

The Hanes Wine Review, May 2013 Edition

When you have been into wine for a long time you see lots of things come and go. In the internet age, this includes wine websites. Recently Hanes attempted to do some cleaning up of his browser bookmarks. And it was amazing to see how many are now “dead.” Underscores not only the relative value of content online but how tricky it is to survive over an extended period, especially if one’s goal is to, like, make money. Luckily, Hanes has been making nada since 1999 so no worries there!

It was nice to see **AbleGrape** still up and around although, Hanes confesses, he never uses it for wine related research. The latest “news” posted on their main page is from March 3, 2011 so Hanes is guessing he is not alone in neglecting this website. It seems that **Wine & Spirits Daily** is still charging for content so at least someone seems to be making some coin. At \$360/year though, it would be cool to see a third party audit of how many people subscribe. Particularly when there is so much free content out there. Gratified to see **The Organic Wine Journal** and **The Underground Wineletter** still periodically posting new content. Hanes should actually read these websites, he might learn something. Looks like **Steve O’s Wine Touring Guides** is still up at californiawineryguide.com – no graphical redo since like the early 2000’s but appears that content does get updated now and then, Hanes remembers this being a useful website. Looks like **Jens Riis’s Spanish Wine Page** is still accessible although the user interface is not the best. *Think* the content is being kept current. **Enology International** has a smattering of recent content and there is a link to Jordan Ross’s wine seminars and classes website but basically not a lot going on here. Another not so robust website is **The Alchemist’s Wine Perspective**, last content posted like January 2012. Although the article on how temperature effects the aging of wine is still key.

Conversely, **VinoWire** (“news from the world of Italian wine”) is still up but nothing new since 12/27/11, so it’s more or less RIP. **Capvins.com** is gone – can’t even remember *what* that website was. **GrapeCrafter.com** – gonzo. Stratsplace.com used to exist, Hanes remembers it for hosting the writings of **Daniel Rogov**, the Israeli wine writer who passed in 2011. Now, it and Daniel are gone. **The Wine Maven** on foodweb.com now sends you to GoDaddy which means... dead! **TORB** (The Opinionated Red Bigot) is up but not running as Ric Einstein has an illness and other stuff going on so torbwine.com remains one of the more fun legacy websites out there, would love to see this sort of energy again. **Wineanswers.com** obviously ran out of answers as it’s kaput. **www.winesearch-online.com/** seemed to be, err, lost. **Wine Brats** at www.wine.brats.org must have got beat on with a baseball bat, vanished. **The Wine Doctor** at <http://www.winedoctor.fsnet.co.uk/> is likewise history. **The Wine Rhino** has shuffled off – Lyle, wasn’t this one of your projects? **Vines.org** has withered on the vine. **Worldwinestocks.com** was perhaps shorted. **Secretsommelier.com** has apparently gone into secret hiding. Can’t recall what **Wine Writers Xtra** was about but nothing “xtra” about it now, gonzo.

And so on and so on. Many more which could be listed. And, to be sure, many new ones which could be added since Hanes more or less stopped doing online wine research years ago in favor of just drinking the stuff. But it is worth a moment to reflect on how many people have put their passion for wine online only to see it fade to the Blue Screen of Death.

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This month’s big winners... Not that there are that many contestants but Brick House’s Gamay Noir from Oregon may be one of the best American Gamays on the market. The 2011 is superb stuff, even if it costs more than most of the best Cru Beaujolais. Case in point the 2011 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée des Ambassades” from Pavillon de Chavannes, a both rustic and fruity Gamay that is worth the \$23 it costs. The consistency of the Syrah made by Lagier-Meredith is something to note. Their 2010 is again one of the top Californian Syrah wines out there, lots of fruit and character and nothing misshapen about it. Great that the price stays consistent too! First wine Hanes has had from Californian producer Clos Saron, their 2011 “Out of The Blue” Cinsault based blend – sweet and fruit driven and just another happy wine. \$27 is about topping out for what it is worth, though. Michel Gahier’s 2011 Trousseau “Le Clousot” is another data point for why the Jura is what all the cool kids drink. Minerals and earth but not too dry nor stern. Yums.

The best \$15 and under picks... When one thinks Chardonnay one doesn’t immediately think Piedmont, Italy. However, the bottling called Bricco dei Guazzi in 2011 is a delightful drop, citrusy with snappy fruit and

cleanliness. A veritable steal for like \$12. The 2011 "Auratus" white from Portugal shows exactly why one blends 60% Alvarinho with 40% Trajadura. Of course. Floral, spicy, some dried fruit, has personality for about \$12 or so. Faugères is not the most popular region these days but as with many Languedoc areas, they steadily crank out some credible juice. The 2011 "La Catiede" Carignan based blend from Mas des Capitelles is all floral goodness, smooth with fine complexity for around \$10. It's Cerasuolo season and the 2011 "Sette Venti" from Duchi di Castelluccio is straight up fun without being dumbed down, a good value at \$11.

And the disappointments... While in no way a *bad* wine Hanes always *loves* the Scheurebe wines from Pffeffingen from the Pfalz, Germany. So when he tastes one which is just good, it is a disappointment, witness the 2011 "dry" QbA. Another \$20 out the window. Not sure what was up with Bedrock's 2011 Kick Ranch Syrah but this did not do it for Hanes, dry and leaden and not flowing as one might hope. Oh, well. Been some time since trying a wine from Condado de Haza and Hanes doesn't buy much Spanish these days, making a concerted effort to address this. Well, this was a clunky, semi-boring experience, tastes like it was made by recipe and for \$24 one should get more. The 2011 Pépière "basic" Muscadet bottling was more of the same when it comes to disappointing 2011 Loire whites. Good but not what this bottling usually achieves. Bring on the 2012's. While expectations were not sky high, still, the 2011 Castello Monaci bottling of Negro Amaro called "Maru" was eh, didn't even have the prune sugariness which can save the day for such wines. Hanes sells a lot of an Italian Pinot Grigio called "DuchiNeri" but had never tasted it. Until now. And it sucks. But it will certainly continue to sell in large quantities. That is how these things work.

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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/oldervintages2013.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 May!

CALIFORNIA RED

Fogline Vineyards
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Sun Chase Vineyard
Pinot Noir
2011, \$42.00, 13.9%
Pure ruby-violet with clarity and depth of hue, richness lasts completely through the rims, pinkish cast further

out, its brightness has it leaping out of the glass at you. The nose feels like a pregnant rain cloud in your nostrils, moisture about to be released, big slug of sour cherry, cranberry, blackberry fruit which leads into notes of watermelon and strawberry, the citrus tones are a blend of orange and lemon, there's a compact earthiness to it, as if untilled, overall displays itself proudly yet with just a few chosen words. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and wiry, the acidity shapes and forms the full journey. That bracing citric bite is right up

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front and adds to the teeth rattling vibrancy of the raspberry, cranberry, cherry fruit, even that strawberry comes off muscular. More of a mineral presence here, dry in a sparkly way. Has a floral side but it gets sort of tucked away, perhaps due to the structure. Its muscularity is a good deal of its charm, brings it grace and focus. 91

Lagier Meredith
Napa Valley, Mount Veeder
Syrah
2010, \$48.00, 14.7%

Darkly opaque purple core, still manages a healthy glow, the rims themselves a thick ruby-magenta, highly reflective surface helps it avoid too monolithic an appearance. The nose is a little on the quiet side, floral with a meadowy freshness, the plum, cherry scents are ripe but nowhere near sugary, very mild oak toastiness, compact while enjoyable, one might argue this is a sign of it shutting down some. Medium-bodied with lots of textural grip if not displaying too strong tannin. More going on here, the oak gives you coconut, fried butter and caramel in measured doses. More stone and dried garden herb notes, also an undercurrent of beef jerky. The floral dimension subsumes the orange citrus notes. Stays well balanced for a wine of its density and persists through a lengthy finish. Naturally impressive, at no point do you feel it is trying too hard. 91

Bedrock Wine Co.
Sonoma Valley, Pagani Ranch Heritage
Blend
2011, \$37.00, 15.0%

Fat purple core, you feel the glow even through the opacity, heavy set magenta rims with more bright ruby furthest out, does not lack for color. The nose is big and fruit-driven in typical Pagani fashion, just a hint of prune alongside the jammy plum, cherry, blackberry scents, ripe orange citrus, some mint to anise nuances, not getting too much oak cream, at times something like honey coated ham to light grill smoke, quite primary. Full-bodied, sweet and juicy in the mouth with perhaps even more emphasis on the plum, cassis, blueberry, blackberry fruit. Here the caramel, toffee gets more assertive. The density of the fruit holds in check whatever tannin or acidity which might be there. The orange citrus aided by a splash of white grapefruit. Wants to push the needle on the pleasure meter and succeeds. But not a simple wine. Unspecified percentages of Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet, Grand Noir, Carignane, Mourvèdre, etc. 91

Turley
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Ueberroth
Vineyard
Zinfandel

2010, \$48.00, 15.8%
Plush red ruby inflected violet core, semi-opaque, the rims choose to go towards more garnet red than lighter magenta, surface has average shine, good fatness across the board. At first the nose explodes with coconut custard, vanilla fudge and buttered popcorn then the oak gets sucked back into the jammy mulberry, blackberry, boysenberry, cherry fruit scents, decent amount of eucalyptus and wildflowers, mild touch of dried beef as well as wood smoke. In the mouth it's close to full-bodied with nicer pacing and fluidity than grab your attention oomph. That oaky coconut, vanilla, chocolate, caramel stuff there but much more woven into the whole, allows a fresher appeal to the raspberry, blueberry, blackberry fruit. Big floral perfume, supported by that eucalyptus, pine and white grapefruit. Not much going on for tannin and acidity. Just falls short of making a big statement. 90

Bedrock Wine Co.
Regional Blend, North Coast
Syrah
2011, \$20.00, 14.0%

Deep purple core pushes into opaque territory, the rims form a great contrast, all pink magenta and cranberry red, reflected light glides across the surface. The nose is mainly violets and crushed, freshly picked raspberry, blueberry, boysenberry fruit with a dollop of caramel on top, there's a pebbles to stone ash element which combines with meadow grasses and pickle brine to give it extra dimension, seems like it could evolve over time. Medium-bodied, quite polished with a smooth mouth feel, satiny. The violet and lilac florality a major player here too, slight elevation in mixed citrus, same likewise for caramel and milk chocolate oak accents. Smokier with subtle cured meat nuances. Tannic like a dried sponge, potentiality to give but kind of frozen in place. Very ripe and dense blueberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit, its concentration extends the finish quite well. And, given this, takes an agreeable sour turn at the end too. Lots of value here. Grapes sourced from Alder Springs Vineyard, Hudson Vineyards, Shanel Vineyard, Griffin's Lair Vineyard, with small amount of Viognier from Steiner Ranch. 90

Clos Saron
Regional Blend, California, Out of The Blue
Blend
2011, \$26.99, 13.1%

A gentle cloudiness deepens the cranberry red to purple hued core, captures light inside it well, the rims

a youthful brick red, looks like one of them there natural wines the kids keep talking about. The nose is all blueberry, boysenberry and rhubarb, rich and dewy, lemon curd, wheat germ, a little flatulence or tire rubber, a forest path wet after the rain, lazy in an affable manner, you don't even want it to get up off the couch. Full-bodied, more thick than layered, sour wet oak, dill and tarragon combine with mocha powder for an interesting mix of messages. That blackberry, blueberry, black cherry fruit is dense and fully ripened and jammy but not sugary per se. The lemon to blood orange citrus steps back here, as do any sweeter baking spices. Has a thin blanket of tannin to throw on the ensemble, not much acidity. Poor brown dirt and random pebbles. Luckily, the fruit lasts the longest and remains the wine's signature calling card. Deftly pulled off. 90% Cinsault, 5% Syrah, 5% Tempranillo. 90

Turley

Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Cedarman
Zinfandel

2010, \$29.00, 15.6%

It's clear yet also gauzy like looking into the sun just before sunset, basic ruby-purple core with a shift into red magenta to garnet further out, actually comes across as not crazily saturated. The nose is admirably tight and focused, menthol, mint, dried potpourri, Italian plum, blackberry, blueberry, actually has an interesting sour kick to it, more stones and poor dirt to it than one might expect, not over oaked nor polished so as to hide very blemish. Medium-bodied, you feel it could have piled on more than it does, decent structure, perhaps more acidic than tannic, no excess fat. The pine, licorice, eucalyptus, orange peel rushes to the front, lagging behind comes the blueberry, cherry, raspberry fruit, good tang going on. The caramel, toffee element is non-obtrusive and just softens the edges. A very nice Zinfandel with very good lift and has energy which is not expended on trying too hard to impress. 89

Calera

Regional Blend, Central Coast
Pinot Noir

2011, \$20.99, 13.9%

Bright cherry red in color, mildly more purple in the core, quite well hued rims, transparent and shiny, just looks very pure. While there's vanilla fudge, caramel, honey and mint in the nose, it's mostly semi-jammy raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit, manages to be very engaging while also never seeming simple, not green but does have an interesting briny side, also a whiff of white grapefruit but not much stoniness. Medium-bodied, has pliancy but not softness, just sufficient tannin to breathe shape into the fully ripened cherry, blackberry, boysenberry fruit flavors. Here the minor

sourness pushes the grapefruit, cola and menthol notes to the fore. Slightly more stoniness too. Very adroitly manages to make that tartness a focal point, restrains the more sugary aspects. Long finish, holds its weight fully, won't go so far as to call it elegant but it is definitely a cut above basic entry level juice. Grapes sourced 39% San Felipe Vineyard (Santa Clara County), 20% Laetitia Vineyard (San Luis Obispo County), 13% Chula Viña Vineyard (Monterey County), 9% Idyll Times Vineyard (San Benito County), 9% Pedregal Vineyard (Santa Clara County), 8% Flint Vineyard (San Benito County), 2% Spring Grove Vineyard (San Benito County). 89

Turley

Contra Costa County, Salvador Vineyard
Zinfandel

2010, \$38.00, 15.9%

Very light filminess to the red magenta to violet core, just about opaque, the rims seem to want to go ruby but then end up all garnet and sunset red, overall has an unusually brooding hue for a Zinfandel. Salty, minerally quality to the nose, menthol and caramel not doing much to salve the wounds, high-toned enough that the raspberry, cranberry, Bing cherry fruit never quite settles in, that said there's more room for the zingy white citrus, flowers and tea leaves, all but devoid of deep oak presence, fresh but as in a newly baked fruit pie. Medium-bodied, trim in a muscular fashion, no fat. The white grapefruit, stony earth, tree bark and uncracked black pepper keep it erect, underneath the rhubarb, cranberry, boysenberry, cherry fruit crackles more than glides, not really that sweet. Menthol, minor pine, vanilla bean and caramel, very little oak here too although it does lengthen the finish. There's something here which nags at you like a light phenolic underripeness. If not for that, it's a sleek greyhound of a Zinfandel which is a good thing. 88

Bedrock Wine Co.

Sonoma County, Kick Ranch Vineyard
Syrah

2011, \$32.00, 14.6%

Dark purple core, impenetrable from a distance, closer up its clarity is evident, the rims how first a garnet red and then a hint of pinkish ruby, bright given the level of saturation. There is a high toned quality to the nose which keeps it somewhat shrill, nail polish, then some flowers and cocoa and peanut, whiff of eucalyptus, the Italian plum, red currant, cherry scents never quite soak in, some twigs and savory herbs. In the mouth it is medium-bodied and taciturn, turns its cheek when you try to kiss it. There is a soothing creaminess of toffee, butterscotch and vanilla fudge but not enough to make the same currant, cherry, plum fruit stick the landing. On the whole dry and chewy with a certain

wooden feel. After some time you get smoked meat notes and, pressed flowers and white grapefruit rinds. Not flawed nor reductive per se but not of a mind to give you pleasure. 95% Syrah, 5% Viognier. 86

WASHINGTON RED

Naked Winery
Regional Blend, American
Outdoor Vino Rambling Red
Blend
NV, \$13.99, 13.0%

Brightly glowing purple core, not dark enough to lose its transparency, equally saturated ruby-magenta rims, closer to pinkish than reddish, looks like it was freshly painted, don't lean against it. The nose is based in cranberry, cherry, pomegranate fruit, comes across like sprayed with a floral air freshener, glimmer of orange peels, as it opens maybe a dash of powdered minerals as well. Medium-bodied, sheds its weight as it moves forward and as the general graininess takes hold, although hard to say it's all that tannic or acidic. During the mid-palate there's an elevation in bell pepper and tangy herbaceousness. Here it's more a white grapefruit pith for citrus, adds bite to the back half. Not a lot of general sweetness to go around. For a wine in a plastic bottle surely meant to be consumed young, just about what you could and should expect. Unspecified percentages of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah. (Plastic Bottle) 85

WASHINGTON WHITE

Naked Winery
Regional Blend, American
Outdoor Vino Wanderlust White
Blend
NV, \$13.99, 13.0%

Pale green-white straw in color, some shine to it, pretty clear, looks "normal" and defies deeper analysis. The nose has a sugariness to it which teases out pineapple, nectarine, papaya, peach notes, not full-on tropical but has good richness, mint, pink grapefruit to tangerine with a little smokiness, underlying vanilla cream, has good pep. Medium-bodied, the acidity does a swell job of lifting it off the palate, shaves weight off. Tangerine, lime, grapefruit pairs with pineapple, guava, mango, apricot, peach, pleasing tartness. There's something like stone or chalk, take this at face value. No sense of place, nothing like complexity, but finds an enjoyable message and sticks to it. Easy to like. Unspecified grapes. (Plastic Bottle) 87

OREGON RED

Brick House
Willamette Valley, Ribbon Ridge
Gamay Noir
2011, \$29.99, 13.0%

Shiny ruby red in color, consistent core to rims, although there is a very light gauziness to it, pleasing overall vibrancy. The nose is driven by tart, lively red cherry, raspberry fruit, white pepper, cut green grass and dusty stones, briskly paced and penetrates deep into your nostrils, only the barest hint of creamy vanilla or caramel at first, disappears with air time. Medium-bodied, charged with energetic acidity, sour and tart to the point it's almost savory. The caramel, toffee stronger around the attack here, sweetens the cranberry, raspberry, pomegranate fruit. Leans more towards grass and stone here, with mixed white citrus zest than to any real damp earthiness. Lean and built for racing, rattles your teeth long after you've swallowed. (Composite Cork) 91

FRANCE RED

Gahier, Michel
Jura, Arbois, Le Clousot
Trousseau
2011, \$26.99, 12.5%

Pure red-ruby in color, even at a distance barely concentrates into a violet at the core, the rims suggest a pink tint, transparent, dances agilely in the glass. There's some merde and mud funk to this nose, however, this hardly gets in the way of appreciating the raspberry, strawberry fruit and juicy orange citrus, beyond a floral musk and matted meadow grasses it remains decidedly primary, not a lot going on right now. Medium-bodied yet quietly has this assertiveness which makes it taut and creates added presence. The lemon, orange citrus has a sweet tang and amplifies the generous strawberry, rhubarb, raspberry, blueberry fruit. There's a subtle tannic influence, in no way unstructured. Plus has a dusty minerality and earthiness which tends to anchor it well. Round without being soft, enjoy its baby fat now while expecting more of a swan down the road some. 90

Pavillon de Chavannes, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Côte de Brouilly, Cuvée des Ambassades
Gamay Noir
2011, \$22.99, 12.5%

Very clear and clean, the violet comes out more from a distance, up close it is all garnet to cranberry red, the rims lose zero hue intensity, quite fetching. There's a liqueur like intensity in the nose to the raspberry, strawberry fruit, sappy, some green apple too, anchored by shades of merde, horse hide and charred

camp fire wood, stiffens further from sour white grapefruit pith, shifts direction really well and keeps you intrigued. Medium-bodied, has a certain fatness while not losing its charm and ability to move. Has decent acidity and structure but not great, however, that gamey, animal fur, barnyard stuff imbues it with a nice rusticity. Any funk easily superseded by the juicy raspberry, cherry, blackberry flavors, the fruit really coats the palate. Underneath lies a bouquet of flowers and a soft citrus tang. A wine to enjoy in the medium term, but enjoy it you shall. 90

Capitelles, Mas des
Languedoc/Roussillon, Faugères, La Catiede
Blend

2011, \$9.99, 14.0%

Healthy glow to the magenta to violet hued core, the liquid is clear but dark enough to achieve a dusky opacity, the rims can't seem to make up their mind if they want to incline towards brick red or pink, plenty of visual appeal. The nose at first is like a freshly sliced white grapefruit, all sour zest, then it delivers strawberry, red cherry, rhubarb fruit scents, rocks and poor brown dirt, light whiff of garrigues and powdered milk chocolate, you feel it wants to get all airy and take off but too dense for that. Full-bodied, pours itself in layers onto the tongue, has a sneakily formidable tannic blanket to create added downward pressure. Certainly does not lack for cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit, sweetly candied and a confident opponent to that tart grapefruit, orange citrus. Sufficient earthiness and stoniness to give it a sense of place. Pinch of white pepper. You are getting a lot of oomph here for not so much dinero. 50% Carignan, 20% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre, 10% Syrah. 89

Zélige-Caravent
Languedoc/Roussillon, Pic Saint-Loup, Ellipse
Blend

2010, \$23.99, 14.0%

The purple core achieves opacity, vague filminess, switches gears into broad ruby rims with a strong pink outer edge, well-saturated and vivid. The nose is stuffed with plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, all ripe and sugary, any barnyard funk counterbalanced by chocolate, maple syrup and flowers, voluptuously primary, momentary glimpses of leather, witch hazel and stone shards. Full-bodied, there's a naturally drying quality to the texture, not so tannic, just kind of drying. This is useful to soak up the excess overspill from the plum, cherry fruit, here it remains outsized but not as overtly sweet. Measured portions of pressed flowers, white citrus, mocha powder and dried beef and cowhide. Way off to the side there's a mountainous trail of rocks, poor dirt and stunted grasses but, really, this never comes off as a terroir-

driven wine. But no less enjoyable for it. 50% Syrah, 40% Carignan, 10% Cinsault. 89

Laurent, Domaine Dominique
Burgundy, Vosne-Romanée, Aux Beaumonts Vieilles
Vignes

Pinot Noir

2009, \$109.99, 13.0%

Rich but flat purple core, on the dull side, equally red ruby to light brick in hue, consistent from core to rims, more transparent than not. The nose is full of vanilla fudge, caramel oak and candied cherry, raspberry jam, cinnamon and clove spice, underneath all this there's a little dusty stone and meadow grasses but mostly it's flash and glamorous poses. Close to full-bodied, layered and fleshy, soaks in as it emphasizes all of its concentrated blackberry, raspberry fruit, has a touch more strawberry than cherry. Mint, licorice, flowers, here a white grapefruit citrus element strikes up the band. The bodacious level of fruit actually covers up most of the still formidable caramel, butterscotch, vanilla, honey flavored oak, quite the achievement. The clove, ginger spice helps the perfume develop. Close to no discernible acidity nor tannin. Very seductive wine that offers few clues as to its place of origin. 89

FRANCE WHITE

Pépière, Domaine de la
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie
Melon de Bourgogne

2011, \$10.99, 12.0%

Kind of yellowish, brownish, whitish hay color, flat and evasively undistinguished, bends light under the surface, mild trace of fizz on the glass walls. Lemon and mineral water dominate the nose, some peach fuzz and flowers, in no way mute but does at times turn its cheek on you, a literal stone wall. Full-bodied, has a great deal of dry extract which has it layering onto the mouth, the acidity is pretty good but it feels clumpy like a fistful of kitty litter or something. The lemon and orange citrus is dry and tacky, plays into the stone powder aspect. All in all, the level of peach, apricot, pear fruit is not bad. Not quite capable of a salty, minerally finish. A lot of sweat was expended to get the raw material to this very acceptable level. 87

ITALY RED

Boschis, Azienda Agricola Francesco
Piedmont

Grignolino

2011, \$14.99, 13.5%

Bright, shiny garnet red, closer to brick red than ruby, consistent through the deeply hued rims, transparent

in spite of the fetchingly deep color, fresh as a newborn babe. The nose is like strawberry to raspberry juice, runs freely, metallic dust, dried oranges and meadow straw and twigs, overall it has a stiff character like glass tubing, it can move, just in a single direction. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and very dry with a one-two punch of acidity and tannin which is formidable to say the least. Not to diminish that core of candied cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit as well as accompanying grapefruit pith. But this one is all about the minerals, stone and anything earthy and dusty which could be sprinkled on the tongue. Has a mutter of dried flowers and maybe even powdered chocolate, but hidden in a dark corner. Fans of sucking on rocks will enjoy this, others may wonder where the beef is. But in the end the wine itself won't care. 87

Ratti, Renato
Piedmont, Barbera d'Alba
Barbera
2011, \$15.99, 14.0%

Good transparency and clarity given the saturation of the violet core, strong ruby rims, lots of energy in its coloration as well as surface shine. The nose is a little aggressive with sour plum, cherry scents, cocoa powder, some merde and animal funk but all that fruit plus some flowers and citrus keep it approachable and honest, has a fat presence in your nostrils. Full-bodied, here loses some extra weight but retains the general density, this aided by extra ripeness in that plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, albeit in no way sugary. White citrus, dried flowers, minor leather, loses most of the funk. The tannin and acidity are average, sufficient to keep it all pointed in the right direction. Not much, if any, overt oak presence. Mild pucker through the finish. Comes across as a crowd friendly introductory version of the grape, which is fine in its own right. 87

Monaci, Castello
Puglia/Apulia, Salento, Maru
Negro Amaro
2011, \$9.99, 13.0%

Lots of red-magenta to ruby to lighten the otherwise violet core, easy enough to see through, the rims are remarkably well-saturated hence the remark, very nice liveliness. While there's a thick floral dew and orange mist laid on the plum, cherry fruit, it never gets too ripe, even factoring in the chocolate element, conversely there's not a lot of real "depth" there just more mint, sweet spice and other easy to digest stuff, nothing challenging. It's close to full-bodied in the mouth, has a drying effect on the roof of the mouth while there's non-sugary ripeness soaking into the palate in the form of plum, fig, blueberry fruit and orange to grapefruit citrus. The flowers more inert here, also the chocolate, caramel and spice get muted.

Tannin level is okay, acidity really runs the show. Ends up a dense mass which has no offensive qualities but doesn't come across as anything in particular. Which is usually not the best recommendation. (Composite Cork) 86

ITALY WHITE

Guazzi, Bricco dei
Piedmont, Piemonte
Chardonnay
2011, \$11.99, 14.0%

Healthy glow to the golden color, bright and deep enough to distort light below the surface, solid rims as well. The nose is very fresh and youthful if not quite airy, cut flowers, lime zest, peach and apricot fuzz, undercurrent of stone and stream water, spoonful of honey, develops an intriguing smokiness before it dissolves. Medium to full-bodied, handles its density and clingy feel well as it has a highly credible acidic structure, there's an incredibly youthful freshness to the lime, lemon citrus, borderline naive. The fruit has more bite here too, nectarine, pineapple as much as peach or apricot, all of which can have a dried fruit concentration while keeping the sweetness under check. At times you can find a certain bitter nuttiness. Highly unusual to find this kind of complexity and verve at this price. 90

TerreDomini
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Friuli Grave, DuchiNeri
Pinot Grigio
2011, \$9.99, 13.0%

Pale yellow straw with a light green tinge, enough general hue so that there's not much loss at the rims, moderate layering, nothing visually unusual. The nose has green apple, pear fruit, not that juicy, some bitter nuttiness, as it warms you get odd banana, bubblegum, cotton candy notes, has more fullness than expressive scents. Medium-bodied, leaner with more tartness here, the acidity is sort of strong for the level of material, smidgeon of grapefruit, lemon in there along with muted florality. Over time you get more nuts and a touch of minerals, some chalkiness, while dry not refreshingly crisp. Average peach, pear, apricot fruit, again lacks juiciness. Leans on the citrus to hold your attention. Performs better when warmer. Very nondescript, not much to say. 85

ITALY ROSE

Castelluccio (Tenuta Cipressi), Duchi di
Abruzzi, Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo, Sette Venti
Montepulciano
2011, \$10.99, 13.5%

Vivid watermelon pink-red in color, almost has a metallic sheen to it, clear with a fizzy dusting across the surface, loses hue intensity at the rims. Minerals and lemon zest give the nose good posture, firming up the strawberry, maraschino cherry scents, solid dose of flowers as well, at times you'd swear someone spooned some cocoa powder in there, has highly credible weight in the nostrils, has unassuming power and thrust. Full-bodied, has a layered heaviness to it which is pleasant enough, a bit restrictive sometimes. Sweet like powdered sugar through the attack then the acidity takes over and there's more zip in the strawberry, raspberry, cherry fruit. The lemon citrus adds to the confectionary feel. The stone, mineral dust holds off until near the finish. While being fun remains its best attribute, there's enough honest evocation of place to satisfy those persnickety guests too. (Composite Cork) 89

GERMANY WHITE

Pfeffingen, Weingut
Pfalz, QbA Dry AP #2
Scheurebe
2011, \$19.99, 13.0%

Moderately shiny and crisp in appearance, has a bright golden hay color with a vague green tint, good amount of tartrate crystals floating about, some hue diminishment around the rims, about average looking overall. The nose has an interesting blend of whipped cream, banana and lemon meringue with mineral spring water, sauna smoke, pineapple, passion fruit and nectarine scents, at times texturally seems like one of those pink balls you play with as a kid. Medium-bodied with good, but not spectacular, supporting acidity. Still, stays dry and on course, perhaps less smoky than in the nose yet rife with the same mineral water, stone and pebble aspects. More tangy sting in the pineapple, nectarine, guava and apricot fruit, aided by grapefruit citrus notes. Not a great deal of extract so flows well. Expresses the heart of the grape well in a streamlined, succinct message. (Screwcap) 89

SPAIN RED

Milagrosa, Bodega La
Ribera del Duero, Milcampos Viñas Viejas
Tempranillo
2010, \$10.99, 13.5%

The purple core achieves both darkness and clarity, you can see through it but it's in no way light, the rims a mix of ruby and crimson and one can easily imagine it bricking with some age, fills up the glass well. The nose is stuffed like wet cotton, full but also not that nimble, still manages to clearly present a mix of leather, chocolate, potpourri, sweet tea leaves, witch

hazel and plum, cherry fruit scents, can't decide if it wants to pierce or soak in, odd. In the mouth it is full-bodied and more decisive about wanting to use its weight to create a certain heaviness. Has tannin and acidity both, however, does not leverage them to create erectness. Chocolate, vanilla, toast and flowers pair with that plum, blackberry, cherry fruit but it's still dry on the whole, fruit-driven but not sweet. Also offers ginger, cumin styled spiciness. There's a lot of "oomph" here for the price but it is not particularly graceful. It's like arm wrestling for fun. 88

Soto de Torres
Rioja, Ibéricos Crianza
Tempranillo
2010, \$12.99, 14.0%

The purple core is dark but too clean to really become opaque, the rims fluctuate between straight up garnet red and darker brick hues, deeply colored throughout. The nose offers pressed flowers, meadow grasses and muddy earth, this providing counterbalance to the mild oak cream, baking spices and somewhat quiet cherry, cranberry fruit scents, overall neither really traditional nor modern. Medium-bodied, spicier here with considerably more oak toast, vanillin cream, cinnamon and ginger, thankfully for the most part avoids dill flavoring. Comes off as kind of acidic but this too may be a product of the oak. The cherry, blackberry fruit is tasty, brightly sour and lasts consistently through to the finish. Has orange citrus, balsam wood and dried flower elements. Not that complex but to its credit does not take an easy path out and even challenges you once or twice. A wine that will show best with some food to add flesh to the total experience. (Composite Cork) 87

Condado de Haza, Bodegas
Ribera del Duero, Crianza
Tempranillo
2009, \$23.99, 14.5%

The core is dark purple and close to inky black, hard to imagine more saturation without reaching full opacity, the rims are a deep scarlet red, overall clean with no sediment. In the nose the oak just whomps you upside the head [sic], caramel popcorn, butterscotch, vanilla pudding, yeehaw, not to ignore the sturdily full plum, black currant fruit scents, otherwise curiously inexpressive with some rocks and stones, dried out orange peels, flowers pressed in some old book and nothing much else. Full-bodied, fills your mouth up swiftly through the attack, pushes outward if thereafter a bit hollow. More floral with more polished toasty oak notes, cedar and dill. There's extracted ripeness in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit but not a lot of naturally flowing sweetness. Has orange to lemon citrus, sour. Mostly wood tannin, semi-astringent. Seems like it was

built to be a “de-cleater” and hit you hard once. Not graceful but does make an impression. 86

PORTUGAL WHITE

Feital, Quinta do

Vinho Verde, Vinho Minho, Auratus

Blend

2011, \$11.99, 13.0%

Dull golden color, a touch watery, a good deal of fizz visible, peters out into hueless rims. The nose highlights golden apples, pears and buttered croissant flakes, primary and close to all fruit, shake of cinnamon powder or spoonful of honey, has more of a violets-led florality as it warms. In the mouth it's full-bodied with good downward pressure into the palate and general weight. The acidity is on the so-so side but it never feels sluggish. There's a dried fruit character to the apple, apricot, pear fruit and the cinnamon to nutmeg spice and vanilla bean takes it up a notch, lending an almost dessert flavor profile. At times it's like a low grade honey baked ham. Sneaky grapefruit citrus accents. Floral yet not in a dewy fashion, overall starts to dry up nicely before it finishes. A pleasurable wine, at once familiar while also just off-center. 60% Alvarinho, 40% Trajadura. (Synthetic Cork) 89