

Every year there's more wine and more and more wine too. New producers, new regions being exported and imported, heretofore unknown grapes taking off. Et cetera. Which means increased competition for everyone across the board. Which in turn means the fight for survival turns savage. And what's more savage than the world of marketing? Not much! Thus, let us have a look-see at the currently evolving state of a wine's "first impression," ye olde label.

There's basic information that wine labels *should* provide and basic information wine labels *must* provide. Given that wine is produced across the globe and under innumerable legal and traditional jurisdictions, the *should* and the *must* are not consistent everywhere. But since this is America god damn it, that's all that counts here. So, we'll start with the "must" angle since that is easier.

Note here at the outset that there is a constraint increasing in importance that rarely receives comment. That is, there's a limit to how big the wine label can be (uhh, smaller than the bottle?) and over the years to come more and more information may be *required* to appear on the labels. With this comes a cascading set of decisions. Shrink the font to fit all this gobbledygook in? Unlikely to happen, there's a statutory limit on how small the fine print can be (2mm). Sacrifice space now allocated to imagery, pretty script or information of interest to the buyer yet not necessarily mandated by law? Hanes can see the back label of the future. It will be like those on a spray bottle of pesticide, basically a fold out six page pamphlet affixed to the back with glue, once you open it you can never get the damn thing closed again. This is a serious practical issue that will only become worse over time.

As it is now, federal law requires that a government warning appear on all labels that pregnant chicks shouldn't drink booze and blacking out drunk may impair your ability to drive a car or operate a forklift. It's also mandated that wine be noted as "contains sulfites" — this even though the debate rages yet as to whether or not allergic reactions to wine truly stems from the presence of sulfites or from other causes. Ehh, what can you do. You also have to note on the bottles who produced and bottled the wine (that is, the legal entity, the name of which may not always be the name the producer is known by in common usage, a potential source of confusion for all). And their mailing address. These days make some room too for the telephone number and website address.

The bottle size must be noted, that is, 750ml, 375ml, etc. The alcohol percentage by volume must be clearly indicated. This despite the fact that, due to the difficulty of measuring alcohol content, the actual contents are allowed to vary by certain percentages. As for the two extremes, to be legally considered wine the liquid must not have less than 7% alcohol (this explains the presence of the "wine" in supermarkets where supermarkets are not legally allowed to sell wine). These "wines" are not legally considered wine by The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB).

What a lot of consumers do not know is that, at the other extreme, the maximum amount of alcohol permitted in domestic wine is 14.0%, with an actual, measured legal variance of 1.0%. Hence, a bottle of wine measured as 14.0% can legally in truth be up to 15.0% and not get the producer in dutch with the TTB. However, this measurement variance is for some reason different than the allowed labeling variance. The latter is actually 1.5%, either lower or higher. Of course, *knowing* all these arcane rules some producers *may* put a number on the label not as accurate as may be technically possible yet still within that 1.0% variance. Why, you ask? These days there's two primary reasons.

The first is money! Wines measured and labeled as over 14.0% are taxed at a different rate than wines 14.0% or lower. Under 14.0% (really 15.0% with the variance) the current tax is \$1.07 per gallon. From 14.0% to 21% the wine is considered "fortified" and is taxed at \$1.57 per gallon. That is a BIG difference. Producers have a real financial incentive to get the measurement of their wines under the 14.0% threshold.

In the past (distant past?) this wasn't that big of a deal as most wines were easily under 14.0% alcohol, as measured and/or labeled. However, secondly, in recent times bigger, riper wines have been in fashion and in many instances this means the alcohol percentage has been higher. So, making a wine that sells and is more in favor with the critics and consuming public costs more money upfront in taxes. Thus, you either "play games" to get the wine down to the 14.0% + variance level (i.e., newly evolving technologies employed in the winery to the liquid wine). Which itself costs money to do. Or you raise prices and pass this cost along to the customer. \$40 bottle of Zinfandel anyone?

More recently there is this annoying trend among wine writers to deride high alcohol wines. They want to cheat the honest drinking public of the best buzz possible. However, the public is slow to catch on and, on the whole, big fruity wines sell best. Back to the topic of labeling, all this makes it very difficult to know how close the alcohol percentage on domestic wine labels is to the actual alcohol percentage. It's not like the wine's alcoholic content is measured when in the bottle, it's done way before and a lot can change chemically in the liquid before it's bottled. Meanwhile, the labels have to get printed and such, all these practical elements occur concurrently. The measurement of alcoholic content for labeling purposes cannot be practically pushed back much later in the winemaking process. Given the variance allowed, a winery may decide to label below what they suspect the true alcoholic percentage is in order to make their wines appear less alcoholic. Or they may be honest but the wine, unbeknownst to them, has changed. Does anyone ever state on the label a *higher* alcohol percentage than the actuality? Now, that's a fun question! Hmmm.

As for alcohol limits on foreign wine labels as long as it's printed there, it's there. In Europe they round to whole or half numbers to keep it easy. Other places you get stuff like 14.1% or 12.8%. All Hanes knows is that while the alcohol percentage on the label is useful information, it is in no way anything more than a general guess and not The Word of God.

For better or worse, one must trust one's palate when it comes to knowing if a wine is too alcoholic or not. A gin martini is a good way to prime the palate before tasting and assessing wine.

Among the useful information you should find on labels are the country of origin, the appellation, the viticultural area and single vineyard designation. While it has its uses Hanes thinks "estate bottled" is pure marketing cheese and just a way to puff up a wine's chest. The vintage is key information as wines do differ dramatically from year to year. Note that for domestic wines to be labeled with a vintage date, 95% of the grapes have to be harvested in that year. The other 5%, who cares. Foreign wines, same deal as with alcohol percentages, all driven by national or local law, no worldwide standards. Hanes normally assumes that the vintage date of his Muscadet wines are accurate enough for his purposes.

Another thing which takes up a lot of room on a label is the bar code. This is a great thing for commerce and eases the sales transaction and makes it a zillion times easier to track stock and see what's selling or not. But they are big. And not so pretty.

The big tempest in the teapot of late is varietal designations on labels. As we all know from paying attention to Hanes for years, it's the "new world" producers who made this popular and label their wines as made from, for example, Chardonnay, Merlot, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, etc. These would primarily be the United States, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile, and Argentina. Most "old world" wines from Europe assume that the region and appellation information says all you need to know about what grapes are traditionally used there. But this is all changing as European producers have to pay heed to the globalization of the wine industry and more and more producers there label with varietal information. It should help sales and Hanes, for one, thinks this is a good thing. Levels the playing field and "demystifies" some alternatives to the cheapie wines with the most market share today.

It should be noted that for domestically produced wine the label requires an appellation of origin (Napa Valley, Columbia Valley, etc.) and conveys the fact that at least 75% of the grapes used to make the wine are of that variety (Chardonnay, Merlot, etc.), and that the entire 75% comes from the stated appellation of origin. The other 25% can be any old grape from any old place. 25% is one-quarter of the bottle of wine. It's up to you to decide if that is a lot or not.

Since 2004 the TTB has allowed wine labels to contain information about the number of calories, as well as the number of grams of fat, carbohydrates, and protein, per serving size or per container size if the container is smaller than a standard serving size. (Is a bottle a container? Always a major conundrum for Hanes.) But what happens if this information is *mandated* at some point? As wine grows in popularity and reports abound about its positive health benefits, providing additional information of this type may be required as for a can of green beans or gallon of milk. More space on the label sucked up!

While wine labels cannot as of yet positively state any potential health benefits of wine consumption they can offer what is called "directional" statements suggesting the consumer contact their doctor or send for government information on possible health benefits. That is, as long as this directional statement is accompanied by a disclaimer saying this doesn't mean you should drink more wine. And this health related information doesn't even touch upon the topic of organic, biodynamic or sustainable wines. If the United States and the world ever settles on standards for these designations, this information will surely demand a lot of prominent label space.

Check out this highly informative PDF from The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB):

[http://www.ttb.gov/pdf/grape\\_wine\\_labels0706.pdf](http://www.ttb.gov/pdf/grape_wine_labels0706.pdf)

Besides all the legal requirements, there's all the stuff that helps to actually sell the wine. In business school they call this the "brand." There are SO MANY articles out there now about brand imagery and wine labels with animals, cartoons and quirky names that there is zero sense regurgitating this easily findable information. Suffice it to say that label design and branding has become almost as important as the swill inside the bottle in creating and sustaining market share. With an ocean of wine out there which barely tastes differently, whether it is from Jumilla or Mendoza or Barossa, any miniscule push the label can give the buyer to select the glass bottle it surrounds needs to be and will be taken. It's worse than internet dating.

The traditional labels of classified growth Bordeaux or top drawer Burgundy aren't going to change much. The fancy script and etchings of ages old châteaux bespeaks of class and breeding and lots of people eat that shit up like candy. However, these wines also represent a fairly miniscule fraction of the wine industry. Beyond them, magenta lizards and laughing pandas rule. Because they work. You morons. The urge for wine producers will be to keep pushing the brand markers to the front and center of the label, bigger and brighter. However, the space for the legalese and other information has to be there *somewhere*. As these needs collide, Hanes suspects labels are going to get uglier, more crowded and, likely, bigger. The increase in worldwide product output isn't slowing down and the competition for shelf space is getting more cutthroat each day. Maybe all wine *should* come in a box — more room for both the kangaroo and the calorie count!

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**This month's big winners...** By most of their prices you'd think Californian Zinfandel wines were sold in Euros and converted to dollars on the way to New York. Nevertheless, Hanes's stalwart Zinfandel remains at \$20, cheap these days. Yes, it's Sobon's "Fiddletown" bottling, the 2006 a nice quaff and done in screwcap so no corked bottles. Real Pinot Noir from Burgundy for under \$20 is as rare a thing as they come so kudos to Paul Pernot for making a fine example in 2006 for \$16 or thereabouts. Mentioned before and will be mentioned again, the cooperative Produttori del Barbaresco makes great wines. Their basic "Langhe" Nebbiolo is still waaaay young but, as with Pinot Noir, any Nebbiolo of character under \$20 should be purchased by the case.

**The best \$15 and under picks...** This month the chickens really come home to roost for Hanes as 54% of the wines reviewed this time are under \$15! This is the highest percentage since Hanes started tracking prices of reviewed wines (and breaking them out into four categories). So, good, bad or indifferent, they were mostly cheap! At least in NYC, Pierre Boniface's wine from Savoie, France "Apremont" has won fans as a little summery white and the 2007 version is a fine representative for \$13. Ditto for Hofer's one liter bottle of Grüner Veltliner. Where you can get it the 2007 is a big summer white value for \$11. Even cheaper is the 2007 Torrontés from Argentina called "Plata" (that's the big name on the label). For \$10 refreshing and clean. The wine's distributor is just gaining traction again in the NYC market so not sure how long this vintage will be around but the 2004 La Casaccia bottling made from the Grignolino grape and named "Poggeto" is well worth the \$12 tariff and easily provides more depth and nuance than the majority of worldwide competitors price-wise. The consistent over-performer from the Languedoc "Les Hérétiques" is at its best in 2007 and is a fantastic red chugger and still under \$10. Wine geeks yet lament the passing of the winery's patriarch, André Iché, but it seems like his family will continue the tradition of fine wine making. More easy drinking from southern France found in the 2005 Château de Lascaux "Coteaux du Languedoc" bottling, primarily Grenache and about \$12. More rustic, but just as good in its own way, is the 2006 Domaine du Cros wine from Marcillac and called "Lo Sang del País." Under \$13 and the grape Fer Servadou always delivers a nicely rustic experience. Hanes doesn't encounter many "value" Slovenian wines, weird enough, but Ferdinand's 2006 Ribolla Gialla for \$15 is quite tasty and apt to please the "ABC" crowd. Regrettably, Hanes seems to be seeing the prices of rosé wines rising more than their red or white peers. Hmmm. Anyway, for \$15 and from the Beaujolais, the 2007 Terres Dorées "Brun d'Folie" is what you want. That is, if you don't want the perennial winner "Il Mimo" from Piedmontese producer Cantalupo, the 2007 kicking butt at \$15.

**And the disappointments...** Conversely to the Sobon, Hanes always remembers Cline as a source of good cheap wine. A friend opened up a bottle of their 2006 "Cashmere" GSM blend and man was it insipid. AND it was \$17! Real lowest common denominator wine. They must sell out of it rapidly. Hanes guesses every country has their uninteresting "kitchen sink" blends and perhaps one of Austria's is the 2005 blend from Heinrich called "Red." It's OK but not really that exciting, even at \$13. Although Hanes is supposed to like it, enough vintages have been slurped (here it is the 2006) to cement the fact that he just doesn't vibrate at the same wavelength as Peillot's Vin de Bugey red wine made from the Mondeuse grape. Mea culpa again.

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

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

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

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

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

### CALIFORNIA RED

Sobon Estate  
Amador County, Fiddletown, Lubenko Vineyard  
Zinfandel  
2006, \$19.99, 14.9%

Light violet hued core with just about the same percentage of red-ruby, a dark magenta forms nearer the rims. Eucalyptus, mixed citrus juice, mint and vanilla custard frame the nose, it's in no way overblown and, as resonant as the blackberry, blueberry, black cherry scents are, they don't raise their voice. Medium to full-bodied, seems like it could have been a lot bigger than it is, breath mint freshness in the menthol, pine, eucalyptus, orange zest accents. The tannins a thicker presence than expected,

however, not to the detriment of the overall flow or smoothness. Same mixed dark berry to cherry fruit profile here. Develops a meadowy, earthy element at the finish, aids cleanliness maintenance. [Screwcap] 89

Turley  
Contra Costa County, Duarte Vineyard  
Zinfandel  
2006, \$32.00, 15.8%

Natural film to the otherwise clear wine, good portion of ruby-red in the purple core, the rims a basic ruby hue with very little intensity loss. Coffee, dark chocolate, toffee in the nose provide a focused, firmer than usual oak presence, pine needles, lemon peel, the raspberry, blackberry scents juicy, if restrained, more contour than extension. Medium to full-bodied, thickly layered without excess weight, not as big as you suspect it could be. Whipped cream, caramel, butterscotch, the oak soft but not soupy. Lemon, tangerine citrus and tea leaf, eucalyptus follow on. Some heft and forward momentum in the raspberry, blackberry, blueberry fruit, moderate sour tightening. Almost seems to intentionally offer an uneven presentation, never reclines back into itself. 88

Cline  
Regional Blend, California, Cashmere  
Blend  
2006, \$16.99, 15.0%

Very light violet in the core, mainly ruby-magenta throughout, more bright than dense. Thick creamy nose, like whipped cream spooned on top of vanilla ice cream, mint and orange sherbet accents too, jammy raspberry, strawberry fruit, slow and steady lift pleasing despite overall uni-dimensionality. Medium-bodied, soft as cotton candy and just as sweet, dissolves like powdered sugar. Lemon to limeade notes, more of the jellied strawberry, raspberry, watermelon fruit. The tannins uneven and yielding, not much of an active role. No noticeable flaws per se, it's just more of a confectionary treat than a wine. Named well. 63% Grenache, 22% Syrah, 15% Mourvèdre. 85

## CALIFORNIA WHITE

Mauritson  
Dry Creek Valley  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2006, \$12.99, 13.5%

Pale-white green straw in color, while transparent neither especially shiny nor dull, all hue lost along the rims. Fluffy nose of stream water, lemon peel, stones and measured pear, apricot, apple fruit scents, not evanescent but certainly gone before fully sinking in. Full-bodied, generously soft and settles into you as if your tongue was a feather pillow. Some sweet tang in the lemon, lime citrus, a livelier component. Displays a strong floral side not suggested by the nose. Richer apricot, peach, pear, nectarine fruit, yet in no way fruit driven. The acidity not that discernible but overall it maintains freshness. Just calm and collected, it's in your glass, in your mouth, and in your belly without your thinking about it. Sourced 95% Hardie Ranch, 5% Coleman-Young Vineyard. [Screwcap] 87

## CALIFORNIA ROSE

Edmunds St. John  
El Dorado County, Witters Vineyard, Bone-Jolly Rosé  
Gamay Noir  
2007, \$19.99, 13.7%

Sparkling pink color, more magenta than ruby, while it fades towards the rims the core has a soft luminescent glow to it. Mildly sour nose at first, stabilizes into cocoa powder, strawberry, raspberry juice, lemon juice and bare hint of freshly cut grass, has good heft in your nostrils and can turn crinkly at times. Medium-bodied with consistent weight throughout, no dips. Average acidity, however, avoids becoming too sweet, this allowing for noticeably ripe strawberry, red cherry, raspberry fruit flavors. Less of that cocoa thing here, also less grass but more stone chunks and mineral water. The lemon, and some lime, citrus tends to hold off until near the finish. Just a touch bigger than it should be to move most gracefully, would benefit from a firmer hand in the acidity. [Screwcap] 88

## NEW YORK RED

Schneider Vineyards  
Long Island, North Fork, Cabernet Franc Petit Verdot  
Blend  
2005, \$42.00, 13.7%

High luster to the violet core, more translucent than opaque, the red-ruby rims spread widely. There's a tutti-frutti quality to the nose, brightens the cherry, raspberry fruit scents, low growl of bell pepper and loamy earth, not particularly herbaceous, by the same token not that floral nor citrusy. Medium-bodied with firm enough tannin to ensure attentive posture in the raspberry, red currant, cherry fruit while also allowing it to expand in a round fashion inside the mouth. A dusty or sandy texture helps it grip and extend past the mid-palate. The bell pepper to grass elevates some here, along with white grapefruit. That said, the popcorn and caramel oak notes most obvious as well. Finishes decently, if somewhat hollow. 68% Cabernet Franc, 32% Petit Verdot. 86

## FRANCE RED

Filliatreau, Domaine Paul et Frédéric  
Loire, Saumur-Champigny, Vieilles Vignes  
Cabernet Franc  
2005, \$24.99, 13.5%

Trim and vibrant purple core of effortless opacity, the rims display as more deeper scarlet as ruby, fully hued throughout. Wonderful floral perfume lifts the juicy black cherry, blackberry fruit scents, the bell pepper and jalapeño notes not especially cutting, yield in large part to the chocolate and orange zest, always present, never obtrusive. Medium-bodied and polished to a sleek surface, water would roll off were wine not already liquid. Touch more bite in the herbaceousness and bell pepper, welcome for how it adds punch to the stone and mineral shard component. Completely ripe blackberry, currant, cherry fruit alongside fully ripe tannin, perfect foils for each other. Extremely drinkable while at the same time holds much promise for development. 92

Filliatreau, Domaine Paul et Frédéric  
Loire, Saumur-Champigny, La Grande Vignolle  
Cabernet Franc

2006, \$19.99, 13.0%

Perfect clarity in the glowing purple core, same to be said for the wide cranberry red rims. Unassumingly steady mineral dustiness in the nose, bolstered by powdered dried grass and a light saltiness to boot, much more fresh raspberry, red cherry fruit and grapefruit zest than any leathery or earthy scents, just out of the shower and dressed in fresh white linens. Medium-bodied, quite bright mouth entry with the same emphasis on powdery minerals, stone and, here, granular earth. The acidity helps to hone the blade of the white grapefruit to lemon citrus. The tannin tends to accrue on the mouth roof which alleviates a lot of potential weight and shorten the finish a touch. Minimal bell pepper, if any, the grassiness subsumed into a more general smokiness. Complete ripeness in the raspberry, red cherry, red currant fruit, while also displaying a savory sour bite. Drinking very young today with upside. 90

Hérétiques (André Iché), Les  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays de l'Hérault  
Carignan

2007, \$9.49, 12.5%

If black purple can be luminescent without a black light in the room, this is, the rims run from hot pink to ruby-magenta with a radioactive glow. The nose first pierces with white grapefruit zest, followed on by wet summer grass, iron-laden earth and meadow flowers, the cherry, blackberry, plum fruit scents achieve full ripeness while holding their shape. Full-bodied with ample bottom, moves at a steady, if languid, pace through the mouth. The grapefruit to orange citrus remains the leader of the pack with leather, earth, lavender notes right behind. Succulent blackberry, cherry, boysenberry fruit sweet yet also possessed of a cleansing sour bite too, aided by the relatively rambunctious acidity. Dries out sufficiently to fashion a clear punctuation mark at the end. Good balance throughout, as usual a no-brainer. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 89

Puzelat, Thierry  
Loire, Vin de Table Français, Le Telquel  
Gamay Noir

2007, \$13.99, 12.0%

Bright ruby-violet in color, glows fully in the glass, the rims increase in intensity to magenta. While the nose does offer some mineral/stone dust, it's the fetching watermelon, strawberry, raspberry fruit which most fills the nostrils, even given a general airiness, offers a touch of lemon peel but the grassiness pairs with the dust to win the day. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and here the herbaceousness much more pronounced with borderline bell pepper, pickle juice notes. The mineral dust equally strong and bolstered by tar, clay notes. In spite of this growl in the lower register, a fresh lift lifts the strawberry, raspberry, watermelon fruit. Lemon infused mineral water and a touch of white grapefruit brighten further. Still dusty through the finish. 88

Pernot et ses Fils, Paul  
Burgundy, Bourgogne  
Pinot Noir

2006, \$15.99, 13.5%

Fully transparent and unblemished ruby-violet, very consistent from core to rims, a bit more pinkish at the

outer limits. Sweet and fruity nose of strawberry, red cherry, raspberry fruit, imbued with more erect bearing via its herbaceousness, adroitly mixes in stone powder and lemon peel, approachable yet in no way simple. Light to medium-bodied, buoyant acidity not only adds spring to its overall step but also helps to separate the components, adding clarity to the stone dust, lemon citrus, hay, dried tar and cocoa powder flavors. Good brightness in the raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit, steady presence through to the finish with minimal bottom drag, nicely fluid. Clean and swift denouement at the end, little residue once the liquid is gone. 88

Oupia, Château d'  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Minervois  
Blend

2006, \$11.49, 13.0%

Perfectly clean and opaque purple core, the rims are of a deep ruby hue with more violet than red influences. Beefy currant, plum, cherry filled nose with orange citrus and iodine notes, lower on the leather or earth scale, mild floral lift as presence diminishes unto the void. Full-bodied, pulls in two directions at once as there's a powdered sugar appeal to the cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit, quite sweet but then there's the fairly savage tannins which almost but don't decimate the fruit, a testament to the latter's depth. Here you get more of the expected white grapefruit notes and a touch less orange citrus. The florality still struggles, a byproduct of the overall density and weight. Tar and leather comes out closer to the finish, and that only with extended air time. Like hugging a hippo, you can your arms around it but your hands aren't going to touch around the back. 60% Carignan, 30% Syrah, 10% Grenache. 88

Maume, Domaine Bernard  
Burgundy, Gevrey-Chambertin  
Pinot Noir

2005, \$46.99, 13.3%

Minimal purple, the core virtually pure red-ruby, the same hue shows through the rims just successively lighter. Pure, light nose of streamlined air, like huffing from an oxygen tank, gossamer raspberry and red cherry scents, pine needle, sweet herbs, lemon zest, attractive for its lack of pretense. Medium-bodied, very structured and delineated via the aid of the acidity and to a lesser extent tannins, every sip refreshes and cleanses. Given the clarity of each element, the stone and mineral parts able to convince the raspberry, cherry, strawberry fruit to stay within civilized bounds. Clove, ginger spice comes and goes. Lemon citrus adds to the cleanliness, maybe there's a hint of tomato skin but at the same time any of this balanced by milk chocolate. Yes, comes across as tightening up some today, needs extended air time to show its best. 88

Lises, Domaine de  
Rhône, Crozes Hermitage  
Syrah

2006, \$26.99, 13.0%

Effulgent glow to the deep purple core, good width in the luminescent ruby-magenta rims, full of youthful vigor. Explosively floral nose with abundant white grapefruit to tangerine citrus, a dab of fresh wet leather, the blackberry, cherry scents feel just ripened and fresh, no real earthiness but, at the same time, no noticeable oakiness either. Medium-bodied, smooth yet not without a blanket of fine tannin to stabilize as well as keep things on the dry side. The grapefruit and lemon citrus here larger part than

the florality, this brings the stone and mineral nuances to the fore. Not especially sauvage, leather, merde or earth subtle at best. Pleasing sour bite in the cherry, red currant, blackberry fruit, lively until the end. Ends cleanly and without any unwelcome residue of any sort. 88

Lascaux, Château de  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Coteaux du Languedoc  
Blend  
2005, \$11.99, 14.0%

Lighter violet core admits of red-ruby influence, loses a lot of the ruby in favor of plain red along the rims, fine clarity throughout. Fresh and juicy nose of strawberry, raspberry fruit, barely a trace of sourness nor herbaceousness, slightly peppery with notes of tar, pressed flowers and orange spice, enjoyably unassuming. Medium-bodied, smooth with lots of polish and flow, even with the pepperiness kicking it up a notch here. More stony with accents of dried tar and poor earth than grassy, any rusticity remains an undercurrent beneath the affable raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit. Sufficient tannin to note it's there at work but not going to pick a fight. Doles out a bit more flowers and mixed white citrus before the final denouement. No problem throwing this down the gullet. 60% Grenache, 35% Grenache, 5% Mourvèdre. 88

Cros, Domaine du  
Southwest France, Marcillac, Lo Sang del País  
Fer Servadou  
2006, \$12.49, 12.0%

Effulgent violet core with widely sweeping ruby to pink magenta rims, very clear but not light per se. Mineral and stone dust infused nose, bowl of just picked and unbroken raspberry and strawberry fruit, lemon and orange citrus, tree bark and fallen leaves, more rustic in spite of the fruit's freshness. Medium-bodied with muscular tannin to frame the attack, middle and end. The herbaceousness a touch bitter here, in a good way, brightens. Lemon to white grapefruit pith, powdered flower petals, tar, leather and caked earth all part of the harmony. Sweet and sour appeal to the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, lively but not simple nor too direct. Won't take an insult from a stranger kindly. 88

Clos Roche Blanche  
Loire, Touraine, Pif  
Blend  
2006, \$13.99, 12.0%

Warmly glowing violet core yields swiftly to even brighter ruby-magenta hues, hard to imagine more overall saturation, sleek surface shine as well. There's a certain dry dustiness to the nose like stones and earth when it hasn't rained for awhile, light coating of flowers and mixed white citrus on the base of pungent, sour currant, cranberry, cherry fruit scents, clings to the nostrils well. Full-bodied with a muscular trunk, gonna take a helluva breeze to get this one to sway. Tannins there but it's the acidity that paves over your tongue. Thus, it's to the credit of that cherry, currant, plum fruit that it can surface as strongly as it does, not as tart here. The herbaceous notes as well as the florality and white grapefruit citrus speak with more conviction. Notes of stone boulders, nothing powdery, the earthiness lesser here. Slips in a touch of leather but nothing major. Should show best with a big ole hearty country meal. Regardless of country. Roughly half Côt, half Cabernet Franc. (Synthetic Cork: Nomaticorc) 87

Sablonnettes, Domaine des  
Loire, Anjou, Les Copains d'Abord  
Groslot (Grolleau)  
2006, \$15.99, 12.5%

Excellent saturation in the violet core through to the light ruby rims, squeaky clean but not to the point of transparency. Sour cherry, raspberry nose, borderline hard candy in feel, good dose of cut and dried grass and minerality as well, some floral musk helps it broaden, comes across as tightly wound and not liable to unwind even with air time. Medium-bodied, very dusty tannins try to get the ripe cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit in a chokehold but the latter able to escape with some struggle. Merde, mud, grass and mineral shards present a strong sense of terroir. Good acidity as well but too bottom-heavy to be considered "fresh." The florality is there but sort of gets lost in the mix. Heavy contours, like a block slowly dissolving in the mouth. Has its interesting points but not the easiest wine to just throw back. 86

Peillot, Domaine Franck  
Ain, Vin du Bugey  
Mondeuse  
2006, \$20.99, 12.0%

Enough purple to darken the core, however, no sense denying that the ruby-magenta coloration dominate, not quite glowing but effulgent. Musky potpourri filled nose with densely packed strawberry, raspberry, pomegranate scents as if jammy without the sweetness, some leather and dry dark chocolate notes, mix of lemon and white grapefruit pith, not a lot of movement but not inert. Medium-bodied, starts out with layers of tannin so it's to the credit of the cherry, cranberry, red raspberry fruit that it shows so well. Leather, muddy hay and dried lemons come through clearly but the cocoa/dark chocolate more haphazard. Pushes forward like poured cement, relentless but not angry. Just wants to cover every crack and crevice, it's what it does. 86

## FRANCE WHITE

Pépière, Domaine de la  
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Cuvée Eden,  
Cuvée Vieilles Vignes  
Melon de Bourgogne  
2006, \$13.99, 12.0%

Glassy gold-brown hay color, great shine with above average depth, even through the rims, very solid when motionless. Lemon peel purposefully leads the nose, closely followed on by mint and floral incense, the mineral dust and stone powder flirt with smokiness but relent, gossamer peach, pear, apple fruit scents yet truly not necessary here, there's an odd note of pickles which goes nicely with the florality. Full-bodied, the acidity helps to cut the weight into slab after slab of concrete to be laid on your tongue. It's like being in a straitjacket while watching a fast-paced tennis match, your body wants to move unconsciously and follow the action but can't. Less of the mintiness and the florality tends to be restricted to before the mid-palate. However, the lemon citrus percolates throughout and that briny, pickled things more pronounced here. Slight elevation in the peach, apricot, yellow apple fruit. Stoniness solid, not biting. Does well today, especially closer to room temperature, yet should drink better years from now. 89

Boniface, Pierre  
Savoie, Vin de Savoie, Apremont  
Blend

2007, \$12.99, 11.5%

Brightly sparkling in the glass, green-gold straw in color, fades around the rims yet hard to notice with the shine across the surface. High degree of mineral smoke in the nose, buffered some by apple and lemon notes, some flower petals as well, the peach and apricot scents develop as it warms and lends a creamy bottom as if topped with whipped cream. Medium-bodied, both the tenacious acidity and slight fizziness imbue it with a cleansing feel, mineral water, fresh stream, wet white pebbles, that kind of stuff. Still has that raw smokiness but not as dominant as in the nose. Fresh, almost juiceless, if snappy, apple, pear, apricot fruit. Lemon peel element fresh too. It's just a fresh, pleasingly evanescent summer white wine and I am tired of trying to add descriptions to an intentionally guileless wine. Mostly Jacquère, remainder possibly Aligoté, Altesse, Chardonnay, Chasselas. 89

Briseau, Domaine Le  
Loire, Jasnières, Karakter Lo27  
Chenin Blanc

2005, \$17.99, 13.0%

Glassy orange-gold color, clear but definitely layered at the same time, holds its hue very well through the rims. There's this borderline acrid smokiness to the nose, fried lemons, tar, the nectarine, pineapple, apricot fruit almost too focused to register, pierces like a bullet from an exit wound. Medium-bodied, even with the rugged acidity it has less body than you'd expect, doesn't tail off, more so relieves. Bristling array of wet sauna stones, white smoke, tar, iron rust, this enough to make the peach, nectarine, pineapple, papaya fruit flavors a distant afterthought. Does not seem to want to relax, more intent on being an academic's sort of wine. Not sure where this would go with time. 87

## FRANCE ROSE

Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun), Domaine des  
Beaujolais, Brun d'Folie Rosé  
Gamay Noir

2007, \$14.99, 12.0%

The pale pink coloration comes with a noticeable orange cast, dazzlingly shiny throughout, only minor fade along the rims. Crystalline and dusty nose of mineral powder and chalk, given the fine quality of these elements the red cherry, raspberry scents dense and thick in contrast, in no manner herbaceous, offers much more lilac and violet styled florality, whisper of lemon peel before it's gone. Medium-bodied with a big acidic kick which gives it a wiry, sinewy mouth feel. The strawberry, watermelon, cranberry fruit flavors front-loaded as the lemon tang grows alongside the mineral, stone bits. Moves at a deliberate pace each step forward made authoritatively, not a soft wine. That said, follows through exemplarily and sticks to the basics without trying too much. Probably best with food rather than just for sipping. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 90

Chermette (Vissoux), Pierre-Marie  
Beaujolais, Les Griottes Rosé  
Gamay Noir

2007, \$14.99, 12.0%

Very pale watermelon pink color, could at some angles pass more for yellowish in tint than ruby, hue dims

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appreciably around the rims. There's a light salinity to the nose, alongside the minerals and metal shavings gives sufficient contrast to the firm raspberry, strawberry fruit scents, nuances of lemon peel and even mint but no real herbal qualities. In the mouth it's medium-bodied plus with about as much tannin as acidity to keep it broad-shouldered and muscular from start to finish. The lemon citrus gets close to pink grapefruit and hovers nicely over the steadier stone and mineral shard foundation. The cherry, raspberry fruit only semi-sweet and do little to offset the general dusty mouth feel. Textural grip on the palate outlasts most of the primary flavors. Actually might benefit from more jolly mindlessness. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 88

## ITALY RED

Casaccia, La  
Piedmont, Grignolino del Monferrato Casalese, Poggeto  
Grignolino

2004, \$11.99, 13.0%

Light and clear without being attenuated, what violet is in the core shares the stage with red-ruby, the rims segue into purer red with hints of orange, high degree of surface shine. The nose has this windswept feel to it, like the scents have more depth than they show but get blown away, the especially true for the florality, cinnamon and mixed white citrus zest, the raspberry, strawberry, apple scents and cut grass cling more tenaciously, overall angularity keeps it bouncing inside your nostrils. In the mouth it is light-bodied in terms of weight and not length as the stocky tannins glue it to your palate and extend presence. There's a richness to the strawberry, raspberry, watermelon, green apple fruit yet not the same degree of warmth, not soft and cuddly. Poor stony earth and wild grasses give it a rough hewn character and dampen the sweetness of the lemon citrus. Rises well into a thick inner mouth perfume by the finish. One could call it a good-natured loner. 89

Sölva & Söhne, Peter  
Alto Adige/Südtirol, DeSilva (Desilvas)  
Lagrein

2006, \$38.99, 13.0%

Good degree of blackness in the purple core, the red has a slight upper hand on the ruby at the rims, light beams across the surface. Very approachable nose of cherry, Italian plum fruit, dry but rich, low undercurrent of white grapefruit, leather and even iodine yet strikes you overall as a modern wine, displays good herbal snap as it dissolves. Medium-bodied, broad and deep without taking up as much space as you'd think. Dried beef, leather but not meaty on any grand scale. No oak presence but some smokiness in the black currant, black cherry fruit. The tannins act as a tugboat of steady, slow movement. White grapefruit, newly grown grass and wet mineral chunks flesh out things through the finish. Smooth texture at the end. 88

Produttori del Barbaresco  
Piedmont, Langhe  
Nebbiolo

2006, \$17.49, 13.5%

Perfectly consistent ruby-violet in color, more red than pink in cast although viewing angle decides, squeaky clean and transparent. The stone dust, mineral powder and dried earth components of the nose restrain the juiciness of the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit scents, pine tar,

orange pekoe tea and potpourri fill in some blank spaces but overall this is a tightly wound package that requires both bottle time and aeration upon opening. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and, in spite of the immobile tannic spine, actually more yielding and broad. The pine, citrus and grass elements have zip and block down field for the raspberry, cherry fruit, no touchdown but gets into the red zone. Light floral lift helps as well. Not a lot of flavor residue through the finish. Just needs time. 88

### ITALY ROSE

Cantalupo, Antichi Vigneti di  
Piedmont, Colline Novaresi, Il Mimo Rosé  
Nebbiolo  
2007, \$14.99, 13.0%

As full ruby as pink, barely loses hues along the rims for a rosé, tinge of orange flicks in and out. Pungent nose, equally divided among strawberry, raspberry, cherry fruit as stream water and wet minerals, lemon peel and hint of leather but zero herbaceousness, coats the nostrils well to linger further. Full-bodied with a full "sweet and sour" profile in the strawberry, watermelon, raspberry fruit, dances across the tongue and makes sure to pause now and then. The lemon citrus stronger here, even suggests lime. More floral swipes as well, less out-and-out minerality although the spring water element is retained. The acidity strong and quite able to keep the conga like going. Holds onto all of its weight through the finish and going on for some time after the liquid has been guzzled. More of a "wine" than summer sipper but, either way, hard not to love it. [Synthetic Cork: Micro Cell] 90

### GERMANY WHITE

Gysler, Weingut A.  
Rheinhessen, Weinheimer, Kabinett AP #1  
Riesling  
2007, \$13.99, 9.0%

The core actually mostly white straw in hue with deeper gold tint around the rims, nothing especially dense about it but the translucency is evident. The nose filled with lemon and lemon sorbet, floral dew and mint leaves, big on prettying itself up for a night out, the apricot, pear, green melon scents all lovely juice, any stoniness barely noticeable. Medium-bodied with a solid bottom to it, the acidity is strong enough to cinch its belt a few extra notches but truly nothing gonna hold back the flood of apricot, peach, nectarine, pear, yellow apple fruit. Again, the lime, lemon, pink grapefruit citrus sweet with a powdered soft drink appeal. Not so much powdered stone nor mineral dust at the end as just a light coat of textual dust per se. Infectiously fun for pounding straight from the bottle. [Screwcap] 88

### AUSTRIA RED

Heinrich, Gernot  
Neusiedlersee, Red  
Blend  
2005, \$12.99, 12.5%

The core as black-red as purple, dusky as if the light fades the more you look at it, more of the same at the rims, just faded to red rose petals and a light violet tinge. Extremely toasty nose of wood kindling, burnt white bread, coffee rinds in addition to wet leather and merde, definite sour streak throughout the red currant, cherry, pomegranate fruit scents, ends with a burst of white grapefruit zest. In

the mouth it's full-bodied and would be on the round and softer side were it not for the decent acidity, that white grapefruit to lemon citrus bite and, yup, the toastiness out the wazoo, featuring burnt buttered toast, coffee, caramelized brown sugar and even a touch of dill weed "red fruit" character with cherry, currant, raspberry flavors. Minimal herbaceousness, more by way of brown mud, merde and cowhide, close to gamey at times but maybe it's the toasty smokiness instead. Very active mouth presence its best attribute. Unspecified percentages of Zweigelt, Sankt Laurent, Blaufränkisch. (Glass Stopper) 87

### AUSTRIA WHITE

Hofer, Bio-Weingut H. und M.  
Weinviertel  
Grüner Veltliner  
2007, \$10.99, 13.0%

A subtle translucent shimmer helps add weight to the white/yellow straw coloration, only mildest of green accents, while not deeply colored holds fully to the rims. In the nose lemon/lime zest lead blocks for the mixed apple, peach, pear scents, penetrates your nostrils like an air freshener, minor notes of grass, green peas and white mineral dust, friendly and with some creaminess. Full-bodied, moves well for a big fella, call it Jackie Gleason. The lemon, lime, white grapefruit citrus inviting and sweet, good introduction to the pine, garden herb, snap pea notes. The acidity has sufficient kick to incline things forward without restraining immediate exuberance. Salty and minerally as it finishes, ends on an up note. One liter bottle. [Bottlecap] 89

Forstreiter, Weingut Meinhard  
Kremstal, Schiefer  
Grüner Veltliner  
2006, \$19.99, 13.5%

Attractive pooling downwards of the golden straw color, enlivened by green streaks, the surface reflectivity distracts you from the hueless rims. Bouncily sweet and juicy nose of tangerine, pink grapefruit, lime citrus, freshly cut spring flowers, ripe apricot, peach and nectarine fruit, a splash of mineral water reminds you all this came out of the ground. Full-bodied and on the soft side, deeply caresses your cheeks with all that peach, apricot, pineapple, nectarine, apple fruit as well as sweet pink grapefruit, lime, tangerine citrus. The relatively low acidity keeps it highly approachable and, why, perhaps infectiously fun. As in the nose, only an allusion to stone or stream water elements, fresh enough but not because of a high level of "terroir" based flavors. The florality relieves some of the weight near the finish and contributes to some lift. Chug-a-lug. 89

### SLOVENIA WHITE

Ferdinand  
Brda  
Ribolla Gialla  
2006, \$14.99, 12.5%

Rich golden straw in color with as much of a brown tint as yellow, fair degree of translucency while yet clean, some loss of intensity at the rims. No denying the mineral powder and chalk in the nose, however, the sweet honey tones take first place and this in turn plays up juicy lemon to tangerine citrus notes, breeze of lilacs yields to denser

apricot, pear, melon, yellow apple scents. Full-bodied with a great deal of viscosity and palate traction, grips like rubber cement. More floral here, slight dip in the mixed white citrus. The minerality fuses with a stream water freshness to alleviate overall weight. Has the kind of acidity that shaves rather than cuts, better since the palate presence a strong point. The apricot, peach, pear fruit familiar and yet slightly off-center. Very good value. 89

## **SOUTH AFRICA RED**

Rietvallei Estate Wine  
Robertson

Cabernet Sauvignon  
2005, \$12.99, 13.5%

Scarlet-purple core, close to bruised in appearance, fades to pure brick red way before the rims, hint of orange too. Sweet raspberry, red cherry fruit swells in the nose, achieves a candied character even alongside bell pepper, smoke ash, tar, roasted oranges, comes up with mild nuances of chocolate, basic overall in a pleasingly unchallenging way. Medium-bodied, fairly round in mouth feel, the tannins smooth without being absent. Black earth, minerals, tar, wood smoke add depth, more herbaceous here with less bell pepper. Fine degree of scrappiness in the cherry, blackberry, red currant fruit, the acidity helps shape this up. Mesquite chips, caramel and vanilla fill out through the finish. Consistently familiar presentation while evokes South African soils too. (Synthetic cork: Diam) 87

## **ARGENTINA WHITE**

Don Cristobal, Bodega  
La Rioja, Plata  
Torrontés

2007, \$9.99, 12.5%

While in no way filmy there is a vague gauziness to the yellow gold color, not quite translucency yet appears to absorb more than reflect light, stays full to the rims. The nose has more cut than one might expect from the grape, keen edged lemon to white grapefruit citrus and metallic minerality trump the more usual florality, in turn a stream stone cleanliness out races the wiry pear, apple, peach fruit scents, good staying power. Medium-bodied, same unusual firmness and taut feel, here the acidity able to abet further. The white grapefruit to orange citrus falls back to the pack some, even in influence with the cleansed white stone and iron notes. The floral dimension remains semi-angular and more adornment than core. More thrust in the pear, peach fruit, fuzzy and snappy as if just ripened and picked. Savory finish, has the mouth watering. Can't fault the verve here, credible personality for the price. 89