

The Hanes Wine Review, September 2008 Edition

Being separated from his usual wine buying stomping grounds, Hanes can't exclusively drink wines which only three other people have ever heard of. It's definitely a "back to the roots" place in time for your humble scribe and that has come to mean chugging wines passed by in recent years.

More specifically, this has meant a reengagement with the Tempranillo grape. This noble grape is used to make some of the most famous red wines of Spain, particularly those from the north central regions of Rioja and Ribera del Duero. Most wines Hanes would consume from these regions are expensive and, as such, when buying expensive wines Hanes usually spends his money on wines from France. However, there are many inexpensive Tempranillo based wines and, in his current state of humility, the Hanesian palate has been blessed by such wines. So, c'mon kids, let's go over some basic facts of the Tempranillo grape!

Tempranillo has been recognized and bottled as such since like forever, even by name as far back as the 13th century. It is most popular and recognized in Spain, the country which has roughly 85% of the world's plantings of the grape. As Spanish wine production increased and improved through the 17th and 18th centuries, Tempranillo became better known by name. This is particularly so as this is the specific name for the grape in Rioja, the first region to make wines from the grape for export and popular outside of Spain.

The characteristics of the Tempranillo grape are as follows. It is an early ripening grape which favors cooler temperature regions and often higher altitude environments. It can deal with large temperature swings from day to night and often benefits from such. It's name means the "the little early one" (from the Spanish word "temprano"). The skins are thick yet, despite this, the grapes are susceptible to rot, especially if left to hang and ripen too long. However, the thickness of the skins do help provide tannin for structure in the wine. The rootstock is highly susceptible to the phylloxera root louse and thus the vast majority of grapevines are grafted onto resistant rootstock. The warmer and lower the altitude of growing region, the less acidity the final wine will usually have and potentially less freshness and ability to age. Tempranillo typically possesses more malic acid than tartaric or citric acids and, in relationship to total acidity, has a high pH level. In rough terms, the higher the pH level the more likely the wine will lose color stability and at times develop a certain flabbiness. So pH management is very important with Tempranillo, starting with where it is planted and the soil composition. Because the grape is usually low in sugar it is also often low in alcohol as there are less sugars to convert into alcohol during vinification in order to achieve desired dryness in the finished wine.

When bottled early the wines have more of a ruby to violet coloration but when aged in oak, they lighten into more reddish tones. Given Spanish winemaking tradition, Reserva or Gran Reserva level wines (or those not obeying strict Spanish labeling law but generally following the practices) will be aged for some time in oak and thus derive oak-inspired flavors of cedar, vanilla, chocolate or caramel. Other typical descriptors include tobacco, tea leaf, dried herbs, leather, merde or light gaminess. In many respects, a well-aged Tempranillo based wine can come to resemble aged Bordeaux wines. Taking into consideration the wide potential lifespan of Tempranillo wines, the fruit flavor profile can run the gamut from lighter strawberry, raspberry, red cherry to darker fruit such as blackberry, plum or even prune or raisin notes.

Tempranillo is known by other names, most notably Cencibel, Ull de Llebre, Aragon, Tinto Fino, Tinta de Toro, and Tinto del País ("tinto" technically means red in Spanish (either in masculine or feminine grammatical usage) so, for example, "Tinto de Toro" basically means "the red grape of Toro"). Given the growing popularity of Portuguese dry red table wines, it is useful to know that Tinta Roriz and Aragonez are in fact Tempranillo. Especially since the majority of the buying public are in the dark as regards Portuguese grapes and possibly intimidated by all these unknown grapes which, incidentally, make excellent cheap wines.

While still most famously produced in the aforementioned Rioja and Ribera del Duero, Tempranillo is successfully grown in many other areas of Spain. Toro, Valdepeñas, Navarra, Penedès and La Mancha are the primary suspects.

Tempranillo is frequently blended with small percentages of other grapes. The main partners are Garnacha (aka Grenache), Graciano and/or Mazuelo (aka Cariñena or Carignan). In these crazy contemporary times Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon may get blended with Tempranillo. Frequently, the blending grapes add acidity to the final product and extend ageability. Deeper color is another result of blending.

After Spain, the next country to mention is Portugal. Again, as just noted, it's not obvious at first that you are drinking Tempranillo since the grape goes by those wacky names Tinta Roriz and Aragonez, among others. It is a vital component of Port dessert wines of the Douro region (although rarely will you see bottles of Port labeled varietally). It's really more with the dry table wines that the grape blends are listed and, since there are a few Portuguese names for Tempranillo, unless you are a stickler for detail, you'll not likely recognize the grape from the label. Sucks man. In any event Tempranillo [sic] is a popular grape for dry table reds in Portuguese regions such as the Douro, Alentejo, Dão, Alentejano, Estremadura or Ribatejo.

After Portugal, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, the United States, Australia and South Africa are the likeliest suspects. In the United States the grape has gone by the name Valdepeñas (after the Spanish region of the same name) however, you'd rarely see this name commercially these days. In Australia the grape is cultivated all over, including McLaren Vale, Barossa Valley and the Margaret River areas. Little of this wine makes it to the U.S. and when it does it is expensive. In

Argentina Tempranillo can be forced to yield more than might be desired and thus results in somewhat dilute wines. But the prices are cheap, easily under \$10.

Given the general characteristics and sensitivity to environment of Tempranillo, the grape could be said to offer a broader spectrum of finished wines than many other noble grapes. A lot will depend on climate temperature and the percentage and type of blending grapes utilized, if any. The best wines grown in appropriate climates with judicious exposure to oak develop a fantastic bouquet over many years, in some instances decades, of aging. Thankfully, there's an abundance of cheap Tempranillo to catch a buzz off while waiting for your Gran Reservas to be ready. And that's what Hanes is drinking!

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This month's big winners... These are crazy days for *The Hanes Wine Review!* Exploring forgotten lands and discovering new vistas. But, first, in the usual esoteric wine department, Irouleguy, we love you! The 2005 *normale* bottling from producer Domaine Etxegaraya is an excellent value at \$20. When will Hanes see you again? René Muré (dba Clos St. Landelin) is one of those great middle of the pack Alsatian producers whose prices stay pretty fair as guys like Boxler, Zind-Humbrecht, Weinbach are asking for your first born for a bottle of grand cru Riesling. The 2005 "Tradition" bottling of Gewürztraminer for \$20 expresses the grape excellently and can surely be served with a wide variety of foods. [Note that "Tradition" is a Frenchie way of saying it's the basic, entry level bottling.] Time and again the Australian producer Water Wheel from Victoria makes a highly credible blend called "Memsie." The 2006 upholds the quality level and for \$17 it is a great "split the difference" wine to serve to Aussie lovers and haters who have to share the same bottle. Karthäuserhof is a steady German producer from the Mosel Saar Ruwer and, while not cheap, they wines are arguably almost always worth the tariff. So, for \$38 or so it is easy to recommend the 2007 Riesling Spätlese Trocken from the Karthäuserhofberg vineyard. Naturally, it helps if you are a Riesling nut who loves to throw down mad coin chasing the grape.

The best \$15 and under picks... Hanes has always had a soft spot for the large production Rioja house, Bodegas Montecillo. One of the first Spanish producers Hanes got all jazzed about back in the stone age. Now, he has since learned there's better out there. But Montecillo still has a place and, even if pretty ubiquitous, for \$12 their 2004 Crianza is a very good Spanish wine not massaged into a grotesquery. Laugh if you want, Hanes enjoyed it. Never heard of Montoya Vineyards from Paso Robles but when seeing an unfamiliar producer making sub-\$15 Zinfandel it usually ends up in the basket. The 2006 bottling is not on steroids and while sweet not 100% fruit. Worth it. Cheval Quancard is really the producer name but "Marquis Rocardour" is the name in big letters on this nice little bottle of 2006 Cahors. For \$13 it can easily fit into the everyday "rustic" wine drinker. Not sure of production numbers nor where it's available but glad it was found in this instance, Cahors wines are yummy. Never tried a wine from Sicilian producer Cusumano before but respect the importer, Vin DiVino, and the price was right at \$15 for their 2007 Nero d'Avola. Liked it, not too sweet nor overripe. The glass stopper in lieu of cork a bonus too.

And the disappointments... In a fit of desperation, Hanes got a bottle of the 2007 basic German Riesling made by Loosen Brothers (aka Dr. Loosen) called "Dr. L." At \$16 the price has jumped a lot over the years. Well, Hanes never liked this bottling at \$10 and the same holds for \$16. Lots of better alternatives out there. Truly, it is difficult to tell if it is Hanes or the winery. Many moons ago, Hanes found the wines of Bogle to be highly acceptable cheap wine. Particularly their Petite Sirah bottling. Natch, he wanted to try the 2006 version at the fair price of \$12. It was OK but not very Petite Sirah-like and concomitantly not the best "red wine" per se you can find for the price. This saddens. Edna Valley Vineyards is one of those producers Hanes remembers seeing since he got into wine and always respected. From a distance. Always a tad pricier than what he wanted to spend and, err, not from France. So he bought other things. Here, we have a chance to a right history. In the form of the 2006 Pinot Noir "Paragon" (in this instance the brand name and not the single vineyard). From start to finish just came across as a wine trying to do too much, keep the fruit but express some sense of terroir as well. Just ends up not clicking and coming together as a whole. Long time since Hanes tried a wine from Nobilo of New Zealand. Seeing a bottle of the 2008 vintage on the shelves already, who could resist? The first 2008 reviewed! Unfortunately, it sucked. So if you see Nobilo's 2008 Sauvignon Blanc "Regional Collection" from Marlborough, the blood is on your hands if you buy it.

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This month also brings a "first" to *The Hanes Wine Review*. As befits the author's life circumstances, the first wine grown and made in North Carolina has been reviewed. This being a 2007 Riesling from Shelton Vineyards of Yadkin Valley. Where Yadkin Valley is, maybe Hanes will find out one day. Anyway, it tastes like Riesling. Needs more cut, acidity and transperance to the soil. But it tastes like Riesling. Bravo!

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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 September!

CALIFORNIA RED

Rosenblum Cellars
Contra Costa County, San Francisco Bay, Appellation
Series Heritage Clones
Petite Sirah
2006, \$19.99, 14.8%
Inky black and fully impenetrable, the rims are fully dark purple and maybe a tiny sliver of magenta if you really tilt the glass, darkness underscores the surface sheen. Slap you upside the head kind of nose, brimming with plum, cherry, blackberry juice and caramel, butterscotch, milk chocolate oak scents, after that there's glimpses of orange peel and eucalyptus but that's it. Full-bodied, there's a gritty texture which you understand once you see the silt on the side of a half empty glass, invisible when full. Not to say it's especially tannic but something creates the sediment and eventually it does dry up a little. The plum, blackberry, cherry fruit bold and audacious, syrupy in texture. All that butterscotch, caramel oak in effect with some added toastiness too. Basically it's a bulldozer meant to steamroll any and everything in its path. 98% Petite Sirah, 2% Zinfandel. 87

Montoya Vineyards
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles
Zinfandel
2006, \$12.99, 12.5%
Perfectly clear ruby-violet color, reaches from the core through to the rims where there's only a slight lightening towards red-magenta. Very quiet nose, requires effort to get at the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents, a brush of floral dust but not much else, not even any real oak notes. Medium-bodied and for the most part front-loaded, light caramel/vanilla swirl at first, fits in with the powder candy in character strawberry, raspberry, blueberry fruit. Tannin and acidity follow the script, not a major factor. While ripe there's a certain grassiness below. Baking spices, orange peel and that pleasant floral swipe help to add length. You keep thinking it will put on more weight but it never does, this a product of bogus expectations than flaws in the wine. Quite acceptable, especially for the price these days. 87

Bogle
Regional Blend, California
Petite Sirah
2006, \$11.99, 13.5%
Tranquilly rich purple core, spreads with ease through to the dark red magenta rims, a pinkish tint develops at the outermost edges. Cocoa bean and chocolate powder lead in the nose, however, it's not oaky and this quickly occluded

by ripe plum, blackberry fruit scents, there's also a dry twiggy, leafy element, inert, just plops in there and barely moves thereafter. Full-bodied, the tannins slab-like but the acidity puts some gas in the tank and gets things cooking from the start. A sour pucker in the cherry, Italian plum, blackberry fruit suggests a touch of green apple as well. Good zesty white grapefruit to lemon citrus bite. Again, minimal oak, maybe mocha and coconut flakes. In turn, that twig, kindling wood, tree bark thing lingers through the finish. Keeps erect posture through the end. Grapes sourced from Clarksburg, Lodi. 87

Ravenswood
Central Valley, Lodi, Old Vine
Zinfandel
2005, \$16.99, 15.0%
Clear red-ruby to purple hued core, somewhat dark, the rims segue into a basic crimson red, decent intensity. Sour cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit scents combine with grassiness to give the nose an invigorating quality, there's notes of caramel popcorn and menthol, not dense enough to let any earthiness coalesce. Medium-bodied, it's not dilute, however, none of the various elements build off of one another which makes it an accumulation of pieces. As such, displays white grapefruit, cocoa powder, wildflowers, dust caked stone, meadow grasses, tea leaves. The cranberry, strawberry, raspberry fruit again tart and more on the lean side. Nice level of acidity. Fresh and briskly paced yet would benefit from soaking in deeper. 84% Zinfandel, 14% Petite Sirah, 2% unspecified other. 86

Lohr, J.
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Estates Seven Oaks
Cabernet Sauvignon
2006, \$13.99, 13.5%
Dark purple core, easily opaque, looks mildly cloudy from a distance, cleaner up close, the rims fully hued scarlet to brick red. The nose is so toasty it seems salty, no soft oak parts just crisp burnt wood, cedar and smoke, even the vanilla seems edgy, dense but not sweet plum, currant scents, brisk mint and menthol but that's about it. Full-bodied, the oak more pronounced in the mouth as vanilla and mocha flavors come to the fore next to burnt toast and fried caramel. The plum, cherry, blackberry fruit heavysset, yet, again, not excessively sweet. Lots of grill and kindling smoke, any menthol types notes swapped for florality. Adequate perceptible tannin. Steamroller attitude has it not changing its profile one iota from start to finish. As usual, very well made for its immediate peer group. 79% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Petite Sirah, 5% Syrah, 4% Petit Verdot, 4% Merlot, 1% Malbec. 86

Edna Valley Vineyard, Edna Valley, Paragon
Pinot Noir

2006, \$21.49, 13.8%

Light ruby-violet color, easily transparent, fresh and unblemished, slightly pinker at the edges but not dilute. Zesty bite to the nose, buckshot explosion of cut grass, lemon peel, cola nut, merde and lavender, tart nature tightens up the raspberry, strawberry, watermelon fruit scents. Medium-bodied, tautly stretched, should be more soft of touch but it comes across as produced by hands lacking full comprehension of unforced elegance. The herbaceousness and barnyard floor notes frame the entry but are not the final word, grapefruit/lemon citrus, cola and a sliver of milk chocolate try to lessen the brunt. The acidity almost focuses into a tight beam before flattening out, tannins already got that same beatdown. The raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit crests in the middle and reverberates from there. Kudos for the lighter body and lack of dependence on fruit, yet could still benefit from bitterness reduction. 97% Pinot Noir, 2% Carignane, 1% Syrah. Grapes sourced 83% San Luis Obispo County, 16% Santa Barbara County, 1% Monterey. 86

Rancho Zabaco

Regional Blend, California, Dancing Bull

Zinfandel

2005, \$9.49, 13.9%

The purple core displays no cloudiness while attaining full opacity, the violet influences last into the rims and darkens the ruby and brings out a lot of red. The oak toast in the nose has a mesquite grill, burnt meat fat edge to it with vanilla powder and warm caramel accents, no softness, the plum, blackberry, black cherry scents dense while doused with a floral perfume like it loitered on the first floor of a department store, heat under control. Medium-bodied with good palate coverage, expends energy to soak in. Sufficient prune and residual sugar to put stickiness in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit and incline towards jamminess. That grill smokiness and honey, molasses thing continues apace. Big surge in orange, lemon citrus. Lacks any kind of eucalyptus, menthol or floral lift, hence tends to sag a bit at the end. In the class of "Under \$10 Red Wines" there's a lot more that suck worse. 80.7% Zinfandel, 5.3% Syrah, 4.5% Petit Sirah, 3.5% Tempranillo. Grapes sourced 44.6% Lodi, 33.6% Sonoma County, remainder is primarily from North Coast, Central Coast appellations. [Composite cork] 85

Stone Cellars by Beringer

Regional Blend, California

Merlot

2005, \$7.99, 13.5%

The violet in the core easily pales to dark crimson to brick red hues, closer to red-magenta at the rims. Strawberry, raspberry hard candy in the nose accompanied by cotton candy and sour oak toast, dill, it's amazing how it balances soft drink fruit with an amount of grassiness, herbaceousness that the general populace accepts, nothing in-between the two poles except a prairie of alcoholic fumes, even at the moderate alcohol level. Light-bodied, smooth enough given that it's not what you'd call harmonious. More milk chocolate and vanilla fudge here, the chips must soak into the liquid. The herbaceous bite persists and there's bell pepper, but the unripe kind. Confectionary nature persists in the strawberry, watermelon, cherry fruit. Tannins clump up here and there. Suggestion of white citrus and black tea leaves. Yeah, it's cheap as hell but can't Congress pass a law

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against this stuff already? For a few bucks more... Ehh, this is why wine geeks condescend so. Unspecified sources, god knows where the grapes come from. [Synthetic cork] 82

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Pine Ridge

Regional Blend, California

Chenin Blanc-Viognier

Blend

2007, \$14.99, 12.8%

Very watery yellow-brown hay in color, not especially shiny either, makes for a ho-hum visual appearance. The nose is spicy with notes of chili pepper and cut grass crowding past the honeysuckle and pink grapefruit to tangerine citrus, striking richness in the tropical pineapple, nectarine, papaya, star fruit scents, keeps punching until your nostrils bruised. Full-bodied, chewy and clingy, the acidity adds more to its zesty flavors than cleanse or refresh. Tag team of lime, tangerine, grapefruit citrus with that pineapple, papaya, guava, pear, pomegranate fruit scrapes against the palate, albeit not in an unpleasing way. Retains a chili or jalapeño pepper edge, cloaking any floral perfume. After all that, likable and the sum greater than the sum of its parts. 80% Chenin Blanc, 20% Viognier. [Screwcap: Stelvin+] 87

WASHINGTON RED

Columbia Crest

Columbia Valley, Grand Estates

Merlot

2005, \$10.49, 13.5%

Deep ruby-violet in color at the core with distinct switch to blood red, ruby around the rims, neither unnaturally dark nor light. Coconut flakes, buttered toast and mint leaf make the obligatory presence of oak known in the nose, has cigar ash, spice notes as well, the cherry, blackberry fruit scents not especially full but do perdure. Medium-bodied, both excessively sweet and smoky during the attack, as if each part was added to obscure the other many times over. Thus the oak stays toasty but also takes on more of a butterscotch, caramel sweetness. And a semi-candied nature concentrates the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, much darker in complexion here. Hints of orange blossom or other white citrus. Tannins bent but not entirely bowed, no real astringency. Easy to see why all 300,000 cases get sold. 94% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1% Cabernet Franc. 86

NORTH CAROLINA WHITE

Shelton Vineyards

Yadkin Valley

Riesling

2007, \$11.99, 11.0%

Deep golden color, a tad on the dull side, fully hued from core to rims, richness helps compensate for lack of sparkle. Thick floral musk and sweet orange/tangerine zest in the nose, the honey notes get close to caramel, in turn this pushes the apricot, peach, pear, red apple fruit scents into concentrated, sugary form. In the mouth it's full-bodied and has a dominant honey to powdered sugar element, suggests something like botrytis and/or late harvest picking. Somewhat lacking in perceptible acidity and, at 11.0% alcohol, you'd expect more dry extract or lower alcohol. Lemon, tangerine, lime citrus abstracts,

more soft drink in feel than true fruit zest. Thick construction to the apricot, peach, nectarine, pear fruit. Doesn't necessarily clean up on the finish but gets the dishes into the sink. (Synthetic cork) 86

FRANCE RED

Etzegaraya, Domaine
Southwest France, Irouleguy
Blend

2005, \$19.99, 13.0%

The core is black enough that you barely register the purple, it's around the rims that all the violet shows, dominating the rub-magenta in large part, glistening surface. Damp black earth, metal shavings, tree bark, tar and burnt cocoa powder make the nose standoffish at first, the massiveness of the black currant, cherry, plum scents doesn't help but they are rich and protracted. Full-bodied, more open and pliant in the mouth if not a poster child for either descriptor. The tannins like the cement holding the bricks together, sturdily links the cherry, currant fruit to white grapefruit, tree bark/leaves, tar, rawhide, old pressed flowers and cedar. Repeats its lines throughout, more a chant than repetition. Parched mouth brings things to an end before you fully swallow. Great juice but not for easy sipping. Mainly Tannat, remainder possibly Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec. (Synthetic cork) 89

Cheval Quancard
Southwest France, Cahors, Marquis Rocardour
Malbec

2006, \$12.99, 12.5%

Immaculate ruby-violet in hue, while remaining fully colored switches to a glowing pink-magenta cast around the rims, high degree of surface reflectivity. Achieves a fullness in your nostrils even as the scents on the whole dry, from the wildflowers to brown earth, dust coated stones and hay, starts to fade prematurely before a final expansion of red currant, cherry, raspberry fruit extends things a few ticks. Medium-bodied, lean but every bit of flesh it has remains dense. Dusty tannins waste no time in coating the mouth, very natural in feel, this underscored by the absence of any oak notes. Hint of cedar and spice, though, fits well with the flowers and orange peel. Despite dryness, not as earthy here, the tart cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit takes up greater territory. Grips and releases in timely manner. Buttass ugly label but the wine's good. 88

Cèdre [Le Cèdre Diffusion], Château du
Southwest France, Cahors, Héritage
Malbec

2005, \$15.99, 13.0%

Glowingly saturated violet core, spreads outward into rich ruby-magenta hues, stays full to outermost reaches. Floral musk mixes with grilled meats and cedar for a pungent nose, some tar and mineral powder in there too, no upsetting oak, the plum, cherry scents well-mannered and restrained. Medium-bodied, very dilute at first but puts on considerable weight with just a few minutes air time. More grip here in the blackberry, black cherry fruit, supplemented by light grapefruit/orange citrus splash. The oak more forward as well yet in proportion with mesquite, cedar, coffee, caramel hard candy flavors. Counter-balanced by minerally black earth and a certain measure of merde. Tannins drying but don't have true staying power. Once it opens a pleasant sturdy little wine. 90% Malbec, 10% Merlot. 87

Semellerie, Domaine de La
Loire, Chinon
Cabernet Franc

2007, \$12.99, 12.5%

Light ruby-violet color throughout, squeaky clean and sparkling, some magenta around the rims but not dark enough to appear saturated. Solid degree of tobacco ash, metallic flecks and mineral dust in the nose, herbaceous in a grassy way, close to zero bell pepper, there's a raw tartness to the red raspberry, cherry scents, never a major factor. Light-bodied, broad tannic super-structure provides weight and stolidity. The cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit sweeter here, present mainly from attack through mid-palate. The mineral and ash dust persists fully, along with the dried cut grass cakes the tongue. Lemon and white grapefruit accents come out through the finish. Not a bad drop, even if it could use more flesh around the middle, priced right. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacor) 86

FRANCE WHITE

Muré [Clos St. Landelin], René
Alsace, Tradition
Gewürztraminer

2005, \$19.99, 13.0%

Presents a core of moderate golden depth, reflective surface if flat beneath, more towards transparent than translucent. Telltale litchee and orange blossom in the nose, not very honeyed nor sweet, while concentrated the pear, apricot, peach fruit scents release nicely and there's even a white smoke stoniness evident before it all dissolves. Medium-bodied, holds its weight throughout with nary a crest nor dip. More floral musk here to apply some makeup to the flesh of the apricot, peach fruit, here you also get a glance of pineapple, nectarine. The acidity does a very credible job of keeping the proceedings dry and well-paced. Less minerality yet the relentless of the citrus zing compensates. That said, not pushy and knows when to end. 89

Sauveuse, Domaine de la
Provence, Côtes de Provence, Cuvée Carolle
Blend

2007, \$17.99, 14.0%

Light gold color, actually more amberish around the rims, sparkly and highly reflective. Notes of honey, cinnamon, green apple, pear, melon, tangerine zest and floral dew bloom fully in the nose, for its richness has excellent lift and unforced presence. Medium-bodied, mint, licorice and flowers together fashion an attractive mouth entry, has good firm grip at the same time. Moves on into cinnamon, ginger, lemon water shades, becomes even more flowery with time. The pear, yellow apple, melon, apricot fruit more sinewy than rich. While refreshing and mouthwatering, the tingle recedes as it massages your palate into a relaxed state at the finish. 85% Rolle, 15% Ugni Blanc. 88

Luneau, Domaine
Loire, Gros-Plant du Pays Nantais Sur Lie, Vieilles Vignes
Gros Plant

2007, \$11.99, 11.0%

All but completely colorless, looks like a glass of water. Fresh and lively nose of lemon/lime citrus, mineral water, green apple, pear, chalk dust, quite lean and penetrating with little effort made to widen its scope. Light-bodied, twinkles with brio on the mouth entry, enough active presence to belie its lesser weight. Lime, lemon, white

grapefruit citrus pierces and explodes. The elements of mineral water, stone, iron flecks and sour grass keep it on its tippy toes. The acidity could have more bite if it tried, instead slowly scrubs and scrubs in circles. Comes up with some floral lift through the finish. Not galvanizing but as far as simple pleasure goes, it's a winner. 88

Corbillières, Domaine des
Loire, Touraine
Sauvignon Blanc
2007, \$14.99, 13.0%

Very clear unto fully transparent white straw color, minimal green or yellow tinge, curiously enough the surface is more dull than shiny. While the nose displays some cotton candy and violet flavored candy notes, the pink to white grapefruit, lemon, orange citrus swiftly sweeps this to the side, more white smoke and chalk dust than outright minerality, this seems to add more edge to the already sharp pineapple, nectarine, green apple, papaya scents, muscular lift and good extension. In the mouth it's full-bodied and fills itself in well, no noticeable loss of heft from start to finish. The acidity stunts the florality some yet naturally supplements that grapefruit, lemon, lime citrus. Sweet and sour pineapple, papaya, passion fruit, guava, nectarine flavors give it decided tropical character. Minor chalkiness or stoniness. Cleanliness of finish secondary to weight carry-through. Keeps coming at you. 88

FRANCE SPARKLING

Hébrart, Marc
Champagne, Premier Cru Special Club Brut
Blend
2002, \$57.99, 12.0%

Very pale yellow straw in color, average clarity, some surface shine, slow and wide bubbles. The nose plays it simple and close to the vest, lemon peel, brioche, mineral smoke, some grass and very light honey, the peach, apricot, pear scents have a whipped up quality, as if blended. Good foam on the attack, medium-bodied with burly acidity, stays lemony and chalky for some while after that first sip. Possesses a stone, seashell dryness, hard earth, pebbles the same, the terroir expressed to the detriment of the voice of the peach, apricot, pear, apple fruit. While it has power, it's tight and doesn't unwind much towards the finish. Requires a lot of patience to if you want it at its future best. 60% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay. (Disgorged 30 Juillet 2007) 88

ITALY RED

Querciabella, Agricola
Tuscany, Maremma, Mongrana
Blend
2005, \$19.49, 13.5%

Youthfully trim appearance, moderate depth to the violet core, the rims in contrast a darker shade of crimson red to brick. Menthol, pine, merde, damp leather and potpourri make for a musky nose, glues the cherry, plum scents to your nostril walls, too fatly pungent to possess much lift. Full-bodied, stoutly layered on the tongue, the roughly textured oak toast comes through more aggressively here, sands off chunks from the plum/prune, cherry, blackberry fruit. The tannins dry and build in stature with each sip. Lemon/orange citrus accents bring bite and the leather, merde, bark, tobacco leaf elements persist. Retronasally speaking (how else does one speak?), the same thick

fumes accrue through the finish and attract more attention than palate weight. A touch too dry and has some shortcomings but it would be a great heavy hitter pickup at the trading deadline for the playoffs push. 50% Sangiovese, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot. 88

Cusumano
Sicilia
Nero d'Avola
2007, \$14.99, 14.0%

Exquisite clarity while the purple core still darkens suitably, the garnet rims stretch broadly and release some lighter magenta hues at the very outermost edges. At first the nose has this smoky, meaty thing going on which at times suggests burnt oak yet whatever it is, plays nicely with the herbal qualities, lessens brunt of the latter, the red currant, cherry fruit scents on the dry side and nowhere near overripeness. Medium-bodied, muscularly built with a good deal of tannin. Here the herbaceousness more in control so liking "country wines" helps. But, again, it's not underripe and there's no lack of blackberry, cherry, Italian plum fruit to suck on. Touch of orange spice and flowers but no real softening element. Very tangy finish activates the mouth well. (Glass Stopper) 87

Caldora, Vini
Umbria, Terre di Chieti
Sangiovese
2007, \$10.99, 13.0%

Effulgent warmth in the vivid purple core, same to be said about the violet darkened ruby rims, lots of color to be had. Semi-sour nose of plum, black cherry fruit scents, some floral mist and charcoal ash as well, barest hint of orange peel, moderate staying power. Medium-bodied, smooth and rich, progresses through the mouth on a steady trajectory. There's a very mild astringency but it's hard to finger the tannins as the culprit. Full ripeness in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, however, doesn't shake its tart edge. At times a little tarry with a sprinkle of ashes. More presence in the white grapefruit to orange citrus. Has that "country wine" feel, after a few sips you aren't looking for complexity, just some salami and bread to chew on. (Synthetic cork) 87

ITALY WHITE

Casalfarneto, Azienda Agricola
Marche, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Superiore,
Fontevicchia
Verdicchio
2006, \$17.99, 13.5%

Good depth to the old yellow gold color, gets close to orange at some angles, not much shine, more gauzy, slight dip around the rims. Something about the nose gives it an unusually rugged quality for a white wine, maybe the mineral water notes or the dry, smoky intensity of the florality, or sour orange pulp, the jabs of wiry pear, apple, peach fruit fit right in, engages your intellect. Medium-bodied, the acidity more like a hatchet than butcher knife, cuts in big hacks. The mandarin orange, grapefruit citrus comes right out during the attack. The mineral water and washed white stones there too, here you also get some bitter, unroasted nuts. Has a slight fizzy texture but no visible pétillance. The apricot, peach, apple flavors have a fruit pit element to it. Too hyperactive to really settle down, no mindless sipper. 88

Tramin (Cantina Produttori Termeno), Kellerei Cantina Alto Adige/Südtirol
Pinot Bianco

2006, \$15.99, 13.0%

Basic golden layering through the core, shimmering translucency with noticeably emptier rims. Smoky, mineral nose with an almost oily texture in the nostrils, small traces of lilac and mint, the lemon to orange citrus notes soft, fuzzy and fresh peach, apricot, apple fruit scents. Full-bodied with attractive viscosity and palate cling, soaks in more than presents a kaleidoscope of flavors. There is a wealth of peach, apricot, pear, apple, green melon fruit, as in the nose more fresh than ripely juicy. The lemon to orange citrus has a quick tart bite to it, allows for added cleanliness, especially as the acidity is average at best. The stoniness lower here with rise in perceptible grassiness. A good food wine for how it doesn't interfere while maintaining a physical presence. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 87

GERMANY WHITE

Karthäuserhof, Weingut Mosel Saar Ruwer, Eitelsbacher, Karthäuserhofberg, Spätlese Trocken AP #12

Riesling

2007, \$37.99, 12.0%

Washed out yellow hay color, highly transparent, uncolored rims, does shine across the surface. The nose overflows with lilacs, violets, lemon perfume and fine chalk dust, the round and just ripened peach, apricot, green melon, pear scents ever so friendly and agreeable, salves all wounds. Light to medium-bodied, dry but really not intensely so. Has the acidity you expect but not the real vicious type. Leans big on the pink grapefruit, tangerine, lime citrus in addition to those lilacs and violets. Cruises through the mid-palate with accelerating stone, slate notes, then the pineapple, nectarine, apricot fruit slowly rises to the occasion and grabs the mic. Never hits that extra gear yet it has a steadiness and purity of purpose to admire. 89

Thanisch (Erben Thanisch), Weingut WWE. Dr. H.

Mosel Saar Ruwer, QbA AP #1

Riesling

2007, \$17.99, 10.0%

Somewhat flat white to yellow straw in color, average transparency and shine, nothing unusual here. Very pure nose even as it possesses quite a punch, bursts of flowers, lemon, pink grapefruit, orange zest and chalky mineral dust push through aggressively, minimal sign of any rubber notes and the peach, pear, green apple scents remain in the background. Full-bodied, very dense and immobile in the mouth, the acidity clamps on your tongue more than prickles it. Heavy on the citrus, bountiful pink grapefruit, tangerine, lime flavors. More ripe juiciness here in the apricot, peach, nectarine and pineapple fruit, closer to tropicality. Has some slate, wet stone, mineral water parts, less out-and-out minerality. The floral dimension seems at moments to meld into a candied sweetness. Still broad and tightly wound through the finish. (Screwcap: Vinocap) 88

Geil, Weingut

Rheinhessen, Mettenheimer, Michelsberg, Kabinett AP #9
Gewürztraminer

2007, \$12.99, 9.5%

Lightly hued yellow straw in color, the steady translucency below the surface allows the coloration to fully extend from core to rims. The nose is just wet, everything about it seems damp, from the litchie nut to the grapefruit, tangerine citrus to the floral musk, the nuttiness does streamline the apricot, melon, pear, guava scents, more suggests mineral water than delivers. Medium-bodied with a jolly girth about its middle. As friendly and easygoing as the grape can be without depending overly on fleshiness and sweetness. The tangerine, lime, pink grapefruit citrus provides sweet and sour bite while the flowers and nuts offers a steadier consistency alongside. Thinly layered honey fills in the nectarine, apricot, peach, green melon fruit and extends it towards the finish. There's average plus acidity and a clean, succinct end. (Synthetic Cork) 87

Loosen Bros.

Mosel Saar Ruwer, QbA Dr. L AP #18

Riesling

2007, \$15.99, 8.5%

Pale white straw in color with a deep green tinge, appearance aided by abundant light reflections masking lack of hue. Green and yellow apple, pear and white peach fruit put gas in the nose's tank, not to underestimate the golden honey layering, also lots of tangerine, pink grapefruit juice, rose petals while evoking white chocolate too. Full-bodied, the acidity gives it its all but can't really turn it refreshing not control the sugary sweetness in the cotton candy, honey and apricot, peach, pear, yellow to red apple fruit, doesn't turn tropical. This said, there's a mineral water fizziness to it and a modest dose of stoniness. Leaves a residual pressure or powdery texture on the mouth roof. Quite drinkable, if undistinguished. (Screwcap) 86

Deppisch, Privatkellerei Johannes

Baden, Tauberfranken, Golf QbA Trocken AP #2

Rivaner

2007, \$14.99, 11.5%

Virtually colorless white-green straw hue, noticeably transparent and possessed of average shine, you know there's liquid in the glass. There's a salty, metallic edge to the nose but it fades in favor of violets and large-scaled white grapefruit, orange and lemon citrus, the pineapple, nectarine, papaya scents have the bite but not the tropical sweetness, as it warms a more mineral water calmness takes hold, consistent lowgrade herbaceousness, always remains below the crest of the other parts. Medium-bodied, pronounced florality based in lilacs and violets but that grapefruit, orange, lemon citrus cuts quite the swath across the tongue. Cleansing acidity no issue here, the palate is closer to raw than not. Highly herbaceous, close to some Sauvignon Blanc in that category. Meager dollop of honey on top of the peach, apricot, pineapple fruit, doesn't have the sweetness to salve the wounds. It's one of those wines that shows more promise in the first glass than the final one. (Synthetic Cork) 86

SPAIN RED

Montecillo, Bodegas

Rioja, Reserva

Tempranillo

2002, \$19.99, 13.5%

Crystal clean black-red tinged purple core, stays fairly consistent towards rims before sudden switch to pink-magenta, very shiny surface. Vanilla cream, cedar, orange peel, cigar ash and molasses crisp give the nose a familiar

feel, the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry scents on the dry side but by no stretch fading, dusty texture helps it swirl through the nostrils. Medium-bodied, despite retaining some tannic punch and a dry profile, flows smoothly and without any gritty patches. Fruit darker here, raspberry, cherry with touch of blackberry, no real prune notes. The mixed citrus, cedar and tobacco ascend above any residual oak flavors. With time accrues a grassiness, like a pile of cut grass left to mulch behind the barn. Could stand a little more freshness but no rip off at the price. 87

Montecillo, Bodegas
Rioja, Crianza
Tempranillo
2004, \$11.99, 13.5%

As much dark blood red as purple in the core, shifts to a redder crimson at the rims but not by much, clear with unblemished surface. Very smoky and toasty nose in that old Rioja way, cedar, fried orange peel, vanilla powder, bright and tar red cherry, raspberry fruit scents, lowkey tea leaf and dried flower accents. In the mouth it's light-bodied and gains buoyancy from its acidic bite. Without gaining much concentration nor weight there's prune and plum flavors alongside the cherry, raspberry here. Heightened presence in the lemon, orange citrus, in turn plays up the herbaceousness and cedar. Tar, tea leaf and tobacco play parts. On the dry side from start to finish, tongue gets slightly roughed up. Meets expectations plus, especially if you like stodgy Rioja. 87

Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España (CVNE)
Rioja, Cune Crianza
Tempranillo
2005, \$13.99, 13.5%

Very consistent ruby-violet color, clear and without even a hint of a blemish, the rims suggest a touch more pinkish magenta. Meadowy sort of grassiness to the nose, not fresh, more dried straw, grasses, overturned dirt caked stones, tree bark and tar, moderate oak toast and very little cedar, orange peel or flowers, the cherry, raspberry scents acceptably terse. Medium-bodied, both handles and holds its weight well. The blackberry, cherry, raspberry fruit more evident and fuller here. Same for the orange citrus. The tea leaf, bark, tar stuff hangs around and, thankfully, there's no real attempt to cover any flaws with vanillin oak softness. The acidity and tannin both pack a wallop, in proportion to the whole. As much as anything, it's honest. 87

Borsao, Bodegas
Campo de Borja, Borsao
Blend
2007, \$6.99, 14.0%

Clean glow to ruby-violet color, consistent throughout, touch of lighter magenta at the outermost rims. Cotton candy and jellied raspberry, strawberry, watermelon fruit scents ok to keep the grassiness at bay, especially when you mix in mocha powder and an antiseptic floral air spray sour dissolve. Medium-bodied, hits you right off with its charms, powdered sugar coated raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit and lemon pie, matched by a certain floral musk and molasses coated bacon fat. During the second glass the price takes over and an astringency and herbaceousness takes over. To be fair, some complexity is gained via tar, tea leaf and tobacco elements. Have the textural feel of a wine made via carbonic maceration. Really, this is a wonder of market placement because it's a strong competitor at the price, but only at the price. 75%

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Garnacha, 25% Tempranillo. (Synthetic Cork: ExcellentCork) 86

PORTUGAL RED

Bacalhã Vinhos de Portugal
Alentejano, Monte das Ânforas
Blend
2007, \$7.99, 13.0%

Evenly mixed cored of ruby and violet, lightens a lot with pink-magenta tinge through the otherwise ruby rims, fairly transparent and easy to see through. Leather, parched brown earth, tar, tumbleweed, all together lets you know the nose is going to be very dry and lean, nothing in the cherry to blackberry fruit changes your mind, dissolves with a burst of cigar ash. Light-bodied, tart and acidic with a clear emphasis on white grapefruit citrus, tree bark, tar and cured tobacco. The cherry, raspberry fruit abbreviated and exits abruptly. The twiggy qualities persist throughout, to its credit it holds what weight it has to the end too. Moderate tannic and acidic structure, light enough that it's not really required. At the finish it almost produces a certain fizzy texture. 60% Aragonez, 30% Trincadeira, 10% Alfrocheiro. 84

AUSTRALIA RED

Water Wheel
Victoria, Bendigo, Memsie Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon
Malbec
Blend
2006, \$16.99, 14.5%

Even with red-ruby in the core, the purple easily achieves opacity, the rims an effulgent ruby to red-magenta, thick without looking overdone. The nose is thick and you can almost feel it unwinding in your nostrils, to lack of oak toast and vanilla but the other aspects balance it all out fully, mint, leather, dried grill fat, orange blossom, the currant, cherry scents have heft without sacrificing nimbleness. Full-bodied, well-layered onto the tongue, tannin makes it noticeably dry even as the plum, currant, cherry fruit impresses for its density. Eucalyptus, dried garden herbs, leather and a light gamey nuance ascend over the oak toast, the latter sharper edged here. Attractive bite in the orange, white grapefruit citrus notes. You have to knock it loose of your mouth with a sledgehammer. 87% Shiraz, 7% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Malbec. (Screwcap) 88

Norman Estates, Greg
South Australia, Limestone Coast, Shiraz Cabernet
Blend
2006, \$11.99, 15.0%

The thick purple core comes close to black yet the red rust to scarlet hued rims have plenty of transparent clarity. Bruisingly dense and compacted nose, pounds itself into your nostrils with eucalyptus, orange blossom, butterscotch, caramel, burnt cocoa powder and a vague herbaceousness, the plum, cherry scents always present while lacking in the sort of sappiness or jamminess to mindlessly please. In the mouth it's full-bodied and dry with rough tannins, the sort of uneven surface that makes you suspect someone worked overtime in the Tannin Management Department. Well-fruited, same juicelessness in the cherry, blackberry, plum flavors. Roasted coffee, butterscotch, milk chocolate more burnt and tart than creamy oak. No heat but you feel the 15% alcohol go right to your head. Nothing subtle nor delicate about it, even the mint and eucalyptus feel like wet cement.

Just the same, meets all expectations, both pro and con. 60% Shiraz, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon. 85

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Nobilo

Marlborough, Regional Collection

Sauvignon Blanc

2008, \$11.49, 12.5%

About zilch for color, washed out white-green straw maybe, neck and neck with that glass of water for transparency. Very herbaceous nose with green pea, asparagus and bell pepper notes, hint of chili pepper as well, moderate mineral water, note a lot of traction in the pear, apple, apricot fruit scents. Medium-bodied, on the bitter side and parsimonious enough with the peach, apricot, pear, pineapple fruit to seem semi-dilute. The acidity is sluggish and not especially cleansing but, technically, there. The white grapefruit and lemon citrus heighten the grassiness and sour straw and asparagus notes. At this point your mouth is parched and kinda dumb so if there's any stoniness or minerality, who can tell. Can't fault the length on the finish, it's there whether you want it to be or not. Drink as close to ice cold as possible. 84

ARGENTINA RED

Fabre Montmayou Winery

Mendoza, Lujan de Cuyo, Phebus

Malbec

2007, \$8.99, 14.0%

Enough clarity and transparency in the vivid violet core to start admitting ruby and magenta early on which extends the rims, warm hum throughout. The nose is somewhat quiet, cedar, mixed citrus and dried herbs dress the base currant, red cherry fruit scents, starts to get outdoorsy but doesn't last long enough to follow through, minimal oak. Full-bodied, sheds excess weight swiftly and pares down to core nicely. Again, there's an honesty about it, sure the currant, cherry fruit massaged into full ripeness but no makeup applied, be it oak or messing with the tannins. The orange/grapefruit citrus lends some pep and sweet tea leaf and flowers stir up the mid-palate. Settles into a non-threatening groove towards the finish, makes you happy without pandering. (Synthetic cork: Supreme Corq) 88

URUGUAY RED

Pisano e Hijos, César

Canelones, Progreso, Reserva Personal de la Familia (RPF)

Tannat

2005, \$15.99, 14.0%

Luminescently glowing black-purple in color, borderline day-glo black, so saturated that the ruby barely comes through in the mainly violet rims. Whiplash of toasted oak starts off the nose, very crispy and to the point, not desirous of stealing the show from the massive plum, black currant, cassis scents, equal portions of dried potpourri and leather, as it sits the animality may gain the upperhand, blends in lemon and white grapefruit citrus as it releases through the dissolve. Full-bodied, the oak toast as in the nose shows first with lots of toast and some butteriness and cocoa, however, it is proportionately welcome as a part of the whole. The natural tannin managed well and suave without ever losing a strong presence. Thus, it is dry on the whole which helps control the sweetness in the fully

ripened plum, cherry, currant fruit, this is a fruit-driven but not fruity wine. The flowers, mixed white citrus, mint more obvious than the leather, game or earthen stone components. For a wine of its density and compactness, very approachable. Can see this aging well. 89