

The Hanes Wine Review, September/October 2006 Edition

One of the many neat things about learning about wine is the way you get to see history unfold virtually before your very eyes. This often occurs without one really noticing it: from too close of a vantage point it doesn't quite come into focus. But if time affords the chance to step back and take the broader view, lots of things become clearer. Having been into wine since the late 1990's, the lore and history of prestigious regions such as Burgundy or Piedmont have been repeatedly drilled into Hanes's brain as representing the most foundational bits of knowledge. This is the *history* of wine, after all! However, one could argue that, when all the pieces are put together, we are currently in one of the most turbulent times of change in the world of wine, history very much in the making.

No one knows what changes the future shall bring, that's why it gets to be the future. Yet, today we can witness incredible new viticultural practices as well as all kinds of shadowy stuff going on in the various phases of viniculture, and then too the almost overnight birth of new wine regions. This is really a crazy time to simply be *into* wine, forget even trying to *write* about wine.

One little anecdotal story which puts this into higher relief is that of the travails and travels of the Malbec grape. Hanes has a soft spot for this grape as it was one of the first "esoteric" grapes to capture his fancy. That is, the grape was lesser known waaaaaay back in the 90's, if not so much today. Which is kind of the point. Back then it had an exotic nature to it, you found it in crazy French places and also in the then still-in-the-crib (in terms of export penetration in international markets) wine regions of Argentina. So, let's see what the Malbec grape has seen and done through the years, shall we? Won't you join Hanes?

First off, the thing that always intrigued Hanes about Malbec is it's reputation as the "black wine," full of dark and brooding imagery. Malbec produces extremely dark juice, such opaque concentration that looking at it makes you think it's this huge bruiser of a wine. The funny thing, though, is that a lot of Malbec-based wines, if not most, are medium-bodied at best and not powerful behemoths only to be unchained in your palate at your own peril. Of course, a lot of this depends on factors such as where in the world it is grown and by who, but that's part of this whole travelogue. So, as usual, we have to start at the beginning.

Malbec's first notoriety was in France, the cradle of all good things vinous (OK, and, let's face it, Michel Rolland too). As is usually the case, each individual French wine region has their own local name for Malbec. Ergo Auxerrois, Côt, Pressac, Grifforin, Cahors, Costa Rossa, Balouzat, Noir Doux, Pied de Perdrix, Pied Rouge, Piperdy, Jacobain and probably even more names which have eluded Hanes's search. For better or worse, we can ignore most of these names as Malbec is no longer that popular in France and outside of grandpa's personal vineyard in Bergerac no one really uses these names anymore. Except for, of course, The Voices.

Given this sad fact we might as well start with the two remaining places where Malbec still plays a noticeable role. The first would be in the area called Cahors in Southwest France. It was here that Malbec got the moniker the "black wine of Cahors." The local name for Malbec is Auxerrois, also called "Cahors" just because it's from Cahors. Today, the French *Appellation Controlée* rules have it that a red wine cannot be labeled as Cahors unless it has at least 70% Malbec in it. A big question mark here regarding the character of the final wine is whether or not the wine is 100% Malbec and, if not, what grapes are used to fill it out. Back when Cahors was making more rustic "country" wines the blending grape of choice appears to have been Tannat. Tannat makes for rustic, tannic wines in the Southwest France wine region of Madiran and added a lot of structure to Cahors wines. In more recent years Tannat has been ditched in favor of Merlot which makes the wine softer and with a denser core of fruit. Freaking Merlot! Some will disagree, but this has merely achieved more approachability in the wine's youth, while potentially sacrificing ageability, in one of the Southwest's last great traditionally ageable wines. Hanes has been lucky to have Cahors wines older than 30 years and many have been terrific with all kinds of tertiary flavors impossible to achieve without a fierce structure to support it through the years of aging.

Using Malbec in blended wines leads directly to a stain on the grape's history in France. C'est si triste! Throughout much of the region's history Malbec was a primary grape of Bordeaux. That's right! King of the hill! But then the haters started their whispering. Ohh, Malbec? It's too sensitive to frost! What, haven't you heard? The grapes shatter and rot! It was too late to get the public relations posse out in effect. So, when in 1956 a frost destroyed a substantial percentage of grapevines in Bordeaux, the dead or dying Malbec vines were replaced with other grapevines, notably those growing Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot. This despite the fact that when the conditions are good, Malbec grows fairly vigorously.

There's still some Malbec being grown within Bordeaux but its primary purpose now is to add color (similarly to Petit Verdot) or a little tannic spine. Usually only a small percentage is thus needed, less than 10% in the majority of cases where used at all. There's less chance that Malbec is used at the most prestigious Châteaux, being grown mainly in Entre-Deux-Mers and Bourg, and it remains highly unlikely that new Malbec vines will be planted anytime soon. But, hey, maybe global warming will make Bordeaux once more hospitable to Malbec.

Outside of Cahors and Bordeaux, the French region where Malbec has some decent standing is curiously the Loire, the land where Cabernet Franc, Gamay and Pinot Noir usually rule for red wines. You'd be hard-pressed to know this because in the Loire Malbec is called Côt. Only a small handful of producers make varietally labeled Côt wines and probably only a fraction of those ever get to the U.S. A lot of the time the Côt gets blended with Gamay and/or Cabernet. Makes sense to Hanes, why not. It's hard to tell if Côt is on the upswing or downswing in the Loire. Hanes is a wine geek failure.

Malbec exists in pockets here or there in the Languedoc as well as other parts of Southwest France. From France Malbec has traveled all over the world. These days, the most famous of these places is Argentina.

Given the increasing market presence of sub-\$15 Argentinean Malbec wines it wouldn't be surprising if most ordinary folk believed Malbec *originated* in Argentina. Au contraire. A Frenchman named Michel Pouget is credited with introducing the Malbec grapevines to Argentina in the mid-19th century. As this was prior to the devastating infestation of the phylloxera root louse in Europe, much of the original plantings in Argentina were 100%, ungrafted Malbec vines. Over time, phylloxera infested Argentina as well and the vines then had to be grafted onto phylloxera-resistant rootstock. The question of grafted or ungrafted rootstock is in many cases today moot. Why? Oddly, because while Argentinean Malbec is a popular cheapie now, its presence in Argentina had been in steady decline throughout the 20th century with vines being pulled out left and right (grafted or ungrafted) until only a fraction of its high of approximately 50,000 hectares planted remained under vine. Malbec was in danger of becoming an afterthought before it became the grape Argentina is currently best known for today. Again, the history of wine is just crazy!

Why Argentina? As noted previously, the grape isn't the sturdiest in the world and needs a specific climate to flourish. Warm, dry, windy, all good. The region of Mendoza has these things in abundance, being at a high altitude where there's plenty of sunlight and dry air. There's not a lot of rain nor frost and the Andes mountains insulate Mendoza from many external climatic influences which would piss Malbec off.

Although not generally known, some Malbec is also grown in Chile. To-date, Hanes has yet to see a commercial bottling of Chilean Malbec, forget actually trying one. With Chile, Hanes is still trying to get over the psychological trauma of learning that a lot of what was believed to be Merlot is really Carmenère. The horror!

Outside of South America, Malbec has made minor inroads. There's a tiny bit being grown in South Africa but Hanes doubts the vines are on the whole that old. The majority seems to be blended with other grapes too. Over in Oceania, New Zealand and Australia have experimented with the grapes. In New Zealand the cooler Hawke's Bay region focuses on vines traditionally grown in Bordeaux so it is no surprise that some wineries are giving Malbec a whirl. More temperate Australian regions such as Clare Valley, Margaret River and areas in Victoria have had had success with Malbec, blended primarily with Cabernet Sauvignon or Shiraz. Malbec is so versatile! Blend it with Gamay in the Loire, Shiraz in Clare! After all, what's the difference between Gamay and Shiraz anyway?

Here in the U.S., California is home to modest plantings of Malbec, mainly in Napa. Washington State has a little planted, as does nearby British Columbia in Canada. Once more, it is employed primarily in blends and only in rare instances has Hanes seen bottles of North American wine labeled as "Malbec." Since many Californian wineries are now aping Australia by calling their cheapie Syrah "Shiraz" maybe it would be worthwhile to call the Malbec "Malbeck" as was once the tradition in Argentina. That would work for sure!

Alas, such dreams are unlikely to be realized since only Argentina and, to a lesser extent, Cahors produce inexpensive, sub-\$20, Malbec wines. No case stacks of bargain "Malbeck" on the near horizon. But as Hanes said at the outset, these are crazy times in the world of wine and to the wise, all bets are off. Today, Argentina is the king of Malbec, tomorrow it might be Switzerland. Whomever it is, let's hope they call Malbec "Pied de Perdrix" instead! That would be too cool for school.

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This month's big winners... It falls above the price cut-off for most excellent cheapie wine, but the esteemed cooperative Produttori del Barbaresco has in 2004 crafted a bargain basement Nebbiolo (at \$16 or so) under the broader "Langhe" regional designation. A fabulous introduction to the noble Nebbiolo grape for those who can't afford Barbaresco or Barolo. One of the first wineries Hanes got into, he maintains a warm affection for Marqués de Murrieta from Rioja, Spain. This love was returned in kind via their 2001 "Ygay Reserva" which for \$20 delivers a full Rioja experience without the unnecessary flash. Voillot is a pretty good Burgundy producer known mostly for Volnay and Pommard wines. They make a nice basic Bourgogne rouge too possessed of good character and typicity. Sadly, though, like many quality wines of this caliber, the price is now firmly past \$20 and rising each vintage. Sigh. The Master rests in peace but the house of Bartolo Mascarello forges ahead. Their 2004 Dolcetto "Vigne Monrobiolo - Rue" is a wonderful drink for about \$20. We can continue the Italian wine love fest with Felsina's basic 2004 Chianti bottling, an \$18 gem which should improve in bottle for a few years to come.

The best \$15 and under picks... It was nice to drink a Provençal wine and at about \$14, the 2004 blend called "Jules" from Terres Rouges delivers just what it should, even needing air time to find itself. Edmunds St. John is a Californian winery which will never get its due. Most of the Big Critics are tepid on them even though ESJ is one of the few Californian wineries the hardest core Francophile wine geeks can drink. As for Hanes, he has had winners and losers from ESJ. A winner this month was their 2004 Gamay, the same grape used in Beaujolais hence the cheesy name "Bone Jolly." A nice \$15 pickup. St. Urbans-Hof is a German winery that seems to fly under the radar, maybe it's their butt ugly labels. That said, they are one of the better Mosel Saar Ruwer producers and there's much value to be had in their basic 2005 "QbA" bottling (the highest quality designation below Kabinett), nicely priced at \$10. It's not made in a large production so it's hard to find outside of NYC and a few other locales blessed by Dressner's distribution network but Clos Roche Blanche's 2005 Cabernet is a great ageworthy wine for around \$13. The rub is it comes with a synthetic cork which angers many of those oft-mentioned wine geeks who distrust synthetics for aging. Only time will tell. When it comes to Muscadet

everyone gets all hot and bothered about Pépière, including Hanes, and with good reason. But there's other producers out there! Witness the 2005 Muscadet from Borne which is delicious for \$11 and will also end up in Hanes's cellar to be consumed in a decade or so. From Rueda in Spain, Telmo Rodríguez has delivered another winner with their blend called "Basa," the 2005 being hoovered down by savvy wine buyers for \$10 or, gosh darn it, maybe even less.

And the disappointments... Hanes plowed through a few more Turley Zinfandels this month and the 2004 Duarte Vineyard one was ho-hum. In fact, he may go so far as to say that over several vintages now this may be one of his least favorite bottlings from Turley. Ehh, what do you want for \$32 these days? (Plus shipping and tax!) Close in spirit to this, the Turley winemaker's own label, Failla, hasn't been doing much for Hanes lately either. Their 2004 Viognier from the renowned Alban Vineyard did not wow and Hanes is on the fence as to whether or not he will continue to order winery direct from them or not. While the Cabernet "rocked," as they say, Clos Roche Blanche's 2005 Sauvignon Blanc "No. 2" did not really do it for Hanes, a good wine but lacking in verve or real distinct personality. Looking to Portugal for a bargain basement winner, Hanes found middling success with the 2004 red blend called "Charamba" from Quinta da Aveleda, even if for only \$7. Maybe next time. Luckily, Hanes had good luck this time around and there weren't that many clunkers to note here. Sweet.

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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/oldervintages2006.html>

The challenge. Each month Hanes will try out a new "tagline" for *The Hanes Wine Review* empire. The goal is to sum up and represent The Hanes Brand. This month's entry is...

Tagline #24: "Because the third person ROCKS!"

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 Varietal
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/October!

CALIFORNIA RED

Turley
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Dusi Ranch
Zinfandel
2004, \$42.00, 16.5%
The red-purple core is deep, as are the red crimson to magenta rims, vividly hued throughout. The nose is ultra-goopy with prune, raisin notes to anchor the plum, blackberry even deeper, lemon oil, eucalyptus rub, peanut brittle, vanilla crunch, dissolves with a outdoorsy country herbaceous twist. In the mouth it is full-bodied with a 1950's bodybuilder's physique, can be considered in shape within a certain context. The vanilla caramel and butter present throughout without undue influence. Ginger spice, milk chocolate and a mite floral too. The tannins are soft, acidity decent, at no point does it seem flabby. The currant, blackberry, black cherry fruit is without excess sweetness. Dances well through the finish. 90

Sine Qua Non
Regional Blend, Papa
Syrah
2003, \$95.00, 14.9%
Can't fault its clarity nor the brilliance of its surface but it's still a jet black core, heavy-lidded ruby-magenta to bright crimson rims, hard to imagine deeper saturation. The nose deceptively bursts forward with fried bacon, glazed ham before really laying on the caramel, molasses, vanilla ice cream and brown sugar, the oak is bold and bodacious, good thing the cassis, black cherry, boysenberry fruit has excess energy to spare. Full-bodied, impressively smooth with not a lot of heat. The tannins tenderized into a thin layer, not much effect. Flowers, orange juice, mint, some beef in soy sauce. And, sure, all that toffee, caramel, molasses, popcorn oak. Curiously not that juicy, if plenty of length in currant, plum, cherry fruit. Sturdy and well-balanced for its size. However, lacks a beginning, middle and end. Impressive with no questions asked. 97% Syrah, 2% Mourvèdre, 1% Grenache. Grapes sourced from White Hawk, Alban, Bien Nacido, Shadow Canyon, Eleven Confessions Vineyards. 90

Edmunds St. John
El Dorado County, Witters Vineyard, Bone-Jolly
Gamay Noir
2004, \$14.99, 13.1%

Fine depth with clarity to match, lots of scarlet red in the purple core, very richly hued ruby rims. Intense sweetness in the nose, not thick enough to be jammy but certainly as ripe as ripe can be, raspberry, blackberry, boysenberry, black cherry all over the place, some earth but no grassy notes, instead you get a strange tire rubber note not unlike a German Riesling. Full-bodied, here in the mouth it is thick albeit evenly paced and well-balanced. Not overtly tannic but presents the type of acidic feel that may be greater in texture than sheer measurability. While not overly sweet, you can easily perceive the concentration in the blackberry, black cherry, raspberry, apricot fruit. A flutter of florality at best, maybe a squeeze of lemon peel too. Is it structured fruit or well-fruited structure? 90

Sobon Estate
Amador County, Fiddletown, Lubenko Vineyard
Zinfandel
2004, \$19.99, 15.1%

Crystal clear plum purple with red-ruby showing throughout at given angles, potentially full rims and above average surface reflectivity. You can't call the nose oaky because by definition as a qualifier it would need something for contrast but really it's enormously difficult to find anything but the caramel popcorn, fried butter, fresh vanilla cream, only minor pine or eucalyptus, mild prune edge to the plum, blackberry, cherry scents, interesting green apple note too. Medium-bodied, it's heavy but not without a healthy sense of release. Spicy in a ginger, cinnamon spice way, spiced orange too. Creamy here yet in a firm texture and the vanilla and coconut flavors fit the whole in the right way. Cedar, pine, eucalyptus give it credibility. Homogenous, sure, but this bottling from Sobon usually picks the right note to repeat. (Screwcap) 89

Failla
Napa Valley, Phoenix Ranch
Syrah
2004, \$38.00, 14.8%

Soft opacity in the black purple core, lack of shine adds to appearance of depth, the rims still mainly violet with a thin band of red-ruby for an aura of sorts. The nose is the usual battle of opposites, in one corner you get toffee, coffee ice cream, vanilla fudge and other oak scents, in the other corner you get salt, beef jerky, flowers, white citrus and acting as a go-between are the firmly packed black cherry, blackberry scents. Full-bodied, thick and chewy, sticks easily to the insides of your cheeks. Even the tannins feel gummy, maybe like wet powder, clinginess breaks out more of the oak toast and caramel tones even though they are less boisterous than in the nose. The raspberry, blackberry, cherry, cranberry fruit starts off thick and juicy but lacks both the clarity and true richness to carve out a lengthy finish. More floral, less meaty and citrusy. Weak conclusion knocks it down a few notches. 89

Turley
Contra Costa County, Duarte Vineyard
Zinfandel
2004, \$32.00, 15.0%

There's a soft, plush look in the red-purple core, languidly opaque, the rims start to morph into garnet, orange and crimson hues. Nothing shy about the nose, full-out

onslaught of chocolate covered raisins, plums, cherries and blackberries as well as coffee ice cream, toffee, mesquite smoke and little bit of orange juice, alcoholic fumes show through too. Full-bodied, Lacks anything even approaching shyness in the mouth too, buildings from the 1920s have fewer coats of paint than this. Strikes you at first as having a decent amount of acidity but this might just be the heat. The sweetness and the tanginess in the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit about equal, smokiness and toastiness might favor the latter. Molasses crisp, caramel, coffee bean, mint make sure you know no expense was spared on the oak. More floral than citrus accents here. Nothing clumsy here, nothing evoking finesse either. 88

Ravenswood
Central Valley, Lodi, Old Vine
Zinfandel
2003, \$14.99, 14.5%

Even below the surface there's sparkle in the ruby-purple color, touch of garnet to dark-orange in the rims, nothing you don't want to look at. Spicy cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger inflected nose, prune and raisin equal to the cherry and plum fruit scents, orange juice, milk chocolate, maybe some herbal notes but its big bottom would make Spinal Tap proud. Medium-bodied, lots of lemon, grapefruit, orange citrus and dried flower petals to adorn and awaken the prune, plum, cherry, golden raisin, raspberry fruit. Touch of acidity, pairs well enough with the tickly tannins to elevate it further in the palate. No deviation from the game plan, no surprises pro or con, just a solid Zinfandel. 87

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Failla
Edna Valley, Alban Vineyard
Viognier
2004, \$35.00, 14.5%

Fairly dark golden color with above average translucency, more or less consistent throughout but does show an orange-amber cast at certain angles. The extremely toasty oak gives it a crisp, if not clipped, feel in the nose, almost regimented, serves up a curious amount of baked ham and roasted meat notes, borderline salty, thick slabs of lemon peel, convincing stoniness, almost devoid of fruit and anything which might soften the blow, really hard to stop sniffing to try and figure it out. In the mouth it is medium-bodied, in no way soft, and has evident attitude. The high-toned oak is in effect, burnt buttered toast, thin layer of caramel, hard toffee candy. More floral, if not openly knit, and elevated peach, apricot, pear fruit as well. The acidity is really tough to gauge, there's a distinct drying effect but without the bite nor tactile tongue sensations. One may admire its serious-mindedness, rare these days, but the execution needs more clarity of purpose and less adornment. 88

FRANCE RED

Voillot, Domaine Joseph
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Vieilles Vignes
Pinot Noir
2004, \$22.99, 12.5%

Red-magenta to violet in color, clear enough to fade at the rims, more red brick there too, sparkly surface. Very high-toned nose, brightly grassy with snappy red fruit of cranberry, red cherry, raspberry fruit, lemon peel, mushroom, crunchy underlying stoniness, very lively and nary a trace of oak. Light to medium-bodied, wiry coil of

acidity drives it forward from the first sip. Just enough grip in the cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit to keep its weight and not become attenuated nor too herbaceous. Tree bark, leaves, grass still in abundance, almost echoes of tea leaves. Above average stoniness. Lemony and mildly grapefruit-tinged finish. Not really elegant yet not possessed of an unnecessarily heavy touch either. 89

Savoie, Domaine Pierre
Beaujolais, Morgon, Côte du Py, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir
2005, \$13.99, 12.5%

Nice plum red to purple color, dark enough core to hide its cleanliness and clarity, rims more tinged with ruby to pink magenta hues. There's a little residual sweetness in the raspberry, red cherry fruit scents yet the nose built more upon the herbaceousness and gravel strewn earth, gives up murmurs of lemon peel and dried beef, powerful lift without losing presence. Full-bodied, remains semi-clenched even after decanting, firm skeleton of acidity and tannins turns it inward looking. Good deal of stones, pebbles and poor earth shown, enough to fend off most of the herbal tones. Much more biting zest in the white citrus than juice. Has more than adequate raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit but it will never hold the spotlight. Taciturn today, have to gamble and wait and see if it opens up in a few years. 89

Clos Roche Blanche
Loire, Touraine, Cabernet
Blend
2005, \$12.99, 12.0%

Radiant luminescence throughout the violet core, an irremovable stain waiting to happen, extremely vivid red-magenta to ruby rims. The nose focused intently on presenting its juicy plum, currant, cherry scents even as the strength of the tobacco smoke, leather, stone bits and freshly pressed flowers burst forth, displays very little herbaceousness nor bell pepper notes. Full-bodied with a slow gait through the mouth, the tannins are not arch nor too drying but they do decisively anchor things to your tongue. Dense isn't the right word as it more so feels like the liquid was condensed in a hydraulic press to a fraction of its size and then released into your mouth. Tobacco ash, minerals, tree bark, cedar and brown earth dust the palate. The currant, plum, cherry fruit comes across as unharnessed energy rather than fluid juice. By the finish it has become noticeably dry. Needs time alone to find itself. Unspecified percentages of Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon. [Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc] 89

Barthod, Domaine Ghislaine
Burgundy, Chambolle-Musigny, Les Chatelots
Pinot Noir
2003, \$89.99, 13.5%

Fully saturated color, violet with deep red-garnet to crimson shades, noticeably dark rims. Rich nose, clings to your nostrils with coconut custard, hard toffee candy, plum, cherry and black raspberry fruit, blends in a dollop of lemon zest and earth as well, too fat to take on a well-contoured shape. Full-bodied, quite ripe and definitely fruity, borderline jammy cherry, plum, blackberry fruit rules the streets. The tannins are a tad gritty but not green. The lemon and grapefruit citrus and florality help fill up the center. However, things do empty out some nearing the finish. Has caramel, coconut here too but nothing too serious. Engaging if not especially elegant. 89

Terres Rouges
Provence, Côtes de Provence, Jules
Blend
2004, \$13.99, 14.5%

Light violet in the red-garnet color, more red to pink magenta around the rims, fully colored throughout. Light, fruity nose, almost playful, with strawberry, raspberry, green apple fruit, wildflowers, bit of earth but not sauvage, just pleasing. Medium-bodied, even prettier in the mouth, nothing complex, just easy to drink. The raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit derives added alertness from a little lemony bite. Throws you some wildflowers and a touch of Mourvèdre funk. The tannins have mild grit, moderate acidity. Very short finish but the spiciness helps. Easy to say yes, no real counter-argument to say no. 50% Grenache, 25% Carignan, 25% Mourvèdre. 88

Peybonhomme Les Tours, Château
Bordeaux, Premières Côtes de Blaye
Blend
2003, \$11.99, 12.5%

On the whole clear but not shiny nor transparent, has that natural duskiness in the red brick to purple core, more orange and scarlet hues around the rims but really not much change from the core. Cedar, leather, loamy earth, forest floor underbrush and spice take up a big portion of the nose, yet don't underestimate the red currant, red cherry fruit for it's got lots of oomph without approaching overripeness. Medium-bodied and broad-shouldered, the tannins are dusty, if not peppery, and betray no greenness. More of the saddle soap, leather, cedar and tobacco leaf stuff, while yielding more territory to the cherry, blackberry fruit. Dries out enough by the finish to clench a little. Beyond that, remains a very satisfying "country wine" styled Bordeaux. 75% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Cabernet Franc, 2% Malbec. 88

Arlaud Père & Fils, Domaine
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Roncevie
Pinot Noir
2004, \$19.99, 12.5%

Pure, if not so shiny red-ruby color, light violet develops at a horizontal level, full to the rims. Lots of stink in the nose, merde, flatulence, black earth, tree bark, dried leaves, the spiciness brings out lemon peel notes, keen cut to the red cherry, raspberry scents lowers its presence in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, here there's more of a center to the cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit while there's abundant acidity to keep it fresh. The white grapefruit element adds bite too. Not floral yet does possess a wide grassy streak. Moderate length, not pushy but no weakling. Maybe a glance of caramel but no real oak of note. Has traditional appeal. 87

FRANCE WHITE

Borne, Domaine de la
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie
Muscadet
2005, \$10.99, 12.0%

Good richness in the golden color, to the point that it begins to turn translucent at many angles, not a lot of surface luster. Fat nose of dried flowers, metal shavings, minerals, meadow grasses, green apple, pear and peach fruit and leesy vanilla custard. Full-bodied, the word "thickness" refuses to leave your mind, dense unto impenetrability. Dry, has a burly sort of acidity, lacks the swift cutting action of brighter acidic structures. Baked

honey, floral paste, lemon peel, has more solid stone than mineral or chalk dust character. The green apple, red apple, peach, apricot and cherry fruit substantial if semi-inexpressive due to its youthful massiveness. Not as refreshing as it might be, instead should shine more with heavier meals, even a cream sauce. Would like to see what's left after the baby fat is gone. 89

Roulot, Domaine Guy
Burgundy, Meursault, Les Meix Chavaux
Chardonnay
2004, \$55.99, 12.8%

Has a faint enough glow in the yellow-white straw color to avoid dullness, turns mostly transparent and hueless around the rims. Very appealing crispness to the nose, razor sharp oak toast, white mineral powder and chalk, fried lemon and lime peels, pear, red apple and apricot fruit, speeds by too swiftly to catch more than that. Medium-bodied, zesty and dry and acidic enough to suck out most of the moisture from your tongue. More floral here with just about the same high level of lemon and lime citrus. But the oak is much more dominant, caramel softens a little of the sharper toastiness even as it still prickles the tongue. Average degree of pear, peach, apple, pineapple, apricot fruit, has a tropical edge but minimal juiciness. May need to lose some excess youthful energy yet still not sure of the strength of the primary material underneath. 88

Pépière, Domaine de la
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie
Muscadet
2005, \$9.99, 12.0%

Whitish-yellow straw color, not a lot of shine and loses what color it has at the rims. Billows thickly through your nose with lemon custard, violet musk, vanilla cream and apricot/peach fruit, takes some effort to unveil the smoky and stony elements, too big to really penetrate, more like it was already there. In the mouth there's formidable, bulky acidity to clean up some of the "irrational exuberance" and at a minimum keep it dry if not sleek nor linear. The minerality and smokiness more apparent yet still not the driving force. Its pure weight is its most dominant aspect. Apple, apricot, nectarine and pineapple fruit knocked to the ground and slow to get back up. Floral side less present. Not particularly refreshing, hard to figure out what to make of it. Final judgment deferred but judged nonetheless. [Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc] 88

Clos Roche Blanche
Loire, Touraine, Sauvignon No. 2
Sauvignon Blanc
2005, \$11.99, 13.0%

Translucent and dull enough to appear hazy at some angles, basic old yellow gold color, holds well through the rims. Lemon and grapefruit citrus prominent in the nose, dusty minerality but not major presence, light edge of dried grass, quiet apricot and peach fruit, really quite on the whole. Full-bodied, very creamy in texture, as soft as warm butter. Vanillin accents throughout, adds creamsicle feel to the orange and lemon citrus. Odd lack of acidic get-up-and-go. More oomph in the peach, pear, apricot fruit than found in the nose but not enough to stay fat through the finish. Not herbaceous nor earthy nor minerally. So, while pleasing enough in an innocuous way, just is. [Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc] 87

FRANCE SPARKLING

Egly-Ouriet
Champagne, Grand Cru Brut Tradition
Blend
NV, \$41.99, 13.0%

No beads, just a snowstorm of very fine bubbles inside the glass, fairly dark golden color, fades away a touch at the rims. Initial breadiness in the nose run down by chalk, crushed stone and mineral water shades, still there's a creamy softness in the apple, pear, melon scents and no sharp angles. Medium-bodied with a broad enough foundation to keep what it has around for as long as it likes, and it likes. Very dry without being biting, this really plays up that minerality and chalkiness. The dusting your tongue takes makes it somewhat difficult to register the pear, green apple fruit and reduces what lemon citrus it has to dried peels. Hardly bready or toasty at all. Has the flavor profile of a more elegant wine but the brute force of an angry grizzly bear. 70% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay. [Lot 56, disgorged Juillet 2005 (37 months)] 90

FRANCE DESSERT

Peu de la Moriette (J.C. Pichot), Domaine Le
Loire, Vouvray, Moelleux
Chenin Blanc
2002, \$16.99, 12.0%

Semi-translucent golden color with a decided ochre to bronze cast, totally appears before you as an integrated block, no sense of surface or layers below. For all of its milkiness, the nose is surprisingly sharp and biting, pine needle, steaming stones, tangerine and lemon zest, pineapple, nectarine, papaya and apricot fruit juice, a fair amount of grassiness normally associated with dessert level wines, really wants to bitch slap you. Full-bodied, crashes against your tongue in relentless waves, heavy but not ponderously, has nimble feet. The acidity is strong enough to slash to the forefront and ensure that it will take more of a leading role down the line. Thick paste-like feel to the apricot, peach, nectarine, pear, pineapple fruit, accompanied by piecrust, honey glaze and milk cream touches. Noticeably candied tangerine, mandarin orange, lemon citrus component. Funny, because when you really step back and assess it, it may not be a true dessert wine. yet, it is certainly too big to be less than that. Aww, hell, just chug it and let others decide. 91

ITALY RED

Produttori del Barbaresco
Piedmont, Langhe
Nebbiolo
2004, \$15.99, 13.5%

Bright red-ruby in color, almost looks like a bowl of cranberries from a distance, consistent throughout, maybe a light shade of orange around the rims, light skips across the surface. Easygoing and approachable nose of floral musk, meadow grasses, dried lemon peels, just polished leather and cherry, raspberry and a bit of strawberry scents. Lighter-bodied at first but puts on additional weight with air time, quite polished without any roughness nor dropoffs from start to finish. This partially an attribute of it not scaling any great heights but that's not what this wine was meant to do anyway. It's honest and guileless, juicy cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit pairs with light grassy notes, a bit of earth and merde, flower petals and a mixed white citrus zip. Does present a mocha

creaminess at moments, a bit odd. Satisfyingly crisp acidity, tannins more foundation than steel skeleton. Lots of kick and flavor left on the finish. Hard to imagine better Nebbiolo for this bargain price. 90

Mascarello, Bartolo

Piedmont, Dolcetto d'Alba, Vigne Monrobiolo - Ruè Dolcetto

2004, \$19.99, 13.0%

Nice, no-nonsense reddish purple core, not a cloud in the sky, lots of violet left in the rims as well as red-magenta and scarlet. Ripe and surprisingly almost jammy, nose of raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit, some twigs and tree bark, earth and grass, distinctly floral as well. Full-bodied, the juiciness impishly fun here too yet must submit somewhat to the firming dictates of the tannins and, to a lesser extent, acidity. Mild prune note to the cherry, plum, blackberry, cranberry fruit, sure to expand as the wine ages. Lemon and orange citrus accents nip at your tongue, adds brightness. Grassiness persists but not obtrusively. Florality akin to freshly dried potpourri, musky at moments. Finish a touch short as those tannins really start to assert themselves. 90

Felsina, Fattoria di

Tuscany, Chianti Classico, Berardenga Sangiovese

2004, \$17.99, 13.5%

Impressively well-hued red-purple core, the rims still mainly ruby but there are already orange to garnet touches. Cedar, wet earth, orange peels and flower petals infuse the nose but it's all quickly overwhelmed by the ultra-juicy raspberry, blackberry, black cherry scents, almost totally fruit. Full-bodied, spicy with a strong enough drop of acidity and tannins to frame the entry before the plumply soft and enveloping cherry, plum, black raspberry fruit takes most of the bite out. The leather, earth, crushed flowers, cedar and brown bark linger well, still kicking at the finish line. Here, the acidity is able to freshen the conclusion some. Highly enjoyable, if not quite full-on tasting like a Chianti yet due to its youth. 90

ITALY WHITE

Giacosa, Casa Vinicola Bruno

Piedmont, Roero Arneis

Arneis

2005, \$24.99, 13.0%

Fat golden color with a light amber edge, one solid brick in the glass, no layers to see, gauzy surface devoid of reflections. Spicy nose with Mandarin orange and tangerine bite, lilacs, green apple, pear, peach fruit up to the task, little bit of chalky minerals, full without seeming so. Full-bodied with a gluey texture that is sticky and pulls and twists. Cinnamon, orange sherbet, floral musk and licorice keep its feet shuffling across the tongue. Relative lack of acidity not imbuing it with get-up-and-go but after awhile you just take it on its own terms and soak in it. Pear, pear, apricot, yellow apple fruit succulent without needing to be mopped up. Thick and chewy right through the finish. A good white wine for heavier dishes, maybe a cream sauce. 88

GERMANY WHITE

St. Urbans-Hof, Weingut

Mosel Saar Ruwer, QbA AP #1

Riesling

2005, \$9.99, 10.0%

While deeply hued, the glow in the bright yellow gold color gives it inordinate life in the glass, average surface shine at best and some dropoff around the rims. Intensely floral nose but like flower petals were dropped over a fresh citrus salad of lime, lemon, orange, pink grapefruit pulp, adds in honey, brown sugar and pure white stone, the peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple scents do not lack for presence but lack the depth to make a firm statement. In the mouth it's full-bodied, very much on the sweet side, this in spite of the sinewy and lengthy acidity. Notes of botrytis evident. heightens the floral and honeyed dimensions. The acidity lends tang to all that tangerine, grapefruit, lemon, lime citrus, tingle to be had. Slight fizzy feel brings out more minerals to mix with the hard stone. Again, the pear, peach, nectarine, apricot, yellow apple fruit solid but decidedly in second place. Stays broad and dense through a prolonged finish. Not erudite nor quick of wit but a stalwart traveling companion. 89

Merkelbach, Weingut Alfred

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Ürziger, Würzgarten, Spätlese AP #15

Riesling

2005, \$14.99, 8.5%

Has a brownish edge to the sand yellow color, clear enough, not the most shine in the universe. Serious dose of lemon in the nose, lime too, followed on by pie dough or bread notes, floral scented wax, the stones smell like they were just pulled from a stream and still wet, subdued peach, pear, red apple fruit scents. Medium-bodied, as in the nose, much more compact and close-woven than many of this producer's wines, and not as sweet also. The acidity has deep grainy feel to it, thick and heavy on the tongue, no prickle. There is, however, a crackle or two in the stone, mineral water, chalk aspects. The lemon to orange citrus has minimal zest while the peach, apricot, yellow apple fruit mostly tastes of pits and skins. Stays fairly fat through the finish. 88

AUSTRIA

Nittnaus, Weingut Anita und Hans

Burgenland, Blauer Zweigelt

Zweigelt

2004, \$13.99, 12.5%

Spotlessly pure yet the darkness of the purple core gives it near total opacity, vibrant and softly glowing ruby-magenta rims full of hue. The nose overflows with white pepper, powerful element which covers up most of the other caramel, cut grass, stony earth notes as well as a good portion of the cherry, currant fruit scents. Medium-bodied, achieves a great of smoothness, glides effortlessly through the mouth. While not as overbearing the white pepper still by far the dominant factor. Has sweetness but not the concentrated weight in the cherry, plum, black currant fruit, in no manner under-fruiting even if not possessing the jammy texture often associated with very ripe wines. Adequate acidity, nothing about the tannins jumps out at you. Not particularly herbaceous nor earthy, maybe a dollop of white grapefruit. Real easy to consume. 88

SPAIN RED

Murrieta, Bodegas Marqués de
Rioja, Ygay, Reserva
Tempranillo
2001, \$19.99, 14.0%

Simple, no-nonsense ruby-purple core, dark with cleanliness, rims still very ruby but already showing signs of the usual red to orange brick hue. Mixture of creamy vanilla ice cream and crisper burnt toast in the nose but the oakiness willingly yields to the super-juicy raspberry, blackberry, red cherry scents, also displays cedar, leather, orange marmalade spice, touch of merde. Full-bodied and buoyantly juicy in the mouth too, can't stop the blackberry, raspberry, cherry juice from sliding all over your tongue. This still as it also presents the old school prune and raisin edge too. Nice tannins, suspect a bit of them are wood tannins from the firm oak structure. Floral and lightly earthy, lots of cedar as well, too early for much to battle the fruit, though. Should improve over 4-6 year horizon but hard to not chug now. 88% Tempranillo, 8% Garnacha, 4% Mazuelo. 90

Unión de Viticultores Riojanos
Rioja, Don Román
Tempranillo
2004, \$14.99, 13.0%

Light purple to red brick in color, shiny surface, pure red crimson rims. Tar, leather, caramel popcorn percolate in the nose, the red cherry, raspberry scents are bright and lively, stays light and not very earthy, smooth dissolve. Medium-bodied, spicy and borderline peppery, the tannins crackle during the attack. The sweetness in the raspberry, black cherry fruit eventually takes over, filling the center. Not that oaky here, some vanilla or toast but that's it. Light, yet consistent, floral touch. Smooth, moderate finish. Drinks like a "joven" wine, with all the good and bad that entails. Nicest for its lack of distinction. 90% Tempranillo, 10% Graciano. 88

Rosario Cooperativa, Nuestra Señora del
Mancha, La, Bodegas Campos Reales
Tempranillo
2004, \$5.99, 13.5%

Squeaky clean violet core, red magenta takes over big time in the obviously saturated rims. Highly herbaceous and sour nose of grass, earth, red currant to raspberry fruit, thankfully not a lot of oak, not much else to hang your hat on. Medium-bodied, has a pleasingly solid skeletal structure, good tannins and some acidity too. Metallic, earthy, herbaceous, there's some saving grace in the bright bite of the cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit, not devoid of bottom either. Derives extra kick from the citrus tones. Piles on more herbaceousness. If any oak was used at all here, it comes across as sour with a small amount of caramel reverb. Serviceable, especially if you like grazing in a meadow. 85

SPAIN WHITE

Rodríguez, Compañía de Viños Telmo
Rueda, Basa
Blend
2005, \$9.49, 13.0%

Light yellow straw color, offers more transparency than shininess, becomes almost completely colorless around the rims. Herbaceous nose with a lemonade aspect, a vague unchewed bubblegum creaminess/sugariness,

hints at more earthiness than fruitiness, pit aspect tot he apricot/peach scents, nothing dominant but full nonetheless. Medium-bodied, while fresh enough it has a dimpled texture to strengthen its grip on your mouth pores, noticeably present. More sweet juice here in the pear, apricot, peach fruit. The lemon, lime, grapefruit citrus isn't zesty but crackles like fresh embers. The acidity is kind of too thick and broad to slice and dice, not breezy, not clumsy either. White mineral dusting on back end. The parts weaker on their own, much stronger when taken as a whole. Approximately 85% Verdejo, remainder Sauvignon Blanc, trace amount of Viura. 89

PORTUGAL RED

Aveleda, Quinta da
Douro Valley, Charamba
Blend
2004, \$6.99, 13.0%

Glowing red-violet to garnet color, absolutely zero loss at the rims, ore red magenta but heavy. Lively, funky nose based in a lot of both herbaceousness and chocolate, mixes in roasted beef notes and red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, simple if full of energy. Medium-bodied, smooth and nicely fluid, not a bump in the road. The herbal notes are lower here, meaty still but more so earthy and the currant, cranberry, boysenberry fruit makes up for its lack of depth with snap. Tree bark, leaves and meadow wildflowers are presented in small portions. Very easy to drink, no roughness. A good cheapie. 35% Touriga Nacional, 35% Touriga Franca, 20% Tinta Roriz, 15% Tinta Barroca. 87

CHILE RED

Xpovin, Domaine
Central Valley, Virginia Louise
Pinot Noir
2005, \$11.99, 13.3%

Lively red-purple color, light and on the transparent side, holds its hue through the ruby rims. Herbaceous nose with fistfuls of merde, earth but avoids being too scrunchy, there's enough thickness in the cranberry, red cherry, pomegranate scents to carve out a lasting presence given its sharp nature. Medium-bodied, also on the grassy side in the mouth, pairs with the acidity to freshen and keep it moving. Conversely, there's grit in the tannins to give it traction. No oak of note, light orange peel, spice, less earth. Gives you a hard twist on the finish, furnishing tree leaves, tea leaves and fallen bark. Not a very long finish but the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit still there at the end. 86

ARGENTINA RED

Siete, Clos de los
Mendoza
Blend
2004, \$13.99, 15.0%

There's a good deal of warmth in the red-magenta to violet core, not truly opaque, the wide scarlet to brick red rims are full of youth. Hard to imagine a more seamless nose of brute cherry, black currant and blackberry fruit, echoes of chocolate and coffee bean, eucalyptus and about zip else, not that you are allowed to notice. Full-bodied, extracted with polish and precision, built as a testament to winemaking with a brief nod to wherever it happens to be from. Just as the currant, plum, cherry fruit begins to turn

too sweet, the tannins react and dampen the dulcet excesses while also introducing a slightly rougher texture. The oak toast plays a larger role here in the mouth, coffee, mocha, burnt buttered toast and cedar, few soft touches. Possesses a floral dimension and again that bit of something like eucalyptus. Wine geeks avoid, regular folks buy by the case. 50% Malbec, 30% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Syrah. 88