

The Hanes Wine Review, April 2016 Edition

It was nice this month to be able to participate in some larger group tastings. Not only do you get exposure to a greater quantity of wine but if you can stop taking notes for five seconds you also meet lots of nice people. As a result of these events and a general steely resolve to plow through a huge backlog of wines in the casa, we have a new edition of the wine review just one month after the previous. Please also check out the "Older Wines Tasted" page because there's a lot there from recent weeks.

Really digging 2014 Beaujolais and need [sic] to buy more to try and perhaps put away for aging. Have heard many good things about Chenin Blanc in the Loire for 2014 but have not tried that many. Better get cracking or they will be gone. Of course, it is almost rosé season. Thank goodness that the spring season of Californian winery direct releases has come to a close so Hanes can justify [sic sic] shopping more in stores rather than spending all his money on mailing list wines. He has created quite the list of even more wines to seek out from small samplings at trade tastings or larger events. Of course, this zeal to try new producers comes swiftly on the heels of Hanes boldly proclaiming that he would limit himself to purchasing only new releases of tried and true producers with lengthy personal familiarity.

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This month's big winners... Hanes is not sure who would count as the domestic "benchmark" for the Lagrein grape but based off of their 2013 and 2014 versions (curiously each was sourced from different vineyards in Paso Robles), Harrington is out in front. The 2014 from the Pelletiere Vineyard is a great wine, smooth with structure, lots of fruit but not so overripe as to lose the preferred characteristics of the grape. Worth \$30. Pigato (aka Vermentino or Rolle) is not that easy to find but those in the know speak well of that made by Laura Aschero. So, time to taste. The 2014 lived up to the hype, strong mouth presence and personality and no problem here spending the \$26 it costs. Sadly, in a world overflowing with wine choices the wines of Virginia do not always get their names called first. That said, Hanes got to enjoy a 2014 Viognier from King Family that was quite good and in the "firmer" Viognier style. The roughly \$27 price tag is acceptable for what you get. Hanes does not consume much Champagne but the basic NV Brut from Jean Velut is a gosh darn good value for \$33 or so. Should appeal to a broad audience too. First time around tasting wines from Keating. Their 2013 Zinfandel from the Dry Creek Valley's Buchignani Vineyard was pretty good, can be recommended to those who prefer big bruiser Zinfandel wines. The \$35 price tag is pushing it. However, to be fair most of the better Zinfandels these days clock in over \$30, one assumes this simply reflects the underlying cost of making wine in California. Hanes's beloved Beaujolais wines bring us two winners this month. First, the 2014 Domaine de La Grand'Cour Brouilly "Cuvée Vieilles Vignes" which is fleshy and earthy at once. Alas, this is not widely distributed and only available at a few stores in the USA. About \$25. The 2014 David-Beaupère Juliéna "La Croix de La Bottière" is likewise hard to find but worth the search, very fresh and vibrant and again well priced at about \$24. Grenache does not always make the most complex wines, especially when younger, but the 2013 from Betwixt and the Boer Vineyard in Monterey deserves note for its playful cheerfulness and more or less acceptable \$28 price tag. Sauvignon Blanc from Italy's Alto Adige can be super-killer stuff. This month the 2014 from Glöggelhof (run by Franz Gojer) upheld the rep with pungency and tang. \$27 is pricey but, hey, that's what most good Sancerre costs if you want to rationalize things.

The best \$20 and under picks.... Was not familiar with the Burgundy producer Vincent Ravaut but hard to argue with the sturdy little Bourgogne rouge he made in 2013, clocking in at \$17. Hanes actually drinks Pinot Noir now and then. Had a taste at a bigger tasting event and went looking for a bottle and at \$19.99 the 2014 Bow & Arrow "Melon" from Oregon is a very credible American rendition of the venerated Loire Valley grape. Good stuff and one suspects the 2015 will soon hit the shelves. Il Nuraghe's "Nero Sardo" Cannonau has not garnered Hanes's attention for some time but have to say that the 2013 is excellent and a veritable steal for \$11. As it is almost with each vintage Lapierre's basic Gamay table wine "Raisins Gaulois" is a bargain for under \$15. A prime time contender for a "house wine" if Hanes's house did not drink a different bottle every night. The 2014 McLaren Vale Shiraz from Thomas Goss is textbook, albeit few read that textbook these days. If you like Aussie Shiraz and want to spend under \$15 this should be on the shopping list. Having tried it twice at tastings prior, Hanes scored a bottle of 2014 Domaine de Sulauze "Les Amis" from Provence and it reminds one of when there were all kinds of inexpensive Provençale wines in the market. Kind of like when you'd drink 2-3 bottles of Côtes-du-Rhône a week because they were so good and cheap. \$20 is near the top end of what Les Amis is worth but still a very nice

drop. Negro Amaro is not a grape for everyone but at a stupid price of \$8 the one called “Flaio” is a rustic little plugger worthy of some love.

And the disappointments... Having had the plucky Médoc wine from Château La Grave a few times in the past, the 2012 was too much on the rough side of the ledger. But still hard to argue with the \$11 price tag. Having recently so enjoyed their Barbera, the 2014 Dolcetto from Bartolo Mascarello was just not that great. Crabbed and unfriendly and \$30. Not a good combination. Was not loving on the 2013 Bedrock Syrah from the Griffin’s Lair Vineyard and other tasters more or less confirmed. Not bad by any stretch but seems below the lofty standards this vineyard has achieved in the past. One bottle is in storage so we shall see if a swan emerges down the road. Right now, not worth \$42. It rare that Hanes (or most anyone) tastes a wine from “cult” Californian producer Sine Qua Non. This month Hanes did get to try a few and the least impressive of the bunch was the 2013 Syrah called “Male” (it has the symbol for the male of the species on the label). Not sure of the mailing list release price but online it can be found from like \$250 to \$450 a bottle. As always, grateful to the friends who allow Hanes to sample the wine but no way in hell would he spend his own money on this, even assuming the mailing list price to be around \$150 a bottle. Bleech. Pépière is pretty much the gold standard in Muscadet. In recent vintages they have released a non “sur lie” version early so as to keep supply in the market until the new vintage’s sur lie version is ready. For whatever reason Hanes did not care for the 2015 version. Quite unforgiveable slight by Hanes. But there it is. We shall see how the sur lie version accords itself in a few months. \$12 is still a wonderful price for this wine. Hanes enjoys trying all the oddball wines Harrington makes but that does not mean they are all enjoyable. This month’s clunker award goes to the 2014 Vermentino from Arroyo Seco. Something here was squirrely and just not right. But, of course, props for trying to make a Californian Vermentino. About \$25 tariff. Weird situation. Bought a case for a party. Opened multiple bottles (screwcap) and liked the wine well enough. Sat down with one bottle for review purposes and almost disliked it. So it went with the 2014 “Penya” from Côtes Catalanes in Southern France. Well, at least it was \$8 so can’t say it was a ripoff.

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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/oldervintages2016.html>

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on *beer* he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/beer.html>

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

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

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And here's Hanes's wine reviews for April!

CALIFORNIA RED

Harrington Wines

Mendocino County, Lover's Lane Vineyard

Terrane

Carignane

2014, \$30.00, 13.5%

Glowing purple core, saturated red magenta rims, fully colored throughout. Dewy, musky nose of plum, black cherry fruit, wet hothouse flowers, displays a small and hard to distinguish reductive quality, cocoa, matted straw, a burst of orange zest, languidly lifts before the final dissolve. Medium to full-bodied and has a pleasing leap across the top register even as it glues itself down against the palate, good textural diversity. Hint of strawberry against the background of blueberry, blackberry, cherry fruit, accents of green apple too. Past the plumpness it can get stony with a quiet earthiness. The tannin helps to ground it and the acidity breathes active life into its cadence. Has a rugged cleanliness which gives it a genial roguishness. 90

Harrington Wines

San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Pelletiere

Vineyard

Lagrein

2014, \$30.00, 14.1%

The core is saturated to a day-glo black purple hue, the rims are a plum pulp reddish purple, glowing warmly in turn, appears solid in the glass with an opaque surface. The nose is super-ripe with plum to prune scents upfront, cherry compote, milk chocolate and a light dusting of stone powder and a mere suggestion of leather, hint likewise of peanut shells, overall youthfully primary with nary a word as to its future direction. In the mouth it's full-bodied and velvety smooth with a gently firm grip, really soaks into the palate. Again, the emphasis remains squarely on the plum, cherry, boysenberry fruit. Here the cocoa is joined by cinnamon and flowers, the flavors might seem to evoke oak but there's nothing about the wine which feels oaky. The acidity is just above average and helps to make space for a few notes of white grapefruit. Minor stoniness fills out the finish. Lots of baby fat on this one, enjoy the fruit's exuberance. 90

Keating Wines

Dry Creek Valley, Buchignani Vineyard

Zinfandel

2013, \$35.00, 14.6%

Red-ruby purple core, good clarity, bright cranberry red rims, lowkey saturation. Steady oak in the nose, buttered popcorn, caramel, butterscotch, more sweet

than toasty, syrupy blueberry, raspberry, boysenberry fruit, minimal mentholated touch, sour orange zest, for all of its sweetness manages to stay open. Full-bodied, super-dense and gluey texture, really hard to wash it out of the mouth. Maple syrup, butterscotch, toffee and vanilla fudge. Here there is a light toasty edge, coffee notes. More of that ultra-rich blueberry, blackberry, raspberry fruit, lasts fully through to the finish. Aided by white grapefruit, lemon burst near the finish line. 89

Turley

Regional Blend, Old Vines

Zinfandel

2013, \$25.00, 15.5%

The reddish plum purple core just falls short of opacity, has a warm and fuzzy glow to the crimson red rims, does not have any excessive saturation. The nose gives you cocoa crisp, vanilla and molasses to mesquite grill smokiness but also a strong tarry nature and metallic earth quality, the raspberry, blackberry, cherry scents are more musky than fresh and juicy, there's an aggressiveness to it which can throw you off. Medium-bodied, more firm than round, squats in the mouth and does not budge much. That said, much more floral here and with orange blossom and zest too. The oak is a creamy vanilla and caramel swirl but it would be hard to characterize the wine as oaky. The blueberry, blackberry, cherry fruit darker in complexion, big initial splash and tapers off from there. Above average for the bottling but could still use more "basso profundo." 89

Harrington Wines

Central Valley, Lodi, Heirloom Ranch

Corvina

2014, \$25.00, 12.5%

Filmy appearance as in unfiltered, has an orange to pinkish color with a close to metallic sheen, empties out some near the rims. Something like a sulfury funk to the nose, sort of foxy with barnyard floor scents, muddled white citrus and a confectionary aspect to the cherry, strawberry scents, overall there's a muted quality to the nose. Lighter bodied but not without volume. Strikes you as having slightly underripe phenolics, this adds a bitter touch to the finish. Nicely floral with orange blossom, honeysuckle. A briny, saline quality acts as a natural restraint on the sugariness of the strawberry, rhubarb, raspberry to red cherry fruit. More showiness here in the white grapefruit, lemon citrus. Haphazard notes of cocoa and clove. As a grape not normally standing on its own, hard to say exactly what's missing. 89

Harrington Wines
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Berardo
Vineyard and Luna Matta Vineyard
Nebbiolo

2013, \$30.00, 14.1%

Bright, lustrous scarlet red to fresh blood red in color, fully hued all the way through the rims. The nose has a funky and roasted quality to it which both intrigues and puts off, witch hazel, high-toned merde as well as pine and matted wet straw, there's also a lot of "quarry stone" like shattered pieces, the cherry, blackberry fruit scents are basic but have plenty of thrust and softened a touch by vanilla tones. In the mouth it's tannic in a good way and puckery, the vanilla and cedar too add more sourness than sweetness. The cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit here brings a sugary front end and a tart back end. The herbaceous side can be ignored in favor of the fruit, while the lemony citrus bite throws emphasis on the rugged stoniness. Right now, as a whole, this is disjointed. But it's like the orchestra is warming up individually and once commanded can kick into harmony. 89

Betwixt

Monterey County, Chalone, Boer Vineyard
Grenache

2013, \$28.00, 14.5%

Transparent and somewhat dilute looking brick red core, brightens to a more cranberry red along the rims, something about it evokes a cough syrup visual look, plus looks "honest" and unadulterated. The nose has a mentholated, medicinal character to it as well as the expected hard candy strawberry, raspberry scents, credible amount of orange to lemon citrus notes, light and floral and no alcoholic sting. Light to medium-bodied, its more syrupy texture aided by a warmed caramel to butterscotch element, along with the menthol, flowers and orange reduction, it does not need to rely on the concentrated cherry, strawberry, blueberry fruit flavors for sweetness. No greenness, no meaningful complexity, it's just a happy wine that wants to make you happy too. 89

Wind Gap

Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast
Syrah

2013, \$39.99, 12.4%

Violet core with light saturated glow, red ruby rims, lacks concentration but nicely bright. Taut nose of white grapefruit pith, white pepper, minerals and stones, sour nature to the cherry, cranberry scents, never feels hollow but close to no wasted words. Medium-bodied, tangy and zippy with pepper, grapefruit to lemon, green olive and mineral bite. The acidity shines through well, the raspberry, cranberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit chugs ahead steadily.

Toffee, butterscotch residue on the finish, pushes just ahead of the stoniness. That said, pleasant leathery uptick at the end. Takes some time to find its stride but when it does it is pretty satisfying. 89

Bedrock Wine Co.

Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Griffin's Lair
Vineyard

Syrah

2013, \$42.00, 14.2%

The purple core inches across the line into opacity, crimson to red magenta rims, overall has good cleanliness if not outright clarity. Big floral nose, open and airy, warmed caramel, coffee beans, mixed black fruits, no real depth nor staying power. Medium-bodied, above average acidity, it lifts into an inner mouth perfume but nothing anchors it on the palate so it basically becomes top heavy and topples over. The florality and white grapefruit zest cover territory but seem hollow like a balloon. Green apple intermixed with plum, cherry, raspberry, full spectrum of fruit flavors. Stone and earth, olives by the end get overrun by coffee, mocha, toffee. Loses grip on the finish, lurching from side to side. Still, the basic material seems okay. Mainly Syrah, remainder Viognier. 87

Keating Wines

Sonoma Valley, Montecillo Vineyard
Zinfandel

2012, \$28.00, 14.5%

Considerable amount of crimson red in the otherwise purple core, the rims even redder, clean and fresh with above average shine, does not evince the pinker sort of saturation. The nose has a pleasing focus on blueberry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, the oak is light and mainly caramel and butterscotch, not toasty, mild eucalyptus to menthol breeze, then an odd moment of bell pepper, not much else going on. Light to medium-bodied, while the ripeness of the fruit is evident it's not enough to prevent a pervasive dryness, hard to say with assurance it is the tannin. The cherry, blackberry to plum fruit darker in feel here. Retains that herbaceous to green pepper edge, could be due to an issue with phenolics. The finish is long enough and, again, it is not slathered in oak to mask any deficiencies. Just lacks richness and depth. 87

Sine Qua Non

Regional Blend, California, Male
Syrah

2013, \$299.99, 15.5%

Incredibly black and impenetrable core, like onyx, the rims are a vibrantly glowing red magenta. Superripe plum, prune, date, black raisin driven nose, violets led florality, milk chocolate, coconut, smells like fruit syrup and oak. Full-bodied, slathered in oaky caramel,

butterscotch, vanilla flavors, almost leaves no room for all the outrageous blackberry, blueberry, cherry liqueur fruit. The tangerine to orange citrus at least has a marmalade tartness. Clove, ginger spice, burnt coffee work there way in. It's predictably exaggerated and, to be fair, in its idiom and intent it is a success. If you thought it would be different, then it's on you. 87

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Bedrock Wine Co.

San Benito County, Cienega Valley, Wirz Vineyard
Riesling

2014, \$18.00, 12.9%

Deeper golden color than expected, not quite bronzed but may get there soon, solid block in the glass without much surface reflectivity, The nose has a lemon reduction to it, orange marmalade as well, floral dew and as much vanilla as rubber notes, peach fuzz, pear and yellow apple fruit scents predominate, while it is fresh on the whole there's an inertness to it, more like it does not want to budge than can't. Full-bodied, quite sturdy here too with plus level acidity and an overall tactile dryness that makes it clump on the tongue.

Mint, lilacs, orange zest give it a pretty mouth entry, the rubber element does not have the same strength as in the nose. Some stoniness, the apricot, peach, apple fruit lowkey and cruises at a low altitude. Spicier ending, ginger or clove. It's an attractive package overall, makes you wish it had more "souplesse" though. 89

Ceritas

Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Charles Heintz
Vineyard

Chardonnay

2013, \$55.00, 13.6%

Fine filminess to the yellow gold color, a few green glints, the rims diminished some. The nose shows good breadth with lemon sherbet, chalk dust, minerally sparkle, floral with countervailing brine accents, the pear, peach, nectarine get awfully close to tropical, overall there's a sourness which upsets it at the end. Medium-bodied, the acidity is good but it does not provide a clear path forward, in general unsettled.

More oak presence here with butterscotch, caramel, toffee, a sort of reduction of violets as well as biting lime and lemon citrus. has thrust but you don't always know where it's going. There is what seems to be an intentionally muffled nature to the pineapple, nectarine, peach fruit, ripe yet with the exuberance in check.

Tries to be classy. 89

Sine Qua Non

Regional Blend, California, Résisté
Blend

2013, \$120.00, 15.4%

Darker green-gold hue, layered enough to reduce the surface shine. Dull nose, some spiciness to pep up the pear, apple and hint of pineapple fruit, spiced oranges, if there's a lot of new oak it's not too bad in the nose, some whipped cream and vanilla. Full-bodied, now here you get a big wave of clove, cinnamon, nutmeg as well as caramel and vanilla pudding. The orange to lime citrus not able to add erect posture to the melon, apple, peach, apricot, fruit which is close to syrupy in texture at times. All that said, leaves you feeling it is not as over the top as it could have been. 45%

Roussanne, 26% Chardonnay, 14% Petite Manseng, 10% Viognier, 5% Marsanne. Grapes sourced 40% from Eleven Confessions Vineyard, 29% Cumulus Vineyard, 31% Bien Nacido Vineyard. 89

Matthiasson

Napa Valley, Linda Vista Vineyard

Chardonnay

2014, \$30.99, 12.8%

Straightforward golden shine, consistent core to rims, not much else to say. Direct and penetrating nose of buttered toast, orange zest with a touch of lime, likewise accent of pineapple in support of the base nectarine, peach fruit scents, fairly clean and unadorned. Light to medium-bodied, lime and lemon, chalky stone with a kiss of oak toast and charred driftwood. There's a dryness to the otherwise tropical pineapple, guava, peach, nectarine fruit. Manages to mix in some black tea leaf and non-oaky smokiness. Near the end you get a Choward's violet mints sort of floral perfume. Seems like it is trying to split the difference, restrained and approachable at once. 88

Harrington Wines

Arroyo Seco, Cedar Land Vineyard

Vermentino

2014, \$25.00, 14.1%

There's a pale glow to the faded gold color and a good deal of spritz clinging to the glass sides long after the pour, no real change in hue towards the rims. The nose is nutty in a blanched manner, a few matchstick notes, mineral water to quinine, it's hard to get at the yellow apple, pear to apricot fruit scents, as it warms more honeyed accents appear to fill in some bald spots. Full-bodied with a blunt mouth feel, has some fizz during the attack and then not showing the kind of acidity which would have it tingle the palate. Lemon peel, honey and lesser nuts, continues to display that offputting matchstick to rubber element. As in the nose the apple, pear, apricot fruit is not absent but in no way

takes a major position. Comes off as not exactly what was intended. 87

CALIFORNIA ROSE

Cowan Cellars

North Coast, Sugarloaf East Vineyard, Jack's Rosé Merlot

2015, \$20.00, 13.9%

Extremely shiny and bright cherry red, clear but the vivacity of hue does not conjure the idea of transparency, only slight diminishing at the rims. Fruity nose of raspberry, strawberry fruit with some green apple notes, gets support from a burst of orange peel and dissolves with a broadening mineral quality. Full-bodied, tangy bite to the raspberry, red cherry, watermelon fruit, here the orange, grapefruit citrus really shines through. Stony underpinning with the minerality waiting to the end to sparkle. Stays broad and grips the tongue through the finish. Big boned and not shy about it. 89

OREGON WHITE

Bow & Arrow

Willamette Valley, Johan Vineyard, Melon Melon de Bourgogne

2014, \$19.99, 12.5%

Decent brightness to the golden color, a few green flecks, translucent distortion of your vision. Sparkly nose of chalk, powdered stone, green apple and pear fruit with fewer apricot notes, orange sherbet, cinnamon, gets rounder as it warms and fills out, more pleasing than complex. Full-bodied, sets itself firmly. Credible array of lemon/lime citrus, flowers, vanilla fudge, lighter baking spices. Lots of apple, melon, pear to peach fruit. Leaves an accruing dry residue behind and eventually gets to the chalkiness. Bounces back and forth between fatness and crisper bite, the acidity is average and a non-decisive factor. Curious to see if aging would change it at all. 89

VIRGINIA WHITE

King Family Vineyards

Monticello

Viognier

2014, \$26.99, 13.5%

Greenish white hue, on the pale side, high degree of reflectivity. Focused nose of floral water, blanched nuts, green melon, pear, peach fruit, almost breadly at turns, not quite as pungent as many examples of the grape but that focus is appreciated. Medium-bodied, good traction with credible minerality to anchor the nuttiness, florality and pinch of butterscotch. Here the peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit has a more tropical

character. That noted, stays tight and coiled, even as it allows the flavors to broaden. The acidity above average for the type. Strong finish, well done for near term drinking. 90% Viognier, 10% Petit Manseng. 89

FRANCE RED

Grand'Cour (Jean-Louis Dutraive), Domaine de La Beaujolais, Brouilly, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes Gamay Noir

2014, \$24.99, 12.0%

There's a certain filminess to the violet to cranberry red color, bright to the verge of luminescence, virtually no change at the rims. Hugely ripe and fruity nose of cherry, raspberry, strawberry and rhubarb scents, big floral musk too, underbrush and green olives with a passing brush of wet animal fur, for whatever hints of an underlying savage nature are present, the nose is all about the fruit. Medium-bodied, starts off super-sweet and then the structure clamps down with a thunder of tannin and lightning of acidity. This brings out the zest in the white grapefruit to blood orange citrus and a ferrous, metallic quality too. Still, the hard candy feel to the raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit remains. Ginger and salt add to the savory finish. Too plump to make a long term prognosis but damn tasty now. 92

David-Beaupère, Domaine Louis-Clément Beaujolais, Juliéna, La Croix de La Bottière Gamay Noir

2014, \$23.99, 12.5%

From a distance the core has purple in it but closer it's as crimson red as the rims, sort of just dried blood look, clear with a sleek enough surface. Gravelly nose with a wet sauna stone sort of smokiness, erect bearing to the cranberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit scents, grapefruit pith, matted straw and some milk chocolate, the snap of the fruit along with a lively floral perfume lift and lengthen it immensely. Medium-bodied with more density than weight per se, the acidity is not keenly edged but keeps refreshing each sip. Vibrant cherry, raspberry, cranberry, strawberry fruit with just enough candied character to give it flow. Less citrus, more emphasis on stone, rocks, dry dirt and tar. Ends on a woody feel, like fallen timber, leaf and twigs, not wetly herbaceous. Nothing unusually unique here but you feel compelled to take the next sip. 91

Othéguy, Domaine Stéphane

Rhône, Côte-Rôtie, Les Massales

Syrah

2013, \$99.99, 12.0%

Black purple core, heavily saturated ruby-magenta rims, unblemished. Incredibly floral nose of lilacs and violets, orange blossom, joined by stone and sand,

white pepper, well-contoured plum, blackberry, raspberry to apple fruit scents, steady and wiry lift. Medium-bodied, the high-toned acidity does nothing to restrain the incredible florality. A touch of chocolate before arrival of brine, iodine, green olives, metallic stone, loads on that iodine bite. The cranberry, red cherry, raspberry fruit likewise has a keenly sharp edge. Hints of bacon and uncooked meat fat but this is built in the “slasher” Northern Rhône mode. Vaguely approachable now, likely better with 5-6 years to settle down. 90

Lapierre, Marcel
Beaujolais, Vin de France, Raisins Gaulois
Gamay Noir
2014, \$10.99, 12.0%

As much bright ruby red as violet in the core, fresh cranberry red rims, clear yet dark enough to deepen into the glass. Stony nose with a stiffening shock of white grapefruit, a little bit of mud and merde when first opened, firm cherry and red berry scents, nothing suggests not being ripe but it does not flow with juiciness either. Light to medium-bodied, there's brawn in the acidity and tannin, particularly for its weight. The stone and poor dirt is a bit diminished but the grapefruit and lemon citrus really steps up its game. There's something close to a brine bite which is actually nice. Even more tautness here in the cherry, cranberry, red raspberry fruit, crunchy. Not as supple and easy to access as some vintages, carries itself with more dignity than gregariousness. (Screwcap) 89

Ravaut, Domaine Vincent
Burgundy, Bourgogne
Pinot Noir
2013, \$16.99, 12.5%

Bright cranberry red color, brilliant in its shine, fully transparent and loses no hue through to the outer rims. There's a viscousness to the nose without it giving up too much freshness, light greenness zips up the semi-tart raspberry, red cherry fruit, a pinch of cocoa or mocha but nothing here bespeaks of meaningful oaking, ground stone dust and lemon zest, stays on the edge. Medium-bodied, framed by powerful tannin and acidity not afraid to jab you. The mixed white citrus has you puckering from the start and there's sufficient metallic mineral stuff going on with the stone to extend this further. Piquant raspberry, cherry, cranberry fruit goes off like rhythmic fireworks in the mouth. Finishes slightly shortly but that's a jerky boy quibble. Lively stuff. 89

Ruet, Domaine
Beaujolais, Morgon, Douby
Gamay Noir
2014, \$19.99, 12.5%

Blackish-purple core, the rims are a duller brick red, has moderate clarity. Dense fruit in the nose, plum, black cherry and has both a stony and dusty minerality to it, some twigginess, dried grapefruit pulp, no lack of fruit but there is a certain sternness to things. Medium-bodied, tannic with a light pepperiness as it enters the mouth. Segues quickly to that stone powder and shards, quite dry and dusty. Savory cherry, Italian plum and currant fruit, ripe but not much juiciness. More bright lemon to blood orange citrus here, trumps any twiggy or leafy qualities. It kind of twists around the tongue and squeezes. Not so much stuffing to expect substantial change over time, just some softening. 89

Sulauze (Karina et Guillaume Lefèvre), Domaine de
Provence, Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence, Les Amis
Blend
2014, \$19.99, 13.0%

Filmy garnet red to purple core, more straight up bright and glowing red along the rims, nice hue intensity in spite of the cloudiness. The nose has a trace of flatulent gases and merde which slowly dissipate over time, cinnamon, spiced oranges, violets and a smidgeon of mocha pretty it up, the blackberry, blueberry, black cherry fruit is more thick and musky than brightly juicy. Full-bodied, dry and tacky although clearly ripened, it tends to layer itself on the tongue. Strawberry, blueberry and mixed cherry fruit come with more tart green apple at times. Those sweet baking spices are here too, garrigues and wet leather. It fits like well worn gloves, snug but ready to move. Each sip is a shade of gray from the preceding one. 85% Syrah, 15% Grenache. 89

Rosiers, Domaine de
Rhône, Côte-Rôtie, Cuvée Drevon
Syrah
2013, \$49.99, 13.0%

Saturated ruby-violet core with glowing magenta rims, however, it is extremely clear and transparent furthest out. Bodacious amount of black pepper in the nose, equally large floral lift, bright mixed red berry scents, has a slightly herbaceous edge too with fluffy underbrush and then a minute burst of burnt cocoa. Medium-bodied, smooth and open, the acidity brings white grapefruit to the fore. The minerals more chunks than dust. Noticeably clean and fresh, glides through the palate. No sense of meat and a just a suggestion of leather. Goes light on the green pepper, cut grass. A floral finish extends its breezy nature. It's either simple or extremely tactful. 88

Grave, Château La
Bordeaux, Médoc
Blend

2012, \$10.99, 13.5%

Unblemished and clean with good shine, reddish purple and glowing orange-reddish rims. The nose is dense, packed with stone, gunflint powder, green pepper, cedar, tart and snappy cherry to blackberry fruit, a bit bound up and not giving. Medium-bodied, very tannic and dry. Not to diminish the depth of the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit but it really struggles to breathe. Tar, asphalt, some dry grapefruit pith make early pronounced statements. Savory cherry, cranberry, blackberry fruit, more punctuation than flow. The cedar is more biting than sweet, no tobacco or vanilla. Dullish finish as the tannin accrues. Actually needs a good 3-4 years to achieve balance. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. 87

Cases de Pène, Les Vignerons de
Languedoc/Roussillon, Côtes Catalanes Indication
Géographique Protégée, Penya

Blend

2014, \$7.99, 13.5%

Perfectly trim and transparent ruby-violet in hue, full through the rims, glossy surface sheen. For an unoaked wine there's an odd amount of coffee grinds and grill char, the smokiness extends through to the roasted raspberry, red cherry, cranberry scents, stiffens some as the white grapefruit citrus unwinds, light florality but really the overall impression is unbalanced. In the mouth it's light to medium-bodied, candied sappiness to the cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit saves the day and massages the palate. Big presence in the white grapefruit to lemon citrus, the smokiness persists but less in a charred wood way. The acidity kicks in and shortens the finish, surprising for how well it started off. It could stand to be a bit more agreeable. 52% Grenache, 36% Carignan, 12% Syrah. (Screwcap) 86

FRANCE WHITE

Ecu (Guy Bossard et Fred Niger Van Herck), Domaine
de l'

Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine, Granite
Melon de Bourgogne

2014, \$19.99, 12.0%

Green with a mix of both white gold straw color, deepens into the glass even as the surface shines brilliantly. Slightly honeyed or even botrytized nose, quite ripe peach, apricot, melon scents which expand more than sink in, honeysuckle, violets, any yeastiness is on the quiet side, too primary now to get at any potential stoniness. In the mouth it's full-bodied, the

acidity keeps freshness in the apricot, peach, melon, yellow apple to persimmon fruit. Has an old vine soft voluptuousness. Oily texture, very good grip, even the raw doughiness adds to the clinginess. Low grade citrus, touch of lemon pulp. Has a notably extended finish. Lacks classic austerity but there's plenty of flesh on the bones on which to peg future development. 89

Delaporte, Domaine

Loire, Sancerre

Sauvignon Blanc

2014, \$22.99, 13.0%

Rich golden color with some residual fizz on the glass sides, bends light inside the glass, more of a straw hue at the rims. The nose is a citrus cavalcade of sweet, sugary lemon, lime, pink grapefruit and more, wet slate, ripe peach to apricot fruit, jasmine and lilacs, more round than penetrating yet not anywhere close to flabby. Medium-bodied, gently contoured to maximize pleasure, loaded with powdered sugar, vanilla as well as flowers. The apple, peach, apricot, green melon fruit ripe and juicy throughout. Not to downplay any chalk, stone dust or mineral elements but this comes across as a "gateway drug" styled wine, and at times has that tangy tangerine, pink grapefruit, lime thing which is more reminiscent of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc than anything else. 88

Pépière, Domaine de la

Loire, Muscadet

Melon de Bourgogne

2015, \$11.99, 11.2%

Pale yellow straw color with a green glint, transparent while capable of distorting vision, somewhat diminished along the rims. The nose is somewhat mute, crushed seashells, lilacs, some lemon pulp, firm snap to the apricot, peach, nectarine fruit scents, something like snap peas or asparagus in there too, tidy package just not saying much. In the mouth it's light-bodied, perhaps more lithe than lean, the apple, apricot, peach fruit as much pit as pulp and even the lemon to orange citrus seems unnecessarily tart and lacking in juice. Conversely, all the stone dust and chalky qualities seem to be in place and there is a delicate floral lift at the end. The finish comes off as truncated, even as the acidity reverberates.

(Composite Cork: Diam1) 87

FRANCE SPARKLING

Velut, Jean

Champagne, Brut Tradition

Blend

NV, \$32.99, 12.0%

Strong activity in the glass, refreshed the surface froth consistently, while there's a flatness to the yellow

straw coloration it extends fully through the rims, pleasing to watch the bubbles go off like fireworks. The nose has a toasty, butter croissant nature, doughy with sweetening honey notes, fresh green apple to peach fruit scents, even some cherry, minor lemon undercurrent, has a tendency to fill the nostrils to the point of blurring individual scents. Full-bodied, here the acidity changes its complexion and allows more chalk and ferrous stone to speak. Likewise, the lemon and some lime citrus pushes further to the fore. The yeastiness remains, reverb through the finish. Floral with marzipan and ripe, if taut, apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit. Caramelly finish. More easy to like than imperious, probably best as a “split the difference” choice. 85% Chardonnay, 15% Pinot Noir. 89

Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun), Domaine des Beaujolais, FRV 100 Gamay Noir NV, \$17.99, 7.5%

Achieves a slight surface dusting upon the pour which regenerates due to a hyper-aggressive fountain of bubbles in the dead center of the glass, like a hose jet stream. Bright cranberry red color and so clear you can see the prodigious amount of bubbles swirling like a tornado under the surface. There's a sour briny quality to the nose, strawberry, green apple, watermelon scents predominate, honey appears only to get wallpapered by stone powder, overall it is fairly open and forward but doesn't often conjure up the word “fresh.” Medium-bodied, the fizz is actually softer than expected and does not last much past first touching the tongue. The stone and white citrus add a drying element as well as bite, however, the raspberry, strawberry, watermelon, apple fruit not going to move out of the spotlight. Does not change much with air time nor from attack to finish but no need for it to. Lively and gregarious and not overwrought. 88

ITALY RED

Nuraghe (Cantina di Mogoro), Il Sardinia, Cannonau di Sardegna, Nero Sardo Cannonau 2013, \$10.99, 13.0%

Attenuated violet fills the core before yielding to a burnt sunset red and then more hints of orange, clear and perfectly transparent. Stony nose with parched earth accents alongside sour orange and grapefruit, the fruit scents feel pressed and concentrated more than free run juicy, mainly raspberry, red cherry and some strawberry, that meadowy outdoorsy quality remains its primary component. Medium-bodied, does an admirable job of balancing out savory herbs, grass and stone shards against the hard candy character to the strawberry, raspberry, blueberry fruit. The acidity is

good plus and it comes across as lightly tannic as well. The citrus more mixed and in turn produces both sweet and sour moments. Opens and smoothes out on the palate with air time. The type of wine that grows on you, neutral first glass but truly enjoying it by the time the second one is finished. (Composite Cork) 89

Flaio Puglia, Salento Negro Amaro 2014, \$7.99, 13.0%

Dark, if clear, red-ruby to violet hued core, more of a warm brick red around the rims, softly saturated. The nose has some blunt force to it, tart white grapefruit and sour cherry, red berry scents, a roughhewn stony earthiness too, then grill smoke and animal fat and mild lavender notes. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, the acidity frames things well and brings an enlivening pucker to the cherry, cranberry, Italian plum fruit as well as the grapefruit component. The dusty earthiness acts as a bandage lest things get too sour and the floral side breathes more deeply here with pine notes. At the same time, there's an odd cocoa like note which highly unlikely comes from oak, doubt this wine sees any. For an inexpensive wine, merits time to breathe and open. (Synthetic Cork: Eno+) 89

Poggio Antico Tuscany, Brunello di Montalcino Brunello 2010, \$72.99, 14.0%

Reddish purple core of some opacity, the burnt orange-red rims have good liveliness. Thick, layered nose of plum, cherry fruit, caramel, pressed flowers and tarry earth, dense enough that it is hard to parse out much more, even with a decanting. Full-bodied, packed to the gills here too, chocolate and flowers, orange zest, caramel sustain the cherry, red berry fruit, especially in the face of a wave of drying tannin. Twiggy, earthy in a clean manner. Lots going on but clearly needs time to get more integrated and gain additional easy fluidity. 88

Villagrande, Azienda Vinicola Barone di Sicilia, Etna Rosso Blend 2012, \$15.99, 13.5%

Some purple but mostly brick red color, clear, decent strength through the rims. Cherry, black raspberry and some green apple fruit to the nose, stony with poor dirt accents, not very “volcanic” per se. Medium-bodied, on the soft side with relaxed tannin. Sweetly fruity, more red raspberry, strawberry, red cherry than darker fruit. Lots of stone but not tar, kind of inert and ungiving. Some vague baking spices and a touch of grapefruit. The brightness of the fruit is by far its biggest draw, not

sure it might unclench and show more breadth. 80% Nerello Mascalese, 20% Nerello Cappuccio and Nerello Mantellato. 87

Bellus Wines

Sicilia, Scopello

Frappato

2013, \$22.99, 12.5%

Light violet to cranberry red, fully transparent without losing intensity of hue, reflective surface. At first the nose smells just like ginger ale, then segues to cherry cough syrup, cinnamon, orange soda, strawberry mixed into the aforementioned cherry, it's more gentle than soft an underlying waft of earthy funk. Light-bodied, the acidity does its best and probably plays at a higher level than the body warrants. More of that ginger root with cinnamon accents and a pronounced element of orange zest. The cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit starts off well but lacks concentration or candied feel in order to last. Develops a tannic throb at the end which too does not match the total body. It's nice enough, comes across as adroitly blended together rather than the voice of a soloist. (Composite Cork) 87

Mascarello, Bartolo

Piedmont, Dolcetto d'Alba

Dolcetto

2014, \$29.99, 12.5%

Dusky purple core, not particularly clean nor cloudy, the rims turn to more of a cranberry red, moderate saturation at best. There is a high-toned quality to the nose which bespeaks of a lack of depth rather than steely-eyed focus, sour cherry and rhubarb scents with a stony and ferrous nature, countered by mint and pine, tries very hard to right the ship but no ballast. In the mouth it's more of the same, light-bodied with tannin that is too much for the general body, dry and clumping by the mid-palate. That minty quality persists, here supplemented more by sour white grapefruit and orange notes. The stone is more neutral and inert and without the minerality. The cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit is red and sour and cannot stretch fully through the finish. The triage is admirable but the stuffing was never there to sew together. 86

ITALY WHITE

Aschero, Laura

Liguria, Riviera Ligure di Ponente

Pigato

2014, \$25.99, 12.0%

Rich golden color with a deep pooling into the glass accompanied by a resplendent surface. Fresh yet muscular nose of lemon peel, quarry stone with a rising smokiness, pressed flowers and anise, fresh

apricot, pear and peach skin, there's a textural tingle which does not quite approach minerally, it's more impressive taken as a hold than parsed apart. Full-bodied, noticeable grip and palate traction, the acidity seems more dampening an drying than zesty. The citrus takes on a mixed grapefruit to lemon profile which matches well with the semitropical and tart pineapple, star fruit, green apple, papaya, nectarine flavors. Makes a powerful statement in the mouth with plenty of reverb. Plus neutral enough to pair with broad array of food. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc Select 100) 90

Glöggelhof (Franz Gojer)

Alto Adige/Südtirol, Karneid

Sauvignon Blanc

2014, \$26.99, 12.0%

Brilliant shine to the green straw coloration, the layering into the glass is evident in spite of the general transparency. From a textural perspective the nose is lean and taut, however, there's a soft drink sweetness to the pink grapefruit, tangerine citrus notes as well as a broadening tropicality in the pineapple, guava, nectarine fruit scents, gets extremely grassy as it sits in the nostrils, with a stone dust undertone. Medium-bodied and somewhat stout in the mouth, muscular to the detriment of fluidity. Lovely melon, kiwi, pear, apricot fruit with a dash of pineapple, more of that tangy to sweet grapefruit and here lime citrus. Pungent florality in a retronasal sense. Loses some sense of stone or mineral. Trails off prematurely at the end but that's why you take another sip. (Composite Cork: Diam5) 89

GERMANY WHITE

Borell-Diehl, Weingut

Pfalz, Kabinett AP #36

Gewürztraminer

2014, \$10.99, 10.5%

Layered yellow-green straw coloration good surface sheen for its overall density. The litchi nut is upfront and present in the nose, beyond the nuttiness, you get powdered sugar dappled green melon, apple, pear, apricot fruit scents, bright tangerine to pink grapefruit accents, its airy and openly knit nature prevents it from becoming unduly saccharine. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, has the needed acidity to keep the fleshiness in check. Still, it's a jolly fellow intent on displaying ample pink grapefruit, lime, tangelo citrus and plenty of reverb in the melon, pear, peach, apricot fruit. The nuttiness more subdued here and this allows some chalk and white pebble notes to surface. Tangy finish, it's not complex but by no means simple either. (Screwcap) 89

SPAIN RED

Albert, Celler Hidalgo
Priorat, 1270 A Vuit Fina
Blend

2011, \$12.99, 14.5%

Opaque purple core, dense crimson rims, looks more middle aged than youthful, the color of dried blood. The nose is muskily perfumed with cocoa powder, incense, crushed cherries, plums to prunes, vanilla powder, tar and leather, has a drying nostril texture. Medium to full-bodied, tannic and oaky so it's dry here too. That said, there's a close to candied aspect to the cherry, raspberry, blueberry fruit aided by nuances of caramel and milk chocolate. Wet leather, earth appear in moderation. Tangy finish, zesty without losing body. Fairly boisterous overall. 50% Garnacha, 30% Syrah, 10% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. 89

of tangy mesquite grill smoke and charred apple wood. Not that tannic but has good erectness and no slouch. Loses grip at the finish. 78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 22% Shiraz. (Screwcap) 87

AUSTRALIA RED

Goss, Thomas
South Australia, McLaren Vale
Shiraz

2014, \$12.99, 14.5%

The purple core is not overly dark nor fully opaque, the rims are saturated but stay more in the garnet red range than heading over to magenta. The nose is ripe plum, blackberry, boysenberry fruit without surmaturité, plenty of molasses, butterscotch and sweet mesquite grill smoke but it all feels in place and welcome, too dense to really let it eucalyptus flutter about. In the mouth it's full-bodied with a syrupy texture that ratchets up the sweetness. Clear emphasis on that plum and dark berry fruit, more molasses and caramel but it's more so smoky with grill fat accents. No tannin to really speak of, however, it does gunk or pucker up at the end. Mild floral to eucalyptus element, no stronger here than in the nose. This is exactly what you want and get for an Australian Shiraz at this price these days. (Screwcap) 88

Hidden Sea of The Limestone Coast, The
South Australia, Limestone Coast, Cabernet Shiraz
Blend

2014, \$20.00, 13.5%

Strong brick red influence to the otherwise purple core, the rims a vivid scarlet red, looking more brooding than aged. The nose is mostly crushed berries and a mix of eucalyptus and earthiness, does not betray any excessive oakiness, on the whole comes off as inert and inexpressive. Medium-bodied, a lot more traction and flow here in the mouth, particularly in the juiciness of the blueberry, blackberry, raspberry fruit. The mint and eucalyptus bolder and supported by notes of black tea leaf, tar and grapefruit pith. The oak takes the form