

## *The Hanes Wine Review, May 2007 Edition*

Hanes catches a lot of grief because he doesn't note where he buys the wines he reviews. As if the review needs even more words. Besides the fact that he doesn't want to seem to favor some retail stores over others when they both carry the same wine, a lot of the wines reviewed are wholesale samples and thus Hanes may not even *know* where they are sold. You ever think of that, man? It's not Hanes's fault all the time. Just most. But this brings to mind an interesting aspect of wine reviewing and the resultant search for the wines by a reader. Or two. You both know who you are. This is how production numbers vary among wines and why some wines are insanely easy to find while others couldn't be uncovered by Sherlock Holmes. The topic also ties into last month's screed because contemporary winemaking techniques do have an effect on production numbers, particularly in terms of creating a homogeneous product in larger quantities (that is, avoiding too much variation among the bottles sold).

Millions and millions of gallons of wine are produced worldwide each year. Really, like millions. It's crazy! The United States has gone hillbilly nuts over wine, with over 16 million cases of wine sold every three months as per a recent *Wine Business* article. Almost \$1.2 billion in sales every three months. That's big business. And a lot of product. And a lot of products to choose among. Lots and lots of competition, consolidation, new product entry, scales of economy, marketing, counter-insurgency and drunken end consumers. Sweet.

One of the interesting things about the article was pointing out how difficult it is for a "small" producer to make an impact on the market. "Small" in terms of how the industry sees itself is like a 10,000 case production. Such a brand doesn't have the sheer quantity of product to create an impression in the collective public consciousness. If that's "small," then what's "large?" Large is like Yellowtail from Australia. Like *eight million cases* of Yellowtail wine gets sold each year, it's the first brand to sell more than a million cases in a single month. The maker of Yellowtail (technically, [yellow tail]®), Casella, says this on their website: "The winery is now capable of crushing 120,000 tonnes of grapes during one vintage. This is backed up by three bottling lines capable of a combined output of over 30,000 bottles per hour, and with two more lines planned, the winery will be capable of bottling over 65,000 bottles per hour." That's over 5,400 cases *per hour*. In 2-3 hours they create more than a "small brand" would in a year. In yo face, mofo.

Another behemoth, E&J Gallo, has a global brand portfolio of over 45 wines and sells over 75 million cases in the United States per year. Their brands include Gallo Family Vineyards, Barefoot Cellars, Rancho Zabaco, Dancing Bull, Ecco Domani, Louis Martini, Mirassou, Napa Valley Vineyards, Anapamu, Indigo Hills, Turning Leaf, Red Bicyclette, Black Swan and Carlo Rossi among others. Now, if anyone wants to find these wines there's not really a problem. They are *everywhere*. But, hey, there's also no sense in reviewing these wines since they really aren't reviewable. As noted last month, it's a "category mistake" — there's too many different types of products being called "wine" these days that bear little resemblance to each other beyond a common ancestry as grapes prior to fermentation. It would be kind of silly to review cans of Pepsi, there's no point (unless one writes for *The Onion* or something). There's a level of production where the liquid has to be homogenized to the point where it's going to lose the individual character worth describing in a wine tasting note.

At the other end of the spectrum you get fancy expensive producers who boast on their label that only 230 cases were produced or something like that. Hell, Casella can crank that out in 24 minutes. But the assumption is that the wine has been shepherded into existence with both a farmer's love for the earth and a winemaker's careful desire to let the wine speak for itself. Sometimes true, sometimes not so. But that's not the topic this month, it's how production numbers vary and make wines harder to find. Say there's 1,000 cases of a boutique winery's Syrah made in 2006. All of it gets sold in the U.S. For argument's sake let's say it's divided equally among the states. That's 20 cases per state. Not a lot at all for a country of 301 million people (even discounting those below the legal drinking age and people who are too lame to drink booze). 1,000 cases sounds like a lot at first but it's really insignificant. And the chances of any isolated one of us getting our mitts on a bottle is like between zero and zero.

It's interesting to see how much wine the prestigious and expensive Bordeaux "First Growth" Château Latour produces. Their website says they average around 220,000 bottles per vintage, or 18,333 cases. This for a wine the 2003 vintage of which sells for around \$900 to \$1,300 *per bottle*. Now at a little under 20,000 cases you *can* probably find some. But can you afford it! In terms of production numbers and price, is Latour a product or a boutique wine? Italy's producer Cavalleri makes about 200,000 bottles of sparkling Franciacorta a year — brand or artisanal producer? Spain's famed Vega Sicilia produces around 200,000 bottles per year among their three different labels. Also from Spain, Bodega Virgen Blanca produces 200,000 bottles annually of their Viña Sardasol Crianza. Do these numbers mean the wines are made the same way as Vega Sicilia's wines?

The point here is that interesting wines can be made in numbers including tens of thousands of cases annually. Maybe even hundreds of thousands. But at some mysterious, ineffable point the center can no longer hold. Depending on factors from the environment to grape type to winemaking style the production number can vary incredibly in terms of how much can be made with the wine remaining potentially interesting. There's no automatic merit in making only 140 cases or in making 14,000 cases, either can appeal or blow equally. What's important is that there's a much better chance of you getting a hold of a bottle when it's 14,000 cases.

Which circuitously brings us back to what Hanes was trying to say in the first place. There's no usefully practical way of noting where the wines reviewed were purchased because there's no way he is also going to dig for the production number of the wine and provide that too. If the review says bought at Store X and they only got a case, they can't get

anymore and Hanes bought the last bottle, there's no use in knowing where the bottle was purchased. After all, this is why Hanes created the internet. So his readers could use it to search for wines that sound interesting.

Fate and free samples will ensure that some wines reviewed herein are of a large enough production number to be locatable. They may not always be the best nor worst, expensive nor inexpensive. But that's not the goal. The goal is to drink as much wine as humanly possible and live.

As a side note, this is also a large part of why ye olde *The Hanes Wine Review* remains free. Sure, the information *can* be useful. But most of the time it can't be useful. Because you'll never be able to find the damn wine! People who charge for their opinions should be mindful of this fact. Either the wines discussed would have to be of a large enough production so as to not be describing the unattainable. Or one would have to admit explicitly that there's a somewhat impractical aspect to one's endeavor because it might as well be fictional for all the real world effect it will have as a form of recommendation. After all, as we all know, wine reviewing is just something to do until the Yankees game comes on.

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**This month's big winners...** To prove that he can be as broadminded and fair as any critic of the vine, two nice Pinot Noirs from Oregon were imbibed this past month, the 2005 Mr. Jefferson Cuvée from Cristom and the 2005 basic bottling from WillaKenzie Estate. Neither cheap but worth the tariff. Hanes is so used to associating Zinfandel wines from Sonoma's Monte Rosso Vineyard with Ravenswood that it was weird to try one from Rosenblum instead. It was very tasty and juicier than past Ravenswood versions, yet excellent wine. But the \$48 price tag is ouchy. Rosenblum's Zinfandel from Paso Robles for \$18 represents very good value, however. Hanes enjoyed three more cru Beaujolais wines this month, a yawn since it was expected and nobody really cares. Most everything else was more or less OK but nothing to go ga-ga about.

**The best \$15 and under picks...** Fausti or Fausto, call it what you may, the 2005 Rosso Piceno from them offers the right amount of complexity one may expect for \$13, a nice wine for sure. A new Loire producer was successfully sampled and let us pronounce that the Domaine des Galluches 2005 Cabernet Franc "Tradition" from Bourgueil is worth \$15. Just call it by the brand "Castillo de Monséran" and ignore the producer because it's in tiny letters and then enjoy the Garnacha (aka Grenache) wine from Spain's Cariñena region (not to be confused with the grape Carignan). Bargain price at about \$8. It is rosé season so most of the values Hanes has been trying are indeed pink. The 2006 Amador Foothills version made of Sangiovese is truly excellent and well worth \$13. In the same category Château de Roquefort in Provence presents us with a pretty little 2006 rosé called "Corail" that should retail for under \$15. Esteemed tender to the vines André Iché always makes a perfectly affordable wine in his Carignan from the Languedoc called Les Hérétiques and 2005 is no different. Still under \$10, folks. Also under \$10 is Caldora's 2005 Sangiovese from Umbria which may not scream terroir or grape typicity per se but goes down awfully easy. Little known but still tasty, the 2005 Sauvignon Blanc called "Petit Bourgeois" from producer Henri Bourgeois in the Loire's Vin de Pays du Jardin de la France makes for easy summer drinkin' for around \$11.

**And the disappointments...** The name Hubert Lignier brings immediate respect from Burgundy wine lovers so Hanes tossed down coin he doesn't really have on a curiosity, a white wine from Fixin. This 2004 Chardonnay was nice but also underscores why people usually make red wines in Fixin. One thing to always remember is that just because a wine is organic or biodynamic or something that's nice to the earth, that doesn't mean it tastes good. A example being the Mendocino Farms' 2004 blend "Redvine Series." At \$32 easy to pass on. Also from Mendocino is the 2005 Chameleon Winery Grenache which was all but unpotable. Wine geeks talk up this newish winery called Scholium Project a lot. Hanes finally got to taste a couple of their wines, two white wines, and honestly they were nothing special. Well enough made but nothing "unique" to warrant the fuss. Maybe next time. Everyone loves cheap one liter bottles of wine, especially when they come with a bottle cap closure. However, in 2006 Hofer's Grüner Veltliner from Austria's Weinviertel region is a notch below their usual quality.

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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/oldervintages2007.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 #31:** "Know fewer wines better!"

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

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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 May!

## CALIFORNIA RED

Turley  
Napa Valley, Moore "Earthquake" Vineyard  
Zinfandel  
2004, \$48.00, 16.3%  
The red-purple core not as dark as it might be while still showing a slight murkiness, the ruby rims mixed with a dulling violet tinge. Attractive interplay in the nose between the salt, mineral, leather and dried beef fat and then the honey, brown sugar coated blueberry, raspberry, black cherry fruit scents, more driven by fruit than oak. Full-bodied, glides across the palate like its stretching on satin sheets, every movement decadently lazy, if smooth. The caramel, honey, hot butter aspects here fit the mood of the blackberry, black cherry, boysenberry fruit perfectly, both moving at the same rhythm. Has some vague acidity, does not come off as sloppy nor unstructured. Some mountain or forest air allusions but the truth is it doesn't need complexity to completely win you over. Long, lingering finish that you don't want to end. 92

Rosenblum Cellars  
Sonoma Valley, Monte Rosso Vineyard  
Reserve  
Zinfandel  
2005, \$47.99, 15.2%  
Rich glow throughout the violet core sort of lightens it some, the rims barely shift to saturated red-ruby, attributable mostly to their just being less liquid to see through there. Mint oil and eucalyptus alongside tangerine zest make the nose enjoyably sprightly, leavened some by rich milk chocolate notes, just enough of a brambly feel in the blackberry, black raspberry, cherry fruit scents to avoid full-on jamminess, gets real comfortable in your nostrils and waits until the busboys are mopping up to leave. Full-bodied, has the ripe acidity to cinch its belt tighter around the middle and gain added forward momentum. The chocolate here more of a bitter dark sort with the orange citrus an infusion through it. The soaks up a good deal of the menthol and mint flourishes. The juicy blackberry, boysenberry, blueberry fruit feels like it's exploding outward in the mouth like a burst water balloon. As the juicy fruit recedes through the finish the oak toast really comes to the fore, helping to relieve weight and create more perfume. Albeit, oaky perfume. (Synthetic cork) 90

Kosuge Wines, B.  
Napa Valley, Carneros, The Shop  
Pinot Noir  
2005, \$34.99, 14.5%  
Good dose of ruby in the violet but it still stays pretty gosh darn dark, perfectly immaculate with brilliant surface shine, barely any loss of hue richness at the rims. Velvety deep nose of cola, coffee ice cream, spiced pumpkin pie,

light sporadic breezes of eucalyptus and wildflowers, the cherry, blackberry scents are as full as can be while still not hogging the spotlight. Full-bodied, cascades outwards across your entire mouth, starts flooding up the walls. Soft without being wimpy, the lack of space it leaves in the palate necessitates the impression of structure. Cola, vanilla bean, cinnamon, clove, maybe a sprig of mint, any oak utilized judiciously. The cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit can't be called anything but plush yet it also moves along at as brisk a pace as you'd want for the weight. Average acidity but you can sense it's trying. Takes a good long while to wash out of your mouth. 90

Ethan  
Santa Barbara County, Alta Mesa Vineyard  
Grenache  
2005, \$30.99, 14.5%  
It's clean on the whole but there's something about the glow that makes less than perfectly spotless, the purple core has a visible red-ruby inflection that grows in proportion to proximity to the rims, complete saturation throughout. Big, pungent nose of clove, nutmeg, anise and orange pekoe tea, definite candied and sugary quality to the raspberry, strawberry, watermelon, red cherry fruit scents, nothing which bespeaks undue oaking, just a whole lot of youthful fruit. Full-bodied, in the mouth the ultra-sweet raspberry, blueberry, cherry fruit must have hanged longer than a bad guy in a spaghetti western. Bountiful sweet spices, all cinnamon, nutmeg, anise with candied orange to lemon peel to boot. You can tease out some dusty earth and field straw if you have a good imagination. Density does the work, acidity and tannins hit the free salad bar. Milk chocolate and vanilla milk shake flavors percolate through the finish. Succumb to it already. 90

Rosenblum Cellars  
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Appellation Series  
Zinfandel  
2005, \$17.99, 14.9%  
Immaculately clear while still remaining dark due to a deep crimson tint to the violet core, the core's color makes the shift towards the pure red rims all but imperceptible. Openly knit nose of fresh strawberry, raspberry, red cherry juice, the first fruit of the season, glimmer of earthiness and stone, ash as well as orange peel, also noticeably free of oak influences, doesn't overcomplicate the situation. Medium-bodied, crisp acidity helps keep it fluid and smoothly, very evenly paced and balanced throughout. Not at all in a blockbuster style, easy drinking and focuses on a simple core of raspberry, cranberry, strawberry fruit and lemon to orange citrus. Again, as in the nose there's hardly any oak toast, gains nuance from licorice and thyme herb bits. Fresh ending, little residue or excess weight without it seeming short as a result. You could drink a lot of it in a sitting without even thinking about it. 89

Palazzo, Scott  
Napa Valley, Right Bank  
Blend  
2004, \$51.99, 14.8%

Reflective and clean, a burnt red influence permeates the purple foundation in the core, the bright brick red rims already suggesting an orange tinge. There's a very fine oak edge to the nose, toast that could cut and draw blood, mint, classy butter like it was specially chosen for a high end restaurant, that said, there's a lack of expressivity in the currant, cherry, blackberry scents albeit pure, touch of salted beef, grill fat, focused to the nth degree at the current moment. Medium-bodied, there's an almost intentional grit to it, as if wants some rubbing traction against the tongue on the attack. Beyond that, it's smooth as ice and glides with casual ease through the mouth. The ripeness in the raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit doesn't effect its supple contours, no exaggerations. Soft suggestions of tobacco leaf, lead, stone, brown earth, lemon peel, conscious of how each part effects the whole. The tannins are relaxed but not too so, an attentive butler. Very balanced throughout. Hard to find any fault with it, however, equally difficult to get stirred up over it too. Unemotionally seductive. Unspecified percentages of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon. 89

Dashe Cellars  
Dry Creek Valley  
Zinfandel  
2005, \$20.99, 14.5%

Both good clarity and depth of hue in the violet to ruby-magenta color, slow lightening from the moderately dark core on through to the rims. Attractively smoky and earthy nose with tar, leather, white grapefruit pith components, together keeps the buttery creaminess at bay, round and supple black cherry, blackberry fruit scents keep coming at you. Full-bodied, the strength of the acidity stands out right away, yet the oaky vanilla cream and butter also bigger than in the nose too. Displays enough prune to dark raisin notes to additionally elevate perceptible sweetness and concentrate the otherwise fresh plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit flavors. Citrus more orange to lemon here, soft mutter of herbaceousness, this balanced out by cinnamon and nutmeg spice. Good unforced length on the finish. As always, provides quality for the price and a sense of natural integration. 89

Rosenblum Cellars  
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Richard Sauret  
Vineyard  
Zinfandel  
2005, \$23.99, 15.6%

Vibrant scarlet red to purple core with a measure of gauziness, mild drop in hue intensity to youthful brick red along the rims, very well hued. Very creamy nose of French vanilla ice cream, whipped cream, white chocolate, this makes the raspberry, strawberry, blueberry fruit more like pie or sorbet than fresh fruit scents, this abetted by cinnamon and ginger spice accents. Medium-bodied, has a spicy and semi-herbaceous attack that enlivens the palate, the ginger accompanied more by sharper clove notes. This in turn brings with it an allusion to ham or glazed game. The more you sip it, the more the acidity makes the bigger impression, any tannins mostly upfront in framing the attack. And towards the rear palate the cherry, blackberry, blueberry fruit does take on a more raisinated quality and sugariness. Doesn't reveal a great deal of alcoholic heat but you get a buzz from it. Could use a little extra kick. 88

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Maramonte  
Regional Blend, California, Syrage Lot 7  
Blend  
2005, \$13.99, 13.9%

It's not murky per se, maybe more like there's a cough syrup red translucency throughout the purple core, the ruby rims not as red but extremely dull, perhaps due to the dark purple tint reaching out from the middle. Heavy nose, not immobile nor lacking in energy but just dense and not necessarily wanting to prance about, mesquite grill smoke, cedar and caramelized brown sugar sweeten up the plum, black cherry fruit scents, some orange reduction and floral paste as well, sticks to your nostrils. Full-bodied, equally dense and lacking in the desire to get up and move here too. As a result, no sense of progression in the currant, blackberry, plum, black cherry fruit, albeit it continues its relentless march through a lengthy finish. Too heavy to measure the tannins, however, mostly dry. Same orange citrus, flowers and spiced milk chocolate thing going on. Big mouthful that's sure to impress value seeking fruit bomb lovers. 58% Syrah, 29% Petit Verdot, 13% Petite Sirah. 87

Panacea Wine Company  
Napa Valley  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2005, \$21.99, 14.2%

Spotless, has sufficient hue intensity in the red-purple core to really keep it both dark and lively, the cranberry red rims as much a garnish as real presence. The nose is well-thought out, furnishes as much vanilla cream and whipped out softness as you'd need, accompanied by cedar, eucalyptus and juicy cherry, blackberry, blueberry scents, at the very last second sneaks in some bell pepper. Medium-bodied, if it were any smoother it would be impossible to register. Frictionless cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit glides through the mouth, still manages to stain the palate fully. The caramel, toffee, brown sugar, molasses, vanilla ice cream oak component obvious yet not obnoxious. After but a few sips it is clear that this wine is highly strategized, not a fraction left to chance. Tannins as non-existent as a palimpsest. Bell pepper, cedar and even a smidgen of black pepper spice but it knows what sells. Why fault it for just being itself? Mainly Cabernet Sauvignon with some Cabernet Franc, Merlot. 86

Lail Vineyards  
Napa Valley, Blueprint  
Blend  
2004, \$44.99, 14.6%

Fully opaque purple core, not quite black, eventually yields to brick red at the rims, certainly fills the glass with the splendor of color but doesn't offer distinction. The nose pushes becoming grapey, plum, raisin, cherry, blackberry jam, only scrunchy alcoholic fumes could stop this tidal wave, actually manages a little green apple and orange zest before this gets subsumed in the whipped cream, caramel oak. Full-bodied, knows how to use both its heft and its suppleness to maximal effect, digs roughly at times so as to never get too polished. Mint, flowers, sweet grill smoke and molasses trump any leather or tobacco flavors. Don't even intellectualize the structure, you've been beaten to the punch. The black cherry, blackberry, black currant fruit curiously pulls up a wee bit short. Really tastes good but an experienced taster can't ignore the fabric of sameness. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 34% Merlot, 16% Cabernet Franc. 86

Mendocino Farms  
Mendocino County, Redvine Series  
Blend  
2004, \$31.99, 14.5%

The core is about pure black without losing cleanliness due to the opacity, light shimmers across the surface all the way to the deep red-tinted ruby rims. Morning floral dew coats the rest of the scents in the nose, deepening the wet toast, cedar and tilled earth elements, turns grassier as it sits in the glass, cutting the legs out from under the cherry, raspberry scents. Light to medium-bodied, the heavy duty tannins help it gain traction in the mouth, keeps it dry and limber. That said, it suffers from an aspect rarely found, that being the flavors have been left alone to find their own path, unfortunately they seem to prefer meandering. Dilute quality to the raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit, adequate attack with a quick subsequent fade. There would be more to appreciate in the earth, tobacco, leather, white grapefruit peel flavors. By no stretch horrible but easy enough to ignore. 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Petite Sirah, 10% Syrah. 84

Chameleon Winery  
Mendocino County  
Grenache  
2005, \$20.99, 14.5%

Very light purple, taken out back behind the woodshed by the red-ruby hues, stays consistently full to the very outer rims. Diffuse nose, brings the chocolate powder and sour earth, merde more to the fore, there might be some lemon or stone in there but it has your nostrils recoiling from the glass, very brief window for the raspberry, red cherry scents to speak too. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, equally nondescript, what descript there is ain't so good. Moderate acidity, too watery and dilute to really hold onto any one aspect and channel it clearly. Some cocoa or vanilla oak, same for the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit. Almost curiously, does not become excessively herbal. At turns earthy or citrusy but not enough to warrant the descriptors. It better keep blending in to avoid scrutiny. 82

## CALIFORNIA WHITE

Scholium Project, The  
Central Valley, Lost Slough Vineyard, Naucratis  
Verdelho  
2006, \$27.99, 15.2%

Somewhat pale yellow to white straw colored core, has enough translucent shimmer to extend into the rims but the truth is that what color may be there is gone. Even before you start to parse out the components, the nose strives for an erect bearing, white grapefruit to lemon citrus pith melds with sweet pickle juice, violets and chunks of quartz stone, for better or worse, the thrust of the pear, peach, apple fruit negates any terroir based components, a narcotic for the nostrils. Full-bodied and treacly, sticks like gummy glue to your mouth pores. Lemon, lime, orange custard does justice to the degree of smoothness it seeks to achieve. Vanilla fudge, milk chocolate, toffee make the oak unmistakable. If you pay close enough attention there's even a pickled side to it. The apricot, peach, guava, mango fruit is damn well tropical and relentlessly clings to the powdered sugar character. Stays with you without forcing itself on you. 88

Matanzas Creek  
Sonoma Valley  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2005, \$24.99, 13.8%

As transparent as liquid can get short of water, the whitest straw hue possible, attractive surface sheen and betrays the faintest little fizz too. The nose is very delicate and light of touch, pear, peach, green melon fruit has a skin fuzz feel, gives up a chalky stone dimension, more dusty smoke than grass offered, for its moderate depth has very nice length. Light to medium-bodied, here there's a noticeable honeyed character which brings out a dewy sugariness in the otherwise tart, if juicy, peach, pear, apricot, melon fruit flavors. The acidity creates a dusty coating across the tongue, heightens the minerality and stoniness to a level you have to recognize. That said, the underlying sweetness brings out more pink grapefruit than other citrus flavors. As in the nose, reduces any herbaceousness to a whisper. Not refreshing per se, but satisfying. [Screwcap] 88

Vare Vineyards  
Napa Valley  
Ribolla Gialla  
2005, \$24.99, 14.5%

The yellow straw color caught between transparency and translucency, drops off some at the rims but not enough to break a sweat over. Oak toast and, curiously, merde frame the first few sniffs you take, then jasmine rice, orange spice, the pear, apple, peach scents too timid to deal with the aggressiveness of the aforementioned. Full-bodied, there's a nanosecond of verve before the creaminess fills any rough patches and interrupts should you disagree with the invited guests. The lemon to lime citrus has weight and cut and next to the sharp spices remains the most compelling ingredient of the attack. Has apple, pear, apricot, melon and pineapple fruit flavors that can't muster complete start-to-finish juiciness but has bite to spare. The acidity is what it is. What is it? Good wine but if you bought it thinking you'd get a new experience you ain't gonna be that happy. 500 ml bottle. 87

Scholium Project, The  
Central Valley, Delu Vineyards, Heliopolis  
Verdelho  
2006, \$24.99, 14.9%

Presents a fairly basic yellow straw to gold coloration, if anywhere displays more amber tint, it's the rims, the faint gauziness makes it less vibrant but helps to lend depth to its overall appearance. Vanilla fudge, cream and then orange sherbet, mint oil take hold, then a kind of sour lemongrass, cooking herbs thing, if there's anything unique it's a latent flatulence, mild poached feel to the apricot, peach, nectarine, guava fruit. Full-bodied, sappy and clingy but not mindlessly so. Just skirts dried fruit sweetness in the apricot, pear, peach, red apple, mango fruit, the lime to tangerine citrus sweet enough that it's not helping here. Acidity? Acidity is for wimps! More honey coated filo dough to be had. Adds in caramel and butterscotch and, truly, there's not room for much more. Ends with a sappy hug of the tongue, no rush to leave, cinnamon, clove and ginger very much wanting to spend time with you. 87

Shelter

Napa Valley

Chardonnay

2005, \$38.99, 14.5%

Glassy old gold color with a touch of bronze, as deeply hued as the core is, just as empty around the rims. Toffee, cotton candy, vanilla fudge give the nose a big old butt, no lift derived from the sweet baking spices and orange to lime zest, moderate restraint found in the pear, apple, peach, apricot scents, nothing out of the ordinary about it. Medium to full-bodied, spicier here with added emphasis on ginger, clove accents. The orange, lime, lemon citrus sweeter, eventually puts out some of the spice heat. Carries a vague poached character in the pear, peach, apricot fruit, concentrated while not painfully sugary. One remains confident there is measurable acidity in the liquid. Becomes creamier with vanilla, caramel, butterscotch flavors dominating the finish. Pretty much plays it by the book. 86

Tablas Creek

San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Côtes de Tablas

Blanc

Blend

2005, \$21.99, 13.9%

High degree of shine breathes life into the yellow gold color, sleek, the light reflects throughout, masking the hue loss around the rims. Borderline bawdy combination of whipped cream, cinnamon buns and orange spice with semi-poached apricot, peach, nectarine, yellow apple fruit in the nose, mixes in minerals and stone bits, not especially floral, leaning heavily on the fruit to impress. Full-bodied, to the point where it doesn't move nimbly, has the kind of lift that while it relieves weight on the tongue, ends up with layers of flesh hanging off the roof of your mouth. Round and dense, if not especially sugary, peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple, mango fruit, fades on a steep decline past the mid-palate. Sharp spices are able to trump the leesy creaminess, bringing focus to the Mandarin orange, lemon citrus component. Its overall dullness and then the burst of spice mask the bulk of any minerality. Not bad, does a lot of things adequately. 42% Viognier, 33% Roussanne, 19% Marsanne, 6% Grenache Blanc. [Screwcap] 85

Esca

Sonoma County

Pinot Grigio

2005, \$17.99, 13.5%

Light brown hay straw color, hue deepest around the rims when viewed at an angle, otherwise mostly transparent and water-like. Honey and glazed bread notes take up most of the nose, sweet lemonade turns as well, contoured ripeness throughout the apricot, pear, peach scents, toys with becoming sugary. Medium-bodied, with an all but complete reprise of the nose, monochrome and completely crafted to not offend. Ripe and juicy pear, melon, apple, peach fruit stays in touch with its mannered side, there's that element of sweet spice, honey and baked bread without it running amok. As it sits in the mouth the lemon/lime citrus takes on a larger and larger role, bringing with it a taste of mineral water as well. Discussion of acidity verboten, that said, no slouching. That said, strong sugary residue through the finish. No need to remove your chewing gum before drinking. [Screwcap] 85

## CALIFORNIA ROSE

Amador Foothills Winery

Amador County, Rosato

Sangiovese

2006, \$12.99, 13.5%

While mostly pinkish-red, there's also this metallic orange tinge which diffuses its solidity, almost unintentionally helping to bleach out the rims. In the nose sugary strawberry, raspberry fruit quickly gets put in its place by powdered mineral and chalk dust, pulverized rose petals and dried lemons, these aspects assuredly lending a smidgen of austerity, thinks about getting grassy but doesn't, spreads out steadily and unobtrusively. Full-bodied, packs a good punch and not shy about hitting you with a combo of bouncy strawberry, raspberry, pomegranate, apricot fruit and then lemon to Mandarin orange zest. Almost from out of nowhere gets softens by milk chocolate tones, even as the acidity seamlessly allows for this and finds a comfortable place for it. The rose petals and licorice flavors continue the happiness festival, any herbal flavors just a lowgrade reverb. Minerally, if not at times, salty, maintains its vivid character to the end. Only Mr. Hand wouldn't enjoy this. 90

Ace Wineco.

Regional Blend, California, Kite Rosé

Blend

2006, \$18.99, 14.5%

Is the color light garnet or dark pink, you decide, something about it evokes a rust orange cast, shiny surface throughout but the hue peters out way before nearing the rims. There's this tugging sensation in the nose towards a more grassy, herbaceous profile yet it keeps bounding back to the strawberry, watermelon, red cherry, persimmon fruit scents, sneaks in a kind of shale, seashell side as well as fried lemon essence. Full-bodied for a rosé, kind of slams into you good-naturedly. Suggests vanilla and caramel but any possible oak exposure has to be light, right? Sweet is as sweet does, dulcet cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit with a dose of caramelized brown sugar to boot. Lemon custard, key lime pie and then floral musk keep it low in the register. Holds your hand for a few more seconds after you think the shaking is done. Has enough acidity to maintain a fresh profile, still odd that a wine of this density would be called "Kite." Cocoa puff notes echo through the finish. No blushing here. Unspecified percentages of Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc. 86

## WASHINGTON RED

Chaz Point (Pendleton Cellars)

Columbia Valley

Cabernet Sauvignon

2004, \$17.99, 13.5%

Sufficient blackness in the purple core to bring on opacity, gives way to a vivid crimson to burnt orange mélange around the rims, quite ember like, just about crackles as you watch it. Depending on your viewpoint, the bell pepper can be a true savior in the face of the sweet caramel, coffee ice cream scents, has ham to thinly sliced beef nuances, behaves like it's trying to pack it all together for one big punch, as a result making it more difficult to parse out the components. Full-bodied, much sweeter in the mouth with the toffee, caramel coated popcorn and butterscotch flavors kicked up more than a few notches. Luckily, the tobacco ash, stone powder and bell pepper

also speak in elevated tones and gain the upper hand by the mid-palate. The velvety plum, black cherry fruit coats the tongue fully without any undue weight. Lightens up some via cedar, clove shades. It's initial impression makes you want to find flaws with it but by the end of night you singing classic rock songs with it. 88

## OREGON RED

Cristom  
Willamette Valley, Mt. Jefferson Cuvée  
Pinot Noir  
2005, \$32.99, 13.5%

Light and shiny violet to more prominent ruby coloration, only a slight drop off to pinker tones around the rims. Forest herbal matter, earth, dried mushrooms and clove make up the bulk of the nose, its smokiness helps to hone the focus of the sour cherry, red raspberry fruit scents, good punctuation as it dissolves. Medium-bodied, spreads itself evenly across the tongue so as to keep it nimble and accelerating forward. The acidity is of a fine level, not overly drying yet provides added revving power. Keen bite in the lemon to white grapefruit citrus too, its high-toned nature at present diminishing the depth of the leather, earth accents. The brisk pacing helps to accentuate both the cherry, red raspberry, blackberry fruit as well as the clove and ginger spice. Not especially long on the finish but does keep tingling long after the liquid is all gone. 89

WillaKenzie Estate  
Willamette Valley  
Pinot Noir  
2005, \$27.99, 13.8%

Very clear, the violet struggles to outpoint the scarlet red, admirably consistent from core through the rims, no loss of full hue. Semi-bracing quality to the nose, like an iceberg cutter ship, grinds through deliberately with mineral dust, dried lemons, powdered grass and weeds, very focused strawberry, raspberry fruit scents, leaves your nostrils feeling refreshed. Medium-bodied, at first there's this odd cocoa powder thing but that gets swept away by the brawn of the acidity as well as the muscular lemon peel, stone, mineral and lighter leather tones. Never becomes as herbaceous as the nose might suggest. While demure, there's a good consistency to the cherry, raspberry, strawberry, watermelon fruit. Hint of clove and other piquant spices towards the finish. Not especially complex but pure and no reason not to like it. [Screwcap] 88

Stringtown  
Regional Blend, Oregon  
Pinot Noir  
2005, \$18.99, 13.5%

Consistent red-violet throughout with a slight shift to brick red at the very outermost rims, trim and scrubbed clean. Bracingly herbaceous nose, gets right up on you with a good old smack, barnyard funk, roasted cherry, black raspberry fruit, sour white grapefruit citrus, borders on pickle juice at moments. Light to medium-bodied, soaks in well adds to its general heft. Still suffers here from that pickled and herbaceous dimensions, as if it was not fully mature and/or overcropped. This becomes a pungent cloud in the mouth, elevating the lemon to white grapefruit citrus, bitter garden herbs and mineral earth. Super-tart red cherry, raspberry fruit could potentially spread wider were it shunted aside by the aforementioned aggressive herbaceousness. The level of acidity seems appropriate to

the rest of the package. It's what it is, just what it is best left uninvestigated. [Screwcap] 83

## OREGON WHITE

A to Z Wineworks  
Regional Blend, Oregon  
Chardonnay  
2005, \$15.99, 13.0%

Very pale white straw in hue, resplendently shiny, the prism-like reflections make up for lack of color. Airy, light nose of orange and lime blossoms, violets, just ripe peach, pear, red apple fruit scents, quiet moments of stoniness, purity decisively over complexity. Light-bodied, equally clean and scrubbed here too, an air freshener spray of lemon, lime, orange mist. Stone bits and mineral shards give up flavor but you have to suck on them to get it. Not a lot of juicy peach, pear, apricot, yellow apple fruit to have to funnel, however, the acidity seems up to the task. The florality finds itself during the mid-palate and creates a nice dense perfume by the finish. Nice for how it remains so clean and light of touch, also never becoming so sweet as to imbalance things. [Screwcap] 87

## FRANCE RED

Desvignes, Louis et Claude  
Beaujolais, Morgon, Javernières  
Gamay Noir  
2005, \$20.99, 13.0%

As crystal clear and blindingly reflective as red wine can get, only the smallest trace of violet in the red-ruby color, the latter as consistent as can be from core to rims. The nose evokes a carefree blend of cherry, raspberry, strawberry juice along with chunks of fruit skin and stems, never herbaceous, never too jammy, the notes stone powder, tobacco ash, dried lemons and violets pulse steadily in harmony with the whole, stays long without you really noticing. In the mouth it's full-bodied, kind of starts off slow, like it's revving its engine in neutral at the starting line before dropping it into gear. The tannins give you a good slug and the lemon, orange citrus a good slap and then it's off to the races with taut strawberry, watermelon, red cherry fruit. Don't get confused, though, it's not fruity, a decided emphasis on stone, mineral, dried leafy matter. Strong enough to prop an elephant on each shoulder and still dance a jig. Infanticide right now. 91

Lapierre, Marcel  
Beaujolais, Morgon  
Gamay Noir  
2005, \$22.99, 13.0%

Possesses sufficient layering in the ruby-violet color to pass over into opacity albeit not truly due to excessive darkness per se, hardly shifts into magenta-tinged ruby along the rims, easily catches light across the surface. Big, overstuffed nose of milk chocolate, cinnamon stick, candied blood oranges and plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit, the floral mist present but nothing which suggests the soil it 'twas borne of, clings viciously to your nostrils. Full-bodied, velvety in texture, only grows and grows with extended air time. The plumpness in the plum, cherry, cranberry fruit not only adds to its sweetness and approachability, it also covers most of its structure and spine in down pillows of juiciness. Orange juice, rose water and cocoa powder complete the perceptible flavors. It's not a chubby but it needs to slim down to be able to display

any terroir. Will it is the question for those who ponder such questions. 90

Vissoux, Domaine du  
Beaujolais, Moulin-à-Vent, Les Deux Roches  
Gamay Noir  
2005, \$22.49, 13.0%

Has the sort of transparency born of pure spotlessness, however, the darkness in the purple by far exceeds the core and pretty much fills the rims too. There's an immobile sort of density in the raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit scents, jammy in the sense of jammed in there, some lemon reduction and floral paste, not particularly grassy nor earthy, plumply unevolved. In the mouth it's full-bodied, derives some stretching of its muscles through the acidity but basically relives the experience in the nose, a slow and steady progression of cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, lemon pulp, musky flower petals, here you get at least a sense of stones and earth. Honestly, it comes off as somewhat homogeneous and thus boring, if strictly because it has barely stood up in the crib. Excellent wine but any clarity of purpose years off. 89

Hérétiques (André Iché), Les  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays de l'Hérault  
Carignan  
2005, \$8.99, 12.5%

Perfectly clear, the ruby-violet spreads evenly throughout with a slight pinkish brightening around the rims. The mix of strawberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit scents are neither truly sweet nor sour, kind of held in stasis by the chalk dust, stony grit and ash scents and textures, nothing herbal of note, parcels of lemon peel and boot leather. Medium-bodied but just, gains some heft in the mouth via the fairly brawny tannins. Stone, brown earth, dried meadow grasses comprise the bulk of what you'll taste, however, no faulting the consistency of the red cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit, here tartness wins the wrestling match. More sustained flavor in the lemon citrus, as much juice as peel. Even levels of leather and flowers. For the terroiriste inside us all. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 88

Grecaux, Domaine des  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Coteaux du Languedoc  
Montpeyroux, Terra Solis  
Blend  
2004, \$17.99, 13.5%

Appreciable crimson red influence in the purple core, still passes the threshold into opacity, the rims fully succumb to the crimson, brick redness, the surface has a mesmerizing stillness to it, easy to just stare at. Presents a highly intriguing nose that really makes you work to get it all out, bread and butter pickles, metallic mineral dust, bluefish skin, matted wet grasses, horsehide, mesquite chips, all this before you can register the elderberry, blackberry, plum fruit scents, it may not sound appealing but it is. Full-bodied, layers itself densely on the tongue, not particularly immobile or lacking in agility but when you hit it, you bounce off it. Here you can tease out more of the latent sweetness in the blackberry, currant, plum, cherry fruit, thick enough to hold steady, as in the nose seems familiar but shifts enough to intrigue, has a "wild berry" sort of profile. Smoky, like a kindling fire after a hiking cookout. Leather and stringy game, tanned animal hide, all this evokes the image of a well-fed caveman. Not especially tannic and the acidity is average at best yet seems

acceptably structured. Could revile some but for the appropriate frame of mind, hits the spot. Mainly Grenache, remainder Syrah, Carignan. 88

Galluches, Domaine des  
Loire, Bourgueil, Tradition  
Cabernet Franc  
2005, \$14.99, 12.8%

Dark purple core of complete opacity, hardly admits of luminescent red-ruby along the rims, pretty color no issue here. The nose shows black pepper, tobacco and volcanic ash more than any herbaceousness, doesn't turn particularly easily given the density of the black currant, cherry scents, how can something end when you're not sure it began? Full-bodied, About as close to a textbook definition of "chewy" as you're going to find, you practically have to consciously gulp it down. The tannins are broad, thick and totally in control. That said, there's almost equal staying power in the currant, plum, black cherry fruit, viscous throughout. Again, not especially herbal, just a trace of bell pepper. Ashen earth, stone dust, dried tobacco and lemon peels provide the majority of the complementary aspects. Already throwing a sily sediment, don't get the last glass. While not complex per se suggests that 4-6 years of aging could bring about a much more complete quaff. 88

Bachelet, Domaine Denis  
Burgundy, Gevrey-Chambertin, Les Corbeaux, Vieilles  
Vignes  
Pinot Noir  
2004, \$71.99, 13.0%

Burnt red influence throughout the purple core, maintains complete saturation through the scarlet-ruby rims, excellent cleanliness as well as clarity, gosh darn easy to stare at. The nose swiftly reveals the wine's rusticity, tar, wet horsehide, black earth and clumps of cut grass steamroll your nostrils, some lemon and anise to soften the blow but not much, charcoal and volcanic ash come on next, gets just about to the dissolve before it remembers in a rush the cherry, raspberry scents. Medium-bodied, austere if not out-and-out pissed off, any initial softness jettisoned in favor of raw tannic punch and acidity that keeps a box cutter handy in its pocket. Highly herbal, full of ash and soot, old undisturbed stone dust, dried out lemons and cow patties stamped down into the fields they were laid down in. Roasted, smoky feel infuses the cherry, red raspberry fruit, the fruit is smooth and fairly long given what it has to go up against. Hot tar seals all this against your tongue so that it can't move right nor left. There's a lot going on here and it's hard to not want to find out what but it'll make you work to find out. 88

Chimères, Mas des  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays des Coteaux du  
Salagou, Oeillade  
Cinsault  
2005, \$12.99, 14.0%

There's a slightly deeper accretion of purple at the core but basically it's the same ruby-violet color throughout, immaculate with an attractive surface sheen. Olive pits, cut springtime grass and white pepper adorn the first few sniffs brought into your nose, the strawberry, watermelon, red cherry fruit scents slowly swallow up a larger percentage of the territory until you're happy enough to not even be looking for complexity. Medium-bodied, its mouth weight consistent so that it appears bigger in retrospective after swallowing. The olive and herbaceous



components a tick lower here yet the white pepper a tick larger, especially as it pairs up nicely with the more noticeable stoniness. The acidity is perfectly agreeable, shapes, funnels and mops up without making too much of a fuss. Most noticeable for how the more you drink it, the less you notice it, sink into easygoing slurping. This while it maintains a distinct personality. Should please a crowd and let them know it's not the same-old, same-old at the same time. 87

Coupe Roses, Château  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Minervois, Cuvée Vignals  
Blend

2004, \$15.99, 13.0%

A dark brick red lends a somber quality to the black-purple core, the hue at the rims pleasingly full, more pure red. Fruity nose with an unusually high percentage of cherry, red currant, blackberry scents vis-à-vis the olive pit, earth and game components, opened up some by floral perfume, seems to slow down when you think it's going to accelerate. Medium-bodied, here too dominated by the round and supple cherry, plum, blackberry fruit, lacks both the tannic and acidic structure to make it downright sauvage, that said, still has structure. The iron rust, olive pit, mineral earth and leather on the quiet side, the florality a consistent, if unobtrusive, role player, mostly present as residue. Some semi-sweet lemony juice. If with the sweetness of the fruit, the finish is truncated and leaves you a little crestfallen. Thus, you take another sip... Syrah, Grenache and small amount of Carignan. 86

Pueyo Frères  
Bordeaux, Tellus Vinea  
Blend

2004, \$12.99, 12.5%

Clean ruby-purple color, spreads widely from the core, the rims a lush ruby, no problem catching your eye. Very herbal and twiggy nose, earth and merde for sure too, if not methane, temperate red cherry, red currant scents at best. Medium-bodied, quite dry and tannic, starts chewing on you way before you get the chance to chew on it. Has a dustbowl kind of tumbleweed, parched earth appeal, cracked leather and old rope. As in the nose, no real fruit to note, a paucity of currant, cherry, as much seeds and skins as pulp. Once past the mid-palate, drops off like an anvil in a Roadrunner cartoon, nothing left but a faint and distance puff of dust. Not flawed, but there's very little there to savor. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. 83

## FRANCE WHITE

Bouzereau-Gruère, Hubert  
Burgundy, Meursault-Charmes  
Chardonnay

2004, \$63.99, 13.5%

Golden-brown hay in color, some diminution in intensity towards the rims yet its layered translucency allows it to fill the glass nicely. Clean nose with clear lines, bright lime and tangerine citrus, even the honey aspect angular in feel, very fresh apricot, peach, pear scents, ends with a steady dissolve, neither rushed nor languorous. Medium-bodied, here in the mouth the oak toast much more of a player, quite floral as well, the pear, apple, apricot fruit keeps a low profile, not much grip. There's a dusty character to the acidity, brings a pith, peel nature to the lemon, lime, orange citrus, less juiciness. Caught being minty and being herbal as in herbs, the more it sits in your palate the more you glean chalk dusted stone. Grows on

you, you need to really spend time with it to get full effect. 89

Bourgeois, Domaine Henri  
Loire, Vin de Pays du Jardin de la France, Petit Bourgeois  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2005, \$10.99, 12.0%

Extremely clean and fresh appearance in the glass, glistening white gold color with a good deal of green flecks, consistent throughout. The grass and asparagus in the nose gets slowly masked by prettier mint and mixed orange, grapefruit, lime citrus zest, suitable degree of chalky stone and minerals, crisp pear, apple, peach scents more lively than juicy but, really, it's best this way. Medium-bodied, starts off fairly round but tightens up well to keep a brisk pace from mid-palate on. More smoky stone and minerals here, elevated floral touches too, less citrus although what's there has cut. More noticeable ripeness through the peach, cantaloupe, red apple, pear fruit, adds weight and smoothness. Nothing to complain about in the acidity department, won't sear your tongue off but as dry as you'd want it to be. A real plugger, you can sense that it maxed out on effort to make the team. 89

Morey et Fils, Domaine Bernard  
Burgundy, Chassagne-Montrachet, Vide Bourse  
Chardonnay

2005, \$69.99, 13.5%

Straightforward golden straw color, nothing to hide, nothing hidden, fades softly towards the fully transparent rims. Spicy and toasty oak infuse the nose, along with the lime zest and shards of metal keep the presentation angular and edgy, you get moments of baked ham, smoothed out by apricot, peach, pear fruit, not overblown but there's no doubt it wants your attention. Full-bodied, the welcome acidity breaks a sweat to keep a clean house and make certain that the mint oil, tangerine to lemon citrus, caramel and vanilla ice cream swirl and licorice behave. Just dry enough to enforce a brisk pacing in the peach, apricot, apple, nectarine fruit, the ginger, clove spicing helps here too. Has minerality and stoniness too although it's not a big part as the moment. It sort of cuts itself into chapters, you have to keep flipping back to the table of contents to see where you want to go next. 88

Mikulski, François  
Burgundy, Meursault  
Chardonnay

2004, \$62.99, 13.0%

Fairly bright golden hue, equally yellow or then green, the surface catches some glints of light but there's pretty much dull translucency below. The oak toast is crisp enough to grant the nose a decided linearity, more cream though then lime zest or mint although both present, the apricot, peach, nectarine, green apple fruit feels like it's been through charm school rather than freely expressing itself, to its credit stays long and on point. Medium-bodied, little divergence from the presentation in the nose, perhaps more active lime, tangerine citrus with an even finer point on the peach, pineapple, nectarine, apricot fruit. The toast has zip, bite, verve while also a forgiving side, wish it wasn't so damn dominant though. This makes the acidity kind of difficult to separate out and decide just what kind of role it plays. Scrubs your mouth nicely, no doubting it has personality but, by the same token, could improve its listening skills. 88

Lignier, Domaine Hubert  
Burgundy, Fixin, Cepage Chardonnay  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$51.99, 13.5%

A soft green touch loses to amber in effecting the gold base, displays pleasing concentration in the core while emptying out appreciably at the rims, broad transparency there. The weight it accretes in your nostrils belies its easygoing touch, soft contours to the oak cream, lime sorbet, the pear, melon, yellow apple fruit stretch out nicely, not complex yet fills 'er up satisfactorily. Full-bodied, richly plush attack with the kind of fleshiness, nuttiness, lemon oil and sweet heavy cream that recalls many a Meursault. Fine balance between stone, earth and peach, apricot, pear fruit, neither steps on the other's toes. That said, the toastiness grows through the mid-palate, a product of the fact that the flavors and weight drop off appreciably thereafter, Not the acidity's fault, giving credit where due, this element more than pulls its own weight. In the end it's a really nice wine that makes you pleased as punch you are drinking it, however, nowhere near worth the price it fetches. 88

Michel & Fils, Domaine Louis  
Burgundy, Chablis, Montée de Tonnerre  
Chardonnay  
2005, \$42.99, 12.5%

Quite clear, has a sort of almost imperceptible orange cast through the yellow gold color, ditches all color way before the rims even approached. The nose takes awhile to find its bearings before unloading the smokiness and minerality, pointed lemon peel zip, vague dried wildflower bits help to elevate the presence of the apricot, pear, melon fruit which suffer from the time it all takes to unwind. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with good grip and a slow, steady pace forward. Pairs the minerality and limestone like nuances with a drop of pickle juice and sour lemons. Soon thereafter it throws a bushel of flowers at you in an attempt to lend it a prettier profile. The peach, pear, yellow apple, melon fruit adequate to the task yet, if it's not going to be a full-on "terroir" Chablis it ought to at least hit you up with more fruit. You get some licorice like notes reverberating through the finish. Can't fault the richness and fullness of weight at the end. Just want more of a refreshing quality. 87

Merlin  
Burgundy, Viré-Clessé, Terroir de Clessé  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$22.99, 13.5%

Lightish golden straw color, more pretty than deep, very good surface shine, does an appreciable hue fade along the rims. Crisply crunchy toast in the nose, almost ground into a fine powder, starts to show strong lime and lemon juice notes but this gets run down from behind by stone and mineral dust, becoming smoky and oily before the mild peach, pear, apple scents can express themselves. Medium-bodied, spreads itself broadly and evenly so as to come across as both balanced and well-stuffed. The lemon, lime tang tries here too to be assertive, the smoky stoniness takes first place once more. The oak comes in tight halogen light beams, nothing unrefined about it, yet certainly noticeable, More sustained presence in the peach, apricot, pear fruit, nowhere near juicy per se but more than ripe enough. Does grow on you over time, pleasingly tingly finish. 87

Graville-Lacoste, Château  
Bordeaux, Graves  
Blend  
2005, \$14.99, 12.5%

While completely trim and unblemished, there is a translucent shimmer to it which deepens the otherwise light golden straw hues, the usual loss around the rims. The nose betrays a consistent herbaceous presence, more crisp snap in the green apple, pear, peach scents than juiciness, easily fits in white smoke and mineral dust, on the whole innocuous and inoffensive. Medium to full-bodied, balloons nicely in the mouth with a round, if firm, texture. Lesser mineral sparkle here, in part due to the richer, if not quite "rich," peach, apricot, red apple fruit flavors. Notable absence of citrus flavors, could be that this lack of "zing" also helps subdue the herbal qualities. Stocky acidity, without cut manages to stay very dry and intent on forward motion. That said, develops a certain creaminess on the finish which helps it linger a bit more. Nice but nothing more. Unspecified percentages of Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon, Muscadelle. 86

## FRANCE ROSE

Cotat, François  
Loire, Sancerre, Chavignol Rosé  
Pinot Noir  
2005, \$34.99, 13.0%

Strong orange influence gives the pink a metallic and salmon like coloring, while clear its depths noticeably bend light, this helping to increase the hue in the rims. Very curious initial whiff of butterscotch in the nose before mineral and stone dust, dried lemons, grass ash take over, the degree of concentration in the strawberry, watermelon, red cherry fruit scents slows dance the pacing considerably, bottom heavy for sure. In the mouth it's full-bodied and just as thick-necked, has the acidity but not powerful enough to really play the drill sergeant role, things just do what they want. Succulent raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit yet again with that milk chocolate to caramel element. Not as powdery stone and mineral here, more solid and less expressive. Virtually no herbaceous qualities. Yet, does present a continuous lemony vibe. Too big to be refreshing but certainly impressive. 90

Roquefort, Château de  
Provence, Côtes de Provence, Corail Rosé  
Blend  
2006, \$13.99, 12.5%

Extremely light watermelon pink in color, any lighter and it would be damn transparent, good thing it's damn reflective, dammit. Green apple, strawberry, watermelon, green melon, apricot fruit scents actually give it more breadth than many peers, snaps back with sufficient mineral and lemon peel to keep you on your toes, makes up in thrust for what it lacks in complexity. Medium-bodied, fills up the palm of your hand nicely before you skip it across the lake. Densely sweet cherry, raspberry, apricot fruit, digs in without sacrificing pacing. There's a meringue pie feel to the lemon/lime citrus component. Seashell, calciferous stone shades fit into the chorus well. Also presents a sense of sniffing an herb garden in late summer, you can pick it but there's not that full sense of pregnancy in the air. Why not refill the glass? Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault, Carignan, Vermentino, Clairette. 88

Escarelle, Château de l'  
Provence, Coteaux Varois en Provence, Les Belles  
Bastilles Rosé  
Blend

2006, \$11.99, 13.0%

The lightest pink possible, white like it saw a ghost, does have some of that pleasing transparent shine though and not at all dull in the glass. More stone and minerals in the nose than watermelon, strawberry, red cherry fruit, keeps it firm and dry, blends in some lemon peel, rosemary and thyme, noticeably focused and not looking to be a "fun" experience per se. Light to medium-bodied, same trip here, the acidity is taut and keeps a watchful eye over the whole proceedings, stone dust, mineral water, lemon peel and mountain scrub trump the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, intentionally so but not mean-spiritedly. Skirts the outer limits without becoming austere, just has the intellectual seriousness of a red wine and, as a result, gains a compactness which makes it difficult to soak in and enjoy mindlessly. Unspecified percentages of Syrah, Mourvèdre. [Synthetic cork] 86

## ITALY RED

Adelaide, Cascina  
Piedmont, Barbera d'Alba, Le Mie Donne  
Barbera

2004, \$19.99, 13.5%

Trim red-purple core, segues easily to fairly broad red-ruby rims, no appreciable loss of hue intensity around the rims. The nose starts out as if it's going to get deeply herbal and earthy then hooks a turn into splashy red cherry, plum fruit before returning to a sort of horse stable funk, slides you minor slices of dried lemons and dried flowers as well. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, starts off with a wide swath of pine, just picked and dried garden herbs and a medicinal sort of bite. The wiry acidity nips at your heels and makes sure you're always paying attention. There's a sneaky sort of sappy sweetness to the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit, while bright for sure this quality helps extend its presence. Lemon mist and more of that piney, floral breeze give it a more masculine "cologne" character than "perfume" per se. Settles into a pleasing earthiness during the finish. 90

Fausti  
Marche, Rosso Piceno, Fausto  
Blend

2005, \$12.99, 14.0%

Crystal clear, if with a certain blackness to the purple core, not close to opacity just brooding, the rims pulse with the color of fresh blood. While the nose possesses considerable leather and earth elements, there's plenty of push in the red cherry, raspberry fruit too, as it sits in your nostrils gets a little more grassy with pine cone notes, rustic in a civilized manner. Medium-bodied, plenty of tart zing in the cherry, blackberry fruit, firecrackers going off during the mouth entry. Mix in stone powder, minerals, tobacco ash, leather and shoe polish and there's a lot more to keep you interested. Restraint, not weakness, in the tannic and acidic structure. Presents that same herbaceous edge here too, maintains erect posture to the end. Does come across as bristling with too much youthful energy, should prove even more integrated in even six to twelve months. 60% Montepulciano, 40% Sangiovese. [Synthetic cork] 89

Noussan, Franco  
Valle d'Aosta, Vallee d'Aoste  
Mayolet

2005, \$24.99, 12.5%

The purple core comes with a strong reddish tinge, this in turn darkens the naturally lighter ruby rims, fully colored throughout and with a fetching clarity. There's some reductive qualities to the nose which takes some time to resolve and let purer expression be found in the tar, leather, horsehide scents, as if, the tartness in the cherry, raspberry scents too aids clarity, funky as silver platform boots. Medium-bodied, that said, the tannins seem to have this gummy quality which makes them and anything they touch stick like glue to your mouth pores. Real sourly tangy cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, all but makes you wince from its bite. Herbal and quite earthy, with that aforementioned leather, tar, merde ratcheted up a notch or two. There's a violet component which helps it achieve a thick retronasal perfume in the mouth as well as make it taste like an olive lovers' convention through the finish. While adequately smooth in overall texture, puts the rust in rustic. Even as the flavors trail off at the end, energetic tactile embers crackle and pop. 88

Caldora, Vini  
Umbria, Terre di Chieti  
Sangiovese

2005, \$8.99, 13.0%

Lively purple core with enough red in it to heighten its clarity, full red-ruby rims, completely saturated throughout. The nose has the floral mist of an air freshener, heavy but widely spaced, super-fresh and juicy raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit with notes of sweet lemon and maybe a wee bit of fallen forest floor matter. Medium-bodied, as youthfully juicy and fruity in the mouth as the nose, a gusher of strawberry, red cherry, raspberry fruit as well as that ripe lemon to orange citrus. Not quite as outrageously floral here, makes some room for leather and earth notes although not "rustic" by any stretch. Has the durable acidity to keep it clean and avoid being too sugary. That said, it's kind of a lowkey fruit bomb that aims for providing pure pleasure as a standalone beverage. Succeeds very well at this too. [Synthetic cork] 88

Santa Maria La Palma, Cantina di  
Sardegna, Le Bombarde  
Cannonau

2005, \$10.99, 13.0%

Vividly shiny cough syrup red, this conversely tinted by violet, perfectly immaculate, consistent through the rims where it's a touch redder. Sweet bubblegum, cotton candy nose, explosively sweet with air freshener density to the floral musk, not grassy yet does display a leathery, smoky side, scorched even, mild tangerine sweetener gets involved. In the mouth it's light to medium-bodied, mainlines the powdered sugar into your system before unveiling earth and roasted meats, this in turn superseded by spearmint and floral reduction. The cherry, strawberry fruit comes with a dollop of apricot as well. Touch more acidity than expected, but you need to be almost to the end of the glass to truly notice. Offers maybe a hint of cocoa powder but this more than elided by lemon citrus. Smooth and simple, analysis not really necessary here. 85

## ITALY WHITE

Palagetto, Azienda Agricola  
Tuscany, Vernaccia di San Gimignano  
Vernaccia  
2005, \$10.99, 12.5%

Very pale white straw in color, transparent beyond a doubt yet flits with purely bleached, sits in the glass like a solid block, shiny yet not really moving. At first the nose has a stony angularity to it before rounder licorice, flower dew, lemon juice nuances appear, never sacrifices its cleansing freshness, the pear, apple, green melon fruit possesses a subtle consistency, in no way barking for your attention. Medium-bodied, has the ability to sit on the palate and accrete weight while also sprinting forward when necessary. The floral side front-loaded and gives way to lemon to lime zest, licorice, anise and caramelized brown sugar undertones. Almost when you think it's on the run, the acidity jumps into action and restrains any honey or sugar notes which might interfere with a clean denouement, even helps to usher in a welcome patina of bitterness. Not a lot of lift nor inner mouth perfume per se yet puts in a full day's work in the flavor persistence department. Grows on you. 88

Cantinamatta (Bibi Graetz)  
Tuscany, Casamatta Bianco  
Blend  
2005, \$9.99, 12.5%

The light yellow hay coloration's surface shine sucked down into the murkier bottom, the weakness of the hue shows through the watery rims. The nose is of lilacs and violets floating in water, all you need are the candles and mood music, if it wasn't light unto gossamer in presence the dried fruit character in the peach, apricot scents would show through more prominently, youthfully full of fresh smiles and not much of import to say. Medium-bodied plus, here it takes the hints at grip found in the nose and translates them into real stickiness on the tongue. That said, maintains that abundant florality and light lemon zest to create a swirl through the mouth, no lead foot. A certain licorice to cinnamon sweetness permeates the apricot, peach, pineapple, guava fruit, awfully close to turning tropical. Dusty sort of acidity, prickly yet, in the end, deadens as much as it activates. Just strikes you as fun, after a few sips you realize there's more reward in chugging than analyzing. 50% Chardonnay, 40% Sauvignon Blanc, 10% Trebbiano. 88

Cadalora, Azienda Agricola La  
Trentino, Vallagarina  
Pinot Grigio  
2005, \$16.99, 13.0%

There's a certain dullness to the bleached white straw color that is about all there is to add hue throughout, otherwise would be fully transparent, as are the rims. Lemon zest, mineral dust and violets muscular enough in the nose that you wouldn't call it "pretty" per se, the smoky dimension actually gets you nose scrunched up at times, the red to green apple, pear, melon, peach scents are of sinewy texture, neither long nor short, just last well. Full-bodied, the acidity is good but at the same time swallowed up in a generally creamy texture, that flattens the texture and prevents much inner mouth perfume. Abrupt forward thrust pushes the peach, pear, apricot fruit into the mid-palate where there's sugary, honeyed concentration that brings it grinding to a halt. Lemon and lime, and maybe even pink grapefruit, citrus effected by this sweetness,

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tang short-lived. Due to all this, the minerality and stream water notes must wait until the finish to get a few words in. Easy to like the texture and it's not watery while conversely doesn't try too hard. 87

Borgo di Colloredo, Cantine  
Molise, Biferno Bianco, Gironia  
Blend  
2004, \$16.99, 13.0%

Richer golden hue at the core, while it doesn't lose its shine nor reflectivity the color does really drop off towards the rims. Big floral component to the nose, gains depth from sweet honey, lemon tea scents, only a momentary swipe of stone, the peach, apricot, melon, pear fruit stays long but not as rich as its initial impression, compact dissolve. Medium-bodied, rose and lilac water creates flow rather than density in the minerality. More airy zest in the tangerine to lemon citrus, however, the acidity deadens the tongue below, creating a somewhat homogeneous plane. Average pear, peach, apricot, apple fruit, nothing of special note. As in the nose, tends to clench up some. Seems like the players in the orchestra need a conductor. Unspecified percentages of Trebbiano, Bombino, Malvasia. 86

## GERMANY WHITE

Hexamer, Weingut Helmut  
Nahe, Meddersheimer, Rheingrafenberg, Quarzit QbA AP  
#5  
Riesling  
2005, \$17.99, 9.5%

Presents a shiny yellow straw colored surface, becomes translucently layered below, remains consistent from the core through the rims. The nose is soft and spongy, fills whatever space you give it, lemon and lime custard, honey and nuts, flowers, the sweetness of the poached peach, apricot, pear fruit scents disturbed by notes of spoilt milk. Full-bodied, surprisingly sweet and sugary, heightens both the tangerine to lime citrus as well as the apricot, peach, pear, green melon fruit. Because the sweetness doesn't make you wince, ipso facto it must have acidity. Moderate rubber notes help it establish credibility, aided in some part by mineral water and limestone accents. Honey and caramelized brown sugar fill the finish. A bit too over the top for this palate but no doubt a fun wine. (Screwcap) 88

## AUSTRIA WHITE

Hofer, H. und M. Weingut  
Weinviertel  
Grüner Veltliner  
2006, \$8.99, 13.0%

While the surface possesses an admirable degree of reflectivity, below the brown-yellow straw hue turns translucent and layered, slowing down the dance, holds its coloration well through the rims. Deep violets, mint, tangerine to lime citrus in the nose, beyond that very light and airy, the pear, apple, peach scents barely register and there's almost no herbal, pepper nor stone accents of note. Medium-bodied, here there's more weight and presence while it's still incredibly loosely knit and dissolves like powdered sugar on the tongue. Oodles of violets and lilacs, the orange, lime, grapefruit citrus all mist and zest. Not especially acidic but has to be dry, as swiftly as it blows away. The peach, apricot, pear, guava fruit is pretty if not bashful and skips nimbly. Some herbal bite to found here, agreeable for helping to put a stamp on things. Very

easy to slurp down, however, a bit more personality might be needed by some to merit further attention. One liter bottle. [Bottlecap] 87

## SPAIN RED

San Valero, Societa Cooperativa  
Cariñena, Castillo de Monséran  
Garnacha  
2005, \$7.99, 12.5%

Unblemished and squeaky clean light violet to red ruby in color, does lighten to shades of pink magenta at the outer rims. There's an adolescent sort of youthful naïveté to the nose, a fresh gushing of strawberry, cherry, watermelon fruit scents next to cocoa powder, lemon drop and an allusion of mint, lacks the maturity to possess guile. Medium-bodied, soaks in very well without consciously trying, no real extract and the acidity and, to a lesser extent, the tannins surprise with their willingness to stick around and soak things up. This said, lots of radiance left in the lemon citrus and strawberry, watermelon, raspberry fruit. Even develops a bit of dusty stone and chalk, kudos there. There's some residue of the cocoa/mocha thing but you have to already be on alert from the nose to really register it. Has a wet wool, leather undertone but the reason you keep sipping is to get the simple satisfaction of the fruit. Cooperatives rock. 88

## PORTUGAL RED

Vidigal, Caves  
Estremadura, Reserva  
Blend  
2004, \$8.99, 13.0%

Basic, if attractive, red-purple core, does a slow dive into dark red-ruby along the rims, without a blemish in sight, perfectly clear for its degree of darkness. Smoky ash and fallen twigs/leaves infuse the nose, jammy textural feel in the plum, cherry scents in the nose without the sweetness, fresh orange peel and cut flowers add a winsome charm, only hints at deeply resonating earthiness, stays light enough on its feet. Full-bodied, here the fruit takes on a much stronger dried fruit character of plum, raisin and fig alongside the fresher plum, cherry flavors. Brightness derived from the orange, lemon citrus as well as a light swirling effect in the mouth from the florality and sweet spices. As it passes the mid-palate it does slow down to a crawl, not shortening the finish per se but you kind of start to wonder when it's gonna show up already. Packs a good amount in there, density-wise. 70% Tinta Roriz, 20% Castelão, 10% Cabernet. 86

## AUSTRALIA RED

Teusner  
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Ebenezer Road The Riebke  
Shiraz  
2005, \$26.99, 14.5%

Displays enough blackness in the otherwise purple core to be totally opaque, the red-magenta to ruby rims have a saturated depth to them while also remaining much clearer and easy to see through. Toasty smokiness and mint ice cream cancel each other out in the nose, both outdistanced by the super-ripe raspberry, strawberry, blueberry fruit scents, manages a salty type of mineral nuance and a hint of incipient gaminess, nice swirling effect to it. Full-bodied, syrupy sweet blueberry,

boysenberry, blackberry fruit, a runaway fugitive from I-Hop, manages to dry up and avoid being too dulcet in nature as the tannins and acidity assert themselves. Orange spice, sweet tea leaves, clove, cedar and lesser rawhide flavors all play their roles well, adding to the solid fruit foundation. Weight keeps leaning against you through the finish, you feel its echoes after the juice has swirled down the shoot. While familiar, has personality too. [Screwcap] 88

Pure Love Wines  
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Desert Eagle  
Shiraz  
2005, \$17.99, 14.5%

Perfectly reflective surface, masks some of the pure blackness of the core, almost begrudgingly lets the rims fade to dense red-ruby. There's agreeably forward cassis, plum, blackberry scents alongside molasses, brown sugar, caramel in the nose, hits you with everything you expect it should but not in any misshapen sense, the alcoholic fumes do distract a little, and there's a bandaid nuance to it, mostly balanced by the orange peel, menthol accents. Full-bodied, carries its weight with dignity and aplomb, little mistaking it for but what it is, the succulently sugary blackberry, plum, black currant fruit and eucalyptus as well as the vanillin oak and molasses make sure of that. The orange spice, sweet cedar and cinnamon keep it all focused on meeting your every need. The tannins are a touch askew but, on the whole, it's dry when it needs to be. Has the local patois down stone cold. [Screwcap] 88

Pikes  
South Australia, Clare Valley, Eastside  
Shiraz  
2003, \$21.99, 14.5%

Moderate depth in the purple core, scarlet tinge helps to lighten it some, even parts scarlet and ruby around the rims, unblemished and clear. The nose begins with light cough syrup and caramel scents before building into more linear orange blossom, mint, brown earth, the richness of the currant, cherry, plum fruit keeps it well-anchored in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, yet with above average traction and stickiness, glues itself to your mouth pores. This sappiness naturally plays up the blackberry, black cherry, black currant fruit, however, by no stretch a fruit bomb and has an admirably strong acidic spine. The latter helps to also highlight the white grapefruit, orange citrus as well as a touch of herbal bite. Wet grill smoke, leather and animal hide lend dimension and a keener sense of grape typicity. While it tightens through the finish, doesn't necessarily lose length for it. [Screwcap] 88

Hamilton Wines, Hugh  
South Australia, McLaren Vale, Jekyll & Hyde  
Shiraz/Viognier  
Shiraz  
2005, \$23.99, 15.0%

Purely black core, sleek surface sheen, thin if vibrant ruby-crimson rims, technically black isn't a color so hard to say much about how it expresses the wine's hue. The nose is pure, unadorned caramel popcorn, vanilla powder and mint leaf, then plum pudding and cherry, blackberry jam with some cinnamon sprinkled on top, naught else. Full-bodied, stiff and unyielding from being crammed in too densely, lacks unforced expressivity even if you can't say there's not a great deal of richness in the cassis, plum, black cherry fruit. This element manages to suppress the oak toast and caramel to a point, albeit along with just

about any other element too. The tannins equally massive, impossible to gauge if they are derived from grape skins, pits and stems or from... elsewhere. A smidgeon of florality peeks through at the end, as much to cry for a mercy killing as to say something. No sense of movement. Very good wine if you like being mugged with a roll of quarters in a sock. 93% Shiraz, 7% Viognier. 87

Cudgee Creek  
South Australia, South East Australia  
Shiraz  
2005, \$6.99, 13.5%

Excellent clarity, while the core is mostly dark ruby-purple it can still easily be seen through, the rims shine with full red-ruby. The nose is kept fresh via sour raspberry, cherry fruit scents, a fistful of cut grass and lemon zest, not especially deep, instead goes for liveliness, offers some tobacco ash, stone and sea sand notes for a final calling card. Medium-bodied, possesses good grip and sap through the attack, becomes fluffier through the mid-palate as if to whip up and agitate the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit into taking up more volume of space than it could otherwise. Presents a light caramel/vanilla swirl but doesn't try to mask any flaws with oak makeup. Able to come up with enough florality and citrus to act as a foil to the sweetness of the fruit. No change at the finish but not short. Right where it should be. 85

## AUSTRALIA WHITE

Farr, Gary  
Victoria, Geelong  
Viognier  
2004, \$53.99, 12.5%

While pale, there's a luminescent glow to the yellow color, giving it a day-glo feel. pretty consistent through the rims. There's burnt kindling aspect to the nose alongside wet minerals and lime juice which gives it all a linear feel, this also takes out some of the airy floral dimension, quiet apricot, peach, pear fruit scents, very much knit into the whole presentation. Medium-bodied, that certain toastiness again the first things you notice before it recedes in favor of smooth lime, lime citrus and equally polished apricot, melon, peach fruit. Never quite gets actively floral, as if partially weighted down by the minerality. Which is not a bad thing, just somewhat unexpected. Probably shows more acidity than you'd think as well, not a blowzy sort of wine. It does trail off noticeably at the end, not intensely flavored finish, the weight left to remain on its own. More interesting than viscerally enjoyable. 87

## AUSTRALIA ROSE

R Winery  
South Australia, Bon-Bon  
Shiraz  
2006, \$11.99, 12.3%

Very light watermelon pink color, while very transparent also has the shine to sparkle in the glass, given the mild hue there's not much to lose along the rims. The nose starts off sour for a second or two before yielding to a core of powdered sugar, cotton candy and strawberry, red cherry, watermelon fruit, anything beyond this comes off as uncomfortable in itself, reticent grass, earth or stone aspects. Medium-bodied, keeps up a steady profile of both weight and raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit throughout, a light too much zip to truly pass itself off as a

straight-up red wine but comes close. Lemon hard candy and floral dew keep it on the sweet side of the sweet/sour divide as well as minimize any herbaceousness bubbling up. Average to average plus acidity and more tannin than expected. Nice palate traction, the kind of wine that you'd serve to a relative who only drinks White Zinfandel so you can have a glass or two too. (Screwcap) 85

## NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Cairnbrae  
Marlborough, The Stones  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2006, \$12.99, 13.0%

While brilliantly reflective, nearly completely transparent with only the lightest of yellow to brown straw hues. Very assertive nose of cut wet grass, metallic mineral dust, white grapefruit to lemon zest and chili pepper, the pear, pineapple, peach, red apple fruit diced into tiny bits. In the mouth it's equally full of aggression, here exacerbated by super-keen acidity. When it's not gouging chunks out of you cheeks, there's a sweet side to the white to pink grapefruit and tangerine citrus. The richer layering in the papaya, nectarine, pineapple, apricot, gooseberry fruit mostly stabilizes things by the mid-palate. The stone and mineral elements triumph over the herbaceousness, albeit does display notes of asparagus and bell pepper. Difficult to ascertain if it finds its pacing by the finish or your palate just succumbs to its energy. Either way, gets better than more you drink it. (Screwcap) 87

## ARGENTINA RED

Mendel, Bodega  
Mendoza, Unus  
Blend  
2004, \$42.99, 14.0%

The sheer luminescence of the purple core makes it spring to life in the glass, the vivid saturation extends to the thin red-scarlet rims, almost black light quality intensity. The oak all but completely destabilizes the nose and makes it lurch into coconut pie, ginger and cinnamon spice, plummy to the exclusion of the cherry, black currant scents, does have a pleasing leather to salted beef jerky side, not lacking in stuffing nor length just hard to get past the makeup. Full-bodied, nothing said about the nose doesn't apply to the palate, gobs of plum, currant, cherry, blackberry fruit with enough brown sugar, honey and caramel dripped over it to put a diabetic into shock. If you plumb into it beyond the manipulation there is some nice old vine fruit expression there. Probably have to give more credit to any acidity than tannins for soaking up the extra juice. Moderate leather, tea leaf, tobacco leaf flavors, if you want to wish them into being. The kind of wine that is best not analyzed just popped open at 2:00 AM when you want something good that won't require thought. 70% Malbec, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon. 86

Vistalba, Domaine  
Mendoza, Bodega Tomero  
Malbec  
2004, \$14.99, 14.3%

Standard black purple core that gets into opacity, sheds darkness to fashion fairly wide red-ruby rims of good vividness. Somewhat candied feel to the cherry, plum, blackberry scents, not overly sweet nor unbalanced but at the same time focuses on the fruit to the detriment of orange citrus, flowers or earthiness, monochrome

presentation. Medium to full-bodied, same deal here in the mouth, hews closely to the headline of "Fruit!" mostly comprised of plum to prune, cherry, blackberry flavors with a smattering of oak-derived clove, cinnamon, hard caramel candy accents. Nothing sticks out about the acidity nor tannins, have to guess they are there somewhere. No flavors which might suggest anything about its place of origin nor grape type. More or less round, juicy red wine. Which is, after all, what sells.  
(Synthetic cork) 84