

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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THE TIMELESS BEAUTY OF VEGA SICILIA ÚNICO



Though I have been drinking Vega Sicilia's flagship bottling of Único for more than thirty years, I had never had the chance to participate in a vertical tasting of this legendary Spanish wine until November of last year, when Keith Williams kindly invited me down to Houston to join him and several of his good friends for a dazzling array of vintages of Único. The tasting was held at the wine storage facility of Vin de Garde Wine Cellars in Houston, Texas, which is the most impressive wine storage center I have ever seen, with beautiful vaulted storage lockers, custom racking, a big, beautiful dining room, a full, professional kitchen and plenty of other comfortable settings to settle down in a nook with friends and share a bottle of wine out of the cellar. It really puts to shame most of the similar facilities that I have seen here in New York, which are far more utilitarian in design. We had the pleasure to be joined on this epic evening by Vega Sicilia's Technical Director, Gonzalo Iturriaga de Juan, who flew in from the winery in Ribera del Duero specifically to participate in this historic tasting. On display were eighteen vintages of Único spanning fully eighty years of winemaking brilliance at this legendary property, with the new release of the 2009 starting off the fireworks' display, which did not end until the last sip of the timeless and utterly brilliant 1939 had been finished. Over the course of this magical range of Únicos, each flight was paired with a perfectly-matched course

by Houston Chef, Luis Roger of restaurant BCN, who brought his seasoned team with him (as well as his mentor from his early days cooking back in Barcelona) to provide Catalàn culinary magic at least the match for the superb wines on display.

Still basking in the afterglow from Keith Williams' amazing tasting in Houston at the end of last year, another subscriber, John Chapman, asked me to participate in yet another vertical tasting of Único back here on the east coast, and in early February; we convened at the superb Spanish restaurant, Alta in New York to tackle another fourteen vintages of this iconic wine. The kitchen at Alta was more than geared up to match the magnificence in the glass in February and we had another fine meal to accompany this range of vintages of mature Único. John Chapman had very kindly asked me after the Houston tasting which vintages we had tasted at that event and worked to tailor our February lineup to include many vintages that had not been represented in the Houston tasting (while still retaining legendary wines such as 1981, 1970 and 1968 in our February dinner lineup!), so that I could have an even more complete roster of vintages of Único to add to the depth of this article. After the tasting in Houston, Gonzalo Iturriaga had shared his impression that "this was probably the single greatest wine tasting I have ever attended" and I shared this sentiment, only to have my good fortune doubled by being able to delve into another fourteen mature vintages of Único only seven weeks later back in New York! The two tastings were amongst the vinous highlights of my entire life and I am very grateful to both Keith and John for including me in two such magical evenings.

Vega Sicilia can really trace its roots back as a professional winery in Ribera del Duero to 1848, when Toribio Lecanda first purchased the estate from the Marquis de Valbuena, and it was in the ensuing decades that the property really began to lay the foundation for fine wine production. When Toribio Lecanda bought Vega Sicilia, the vast property had a mixed agricultural base, with vineyards being only one of its farming pursuits, and Señor Lecanda had a vision of Vega as a wholly self-sufficient estate that would produce everything on the ranch needed to live well: cattle, wheat, corn and other vegetables, not to mention grapes for wine. The estate's name was already well-established by the time Toribio Lecanda purchased it, but Vega Sicilia was not yet famous for wine production. It was Toribio's son, Eloy Lecanda y Chaves, who was really Vega's founding winemaker and who ultimately set the course of history for the estate when he inherited the property from his father in 1859. Eloy Lecanda first started planting more vines at the property in 1864 and this is often the year that is cited as the founding year of Vega Sicilia as a fine wine-producing estate. He had studied winemaking in Bordeaux in the first few years of the decade of the 1860s and brought back with him cuttings of the grapes most popular there at the time to plant at Vega Sicilia, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Malbec, which he planted alongside of the indigenous grapes already in the vineyards on the property at this time: the red wine grape of Tempranillo and the white wine grape of Albillo. All of these grapes would come to play a role in the red wines of Vega Sicilia in the years to come (back in this era, the white wine grape of Albillo was co-planted in the vineyards and used in small quantities in the red wine blend to add a bit more alcohol to the finished wine). Much to the surprise of Don Lecanda, the grape that was the most impressive in Vega's vineyards turned out to be the Tempranillo, then known by its local name of *Tinto del Pais*, which qualitatively edged out the other varietals brought back from Bordeaux, so that the dominant grape in the Vega's red wine blend has been Tempranillo since its very earliest days. By 1882 Eloy Lecanda had finished construction of a proper winery and cellars for the property and word was slowly

starting to quietly spread in Spain about this great wine being made in the relative backwaters of Ribera del Duero.

In 1903, Vega Sicilia was sold to Antonio Herrero, who continued to build upon the foundation created here by Eloy Lecanda. His winemaker at Vega in this era was one of the most important figures in Spanish wine at the turn of the twentieth century, Domingo Garramiolla Txomin, who is widely credited with first crafting the wine in the style which we know today as Único. The red wines were soon rumored to be amongst the very finest in Spain (perhaps the very finest), but as Ribera del Duero was not the well-known wine-producing region that it is today, the wine was almost shrouded in mystery throughout Spain. Vega's current Technical Director, Gonzalo Iturriaga, cites 1908 as the first vintage of Único that the estate can confirm was officially commercialized in a small way, but the wine was essentially still only sold in barrel to select private clients of the estate. A few well-connected people had drunk the wine and could vouch for its stunning quality, but it was nearly unavailable in the Spanish wine market, and certainly not a well-known at this time as were the wines from the top *bodegas* in Rioja. The estate began to sell their wines in bottle in a small way only at the close of World War I. Vega Sicilia's coming out party was the World's Fair held in Barcelona in 1929. In the wine competitions at the World's Fair, Señor Herrero submitted the 1917 and 1918 vintages of Único, with both wines winning prizes over many other, far more well-known wines from the world over, and the reputation of Vega Sicilia "Único" as Spain's "First Growth" was cemented at this time. However, Señor Herrero was still quite particular about who he would sell bottles of Único to in the wake of the World's Fair, and this continued practice of limited availability only added to the mystique of the wine. Prior to its success in Barcelona in 1929, the wines from Vega Sicilia had been sold exclusively to a very small list of private clients, and Señor Herrero had no desire to change this after Único was brought to the world's attention.

Antonio Herrero owned Vega Sicilia for nearly fifty years, before selling his beloved property to the group Prodes S.A. in 1950. In their turn, this wine group owned Vega for fifteen years, eventually selling it to the Venezuelan businessman, Hans Newmann in 1964. Señor Newmann owned Vega Sicilia during one of its golden eras, running the property with great commitment to quality from 1964 until 1982, when he then sold the winery and its vineyards to Señor David Álvarez in that year and the Álvarez family continues to own and manage Vega Sicilia to this day. 1982 was a seminal year in Ribera del Duero, for not only did Vega Sicilia find its current family ownership, but the region was also granted its first *Denominación de Origen* in that same year. Many Spanish wine *cognoscenti* grant Vega Sicilia and its long history of excellent wines as the primary reason that Ribera del Duero was given its own D.O. in 1982, though the wines at Pesquera were also gaining in popularity in this timeframe and perhaps, proving to Spanish wine authorities that Ribera del Duero was more than home to one, great, unique winery and that the region in general also had enormous potential. This, of course, has proven to be the case, though none of the newer, high-quality producers in Ribera del Duero have ever usurped the crown from Vega Sicilia as the king of Ribera del Duero and its greatest producer.

The estate of Vega Sicilia had existed long before it became an important wine-producing property, with the name of Vega Sicilia to be found in Spanish land ownership records dating back hundreds of years prior the purchase of the estate by Toribio Lecanda in 1848. The name

has nothing to do with the island of Sicily (a common misconception), as the Sicilia in the name is for Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians and one of the important figures in early Catholic history. Today, the total acreage of the estate of Vega Sicilia amounts to just under one thousand *hectares*, with two hundred and twenty of these committed to vines. The vineyards at Vega are amongst the finest in the region, as they consist of a fine layer of schist over a deep foundation of limestone bedrock. They sit at an altitude of six hundred to seven hundred meters above sea level, which is important for keeping the wide diurnal temperature swings in the evenings that help retain a freshness to the wine made from grapes harvested at Vega and which are not replicated in vineyards at lower altitude elevation in Ribera del Duero, where evening temps do not fall anywhere near as much as at Vega Sicilia. In the warmer, lower altitude vineyards of Ribera del Duero, the resulting wines can often lose a bit of the complexity and vibrancy from their higher average temperatures during the very warm growing seasons in the region. Goyo García is another top producer in Ribera del Duero who also has higher altitude vineyards and produces wines of great complexity and vibrancy from these same diurnal temperature swings during the summer evenings. In addition to the benefits of their higher elevation, many of the vineyards at Vega Sicilia are also planted with a northerly exposition, which helps to offset a bit of the summer heat of Ribera del Duero, and this also contributes importantly to the dramatic precision, tangy acidity and inherent complexity that one finds in the wines from Vega.

No one at the winery today is quite sure exactly when the term “Único” (which means Unique) was first used to designate the property’s Gran Reserva bottling, but the oldest extant bottle of Único in the cellars at Vega Sicilia today hails from the 1915 vintage. Gonzalo Iturriaga mentioned at our tasting that the winery has heard of bottles labeled as Único in some private collectors’ cellars that date back to the late nineteenth century, but no bottles from this previous era still exist in the winery’s library. In any event, Vega’s bottling of Único certainly became more of a household name amongst the wine world’s most savvy collectors and tradespeople in the wake of its brilliant showing at the World’s Fair in Barcelona in 1929, and though it would take several more decades before the ownership of the winery allowed the wine to be more widely available through traditional commercial channels (rather than just sold to family, friends and “friends of friends”), it has been recognized as one of Spain’s greatest wines for well more than a century. Today, Vega Sicilia “Único” is certainly an expensive wine, with its price per bottle fairly closely tracking those of the First Growths in Bordeaux, so that even though it no longer requires very tight connections to purchase the wine from the winery, it certainly takes a pretty elastic wine budget. But, unlike the First Growths in Bordeaux, which are made in each and every vintage, Único is only produced in top vintages in Ribera del Duero and there have been many years when it has not been produced, as the owners of the property did not feel that the quality of the vintage was sufficient to merit a bottling of Único. Consequently, there are really only “very good” and “great” vintages of Único produced, and even those years that are not the most famous are still extremely fine and the wines can be every bit as brilliant as those that hail from the most illustrious vintages. There is simply never an “off vintage” of Único.

Vega Sicilia has been home to some of Spain’s most-heralded winemakers over the course of its history. Domingo Garramiolla Txomin passed away in 1933 and was succeeded at the helm here by his long-time assistant, Martiniano Renedo, and he was followed in due course by the highly-respected Jesús Anadón as winemaker here in 1956. During the era that the winery

was owned by Prodes S.A. (1950 to 1964), Vega's legend within Spain really began to grow and Señor Anadón was considered one of the most talented *vignerons* in all of Spain during his time at the winemaking helm at Vega Sicilia, and all of his top vintages of Único continue to drink brilliantly more than half a century after he last patrolled the cellars here. He eventually passed on the winemaking baton at Vega to his long-time assistant, Mariano García, whose father was a vineyard manager on the estate and Mariano was actually born on the property. Señor García started working as Jesús Anadón's assistant in 1968 and the joint careers of these two gentlemen in the cellars at Vega represent one of the golden ages in the long and illustrious history of this property. In his turn, Mariano García was one of the most famous and talented Technical Directors at Vega Sicilia, as he manned the cellars and crafted the great wines produced here all the way up to 1998. During his thirty years as assistant and head winemaker, Vega's various bottlings rose to international prominence and became symbolic of the greatness of Spanish wine to be found from the very top producers in the country. Not surprisingly, this was also an era when Vega's wines became more readily distributed throughout the globe, so that the tight family connections that were necessary in the first half of the twentieth century to buy the wines of Vega Sicilia were no longer necessary. Rioja had long been considered Spain's greatest red wine region, due to the great blossoming of the wine industry in the country when Bordeaux winemakers descended upon the area in the wake of phylloxera in their home vineyards in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and helped expand and organize the vineyards in Rioja. However, during this period of Spanish wine renaissance that represented the era between the *Bordelais* arriving in Rioja in the 1870s and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Vega Sicilia still stood at the pinnacle of the Spanish wine hierarchy. As the notes below will happily attest, while the thirty year period when Señor García was helping or in charge of the cellars at Vega Sicilia was certainly a golden age for the property, it was not fundamentally different from the decades before, when Vega Sicilia produced truly profound wines of legendary longevity and marvelous quality, and since 1998, the property has not missed a beat in continuing its legacy of producing one of the world's greatest red wines.

Mariano García was followed as winemaker at Vega Sicilia, in turn, by his own long-time assistant, Xavier Ausàs, who was in charge of the cellars here from 1998 until 2015. Today, Gonzalo Iturriaga is the Technical Director and head winemaker at Vega Sicilia. He arrived at Vega Sicilia to take the winemaking helm on September 2nd of 2015, which he calls "the best day of my life!" Under his trusteeship, Vega Sicilia has not missed a beat, and the estate continues to cruise along at the pinnacle of the Spanish wine world. Gonzalo was very generous with his time in answering my myriad of questions concerning both the history of Vega Sicilia and the winemaking practices here today, and this article is much more thorough thanks to his kindness in sharing so much information with me. This is particularly true in regards to the winemaking for Único that we go into a bit further along, as the winery for much of its long history valued its privacy and there has not always been a lot of information disseminated concerning the winemaking foundation that has given us so many brilliant vintages of Único over the last century. Señor Iturriaga was quite kind to open up a bit about the unique and extended *elevage* process that lies behind each and every vintage of Único, though one has the sense that the barrel aging process today is a bit more systematic than what was the case over most of the twentieth century here, when decisions about how long to age a given vintage of Único in smaller casks or huge oak vats was left more to "feel" and the impressions of the style and quality of a given vintage here on the part of the winemakers that preceded Señor Iturriaga at the helm.



Keith Williams, host of the Único vertical in Houston, and Gonzalo Iturriaga, Technical Director at Vega Sicilia.

As mentioned above, since 1864, Bordeaux varietals have been planted at Vega Sicilia, but the dominant grape in the vineyard plantations has continued to be Tempranillo, which was already planted on the estate prior to Eloy Lecanda returning with his oenology training and vine cuttings from Bordeaux. The original plantations at Vega had been Tempranillo, then known as a local grape for simple table wines and not yet recognized as one of the world's finest red wine varieties, (and called in Ribera in this era *Tinto del Pais* or today, *Tinto Fino*), as well as Albillo, which is a local white wine grape that was co-planted in many vineyards in Ribera del Duero with Tempranillo and often co-fermented with the red grapes to make a red wine that was a bit higher in alcohol. To my knowledge, the last bottling of Único to include any of the white grape of Albillo in the blend was the 1980, but a small percentage of this grape had been an integral part of the blend in virtually every vintage prior to the 1980s and even legendary vintages like the 1964, 1968 and 1975 Único included a bit of Albillo. Since the very earliest days of fine wine production at Vega Sicilia, the red wines here have included a percentage of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Malbec that were brought back from Bordeaux by Eloy Lecanda, but to Señor Lecanda's surprise, it was the Tempranillo grape that performed best in the vineyards at Vega and this has always been the dominant grape in the blend here. The percentages of each grape have varied depending on how each variety has fared in a given growing season, but one could say that Tempranillo would typically make up sixty to seventy percent of the *cépages* of Único each year, with Cabernet Sauvignon ranging from ten to twenty percent of the blend, and the balance made up of Merlot, Malbec and (prior to the 1980s) a touch of Albillo. There have been reports that Eloy Lecanda also brought back the Carmenère grape to Vega in the 1860s, as

it was a popular varietal in Bordeaux in that era, but Gonzalo Iturriaga wonders if these reports are accurate, “as it would have been a very hard grape to ripen at Vega Sicilia in those days and there is none planted on the estate today, though we still have one very old vineyard that is planted with a mix of twenty-two different varieties and is one hundred and thirty years-old- but even it does not include any Carmenère.”

In recent years, and in part due to the effects of global warming in Ribera del Duero, the *cépages* of Único has changed since the vintages of the 1990s, and today, it is composed solely of Tempranillo and Cabernet Sauvignon, with the Malbec, Merlot and Albillo no longer part of the blend. Perhaps a harbinger of things to come, the fine 1990 vintage of Único was the first composed exclusively from these two grapes, though this may have been simply a reflection of that particularly growing season and subsequent vintages of Único in that decade included a bit of Merlot and Malbec again. However, by the end of the decade of the 1990s, Único was down to being a two varietal blend and in most vintages and today, around ninety-five percent of the wine is composed of Tempranillo. As Gonzalo Iturriaga commented at our vertical tasting in Houston in November, when one of the participants asked about the change in *cépages* for Único: “if we could go back to the weather patterns we had in the 1970s and 1980s, we would probably also go back to the old blend that included Merlot, Malbec and Albillo, but today, I am not sure that it would make sense with climate change to still include those grapes.” Even before climate change really began to be self-evident in Spain, the trend at Vega had been to rely more and more on Tempranillo in the blend, as the grape was excelling in the vineyards here over the last quarter century, so that gradually, more and more of each vintage of Único was composed of Tempranillo.

We should also note that the official advent of the D.O. for Ribera del Duero in 1982 may have had some influence on the wines at Vega Sicilia, as back in the early decades of the twentieth century, when there was no official delimitation of Ribera del Duero, the winery would have been free to augment its own production with fruit from other vineyard sources throughout the Duero Valley, and in vintages where the possibility existed to buy in high quality grapes from another source, the estate was certainly free to do so and it would have been foolhardy not to have added more top notch grapes in order to produce an even finer version of Único. So the adoption of the D.O. in 1982 would have restrained the winemakers at Vega to a certain degree, whereas prior to 1982, there would have been no reason not to have purchased additional fruit to augment what was grown on the estate in efforts to produce an even greater wine. We have to recall that Vega Sicilia was for much of the twentieth century, the only winery in Ribera del Duero, outside of the regional cooperative, and the landscape here was dramatically different than it is today, when there are hundreds of wineries in the region. While there are no records that Vega Sicilia relied on outside sources in its early years, it would have been logical to do so and one has to assume that some of the winery’s extraordinary track record for consistency had to do back in the past with its ability to buy in some production in growing seasons where its own vineyards had not been treated gloriously by Mother Nature.

While there are still plenty of very old vines planted in the vineyards at Vega Sicilia (old vines here range from seventy-five to nearly one hundred and fifty years of age!), according to Gonzalo Iturriaga, the average age of the vines these days that produce the fruit that goes into a given vintage of Único is probably between forty-five and fifty years of age. The property has a

long-standing policy of replanting very old vines when they start to lose their health, but on a very small scale, so that the overall average age of the vineyards is always at least close to fifty. No production from vines under twenty-five years of age ever goes into Único, as the fruit from the younger vines on the property go into the estate's other cuvée, Valbuena 5 Año. This is a wine that is aged five years prior to its release and is produced from the same vineyards as Único, with casks of older vine fruit that are not selected for the Único blend in a given year combined with the wine made from the younger vine fruit from the same vineyards to make up the foundation of Valbuena. The estate formerly produced two different versions of Valbuena, with one aged for three years prior to release and another for five years, but the three year-old version was discontinued in the lineup here in 1998. There is also a third wine still produced at Vega Sicilia, which we will go into in more detail below, and that is the Único Reserva Especial, which is a non-vintage bottling that is almost always a blend of three different vintages combined to make a singular and beautiful wine that pays homage to a style of wine that was so prevalent in the early days of the Spanish wine business, when blending vintages was the norm, rather than the exception.

While there are two hundred and twenty *hectares* of vines planted today at Vega Sicilia, only the production from approximately one hundred and forty of these are used for Único and Valbuena 5 Año. As Gonzalo Iturriaga notes, “there are another thirty *hectares* of vines that are too young for use in either wine, as we only use production of vines over ten years of age even for Valbuena” and “another twenty *hectares* that we sell off, because they really do not produce high enough quality grapes for our own wines.” The remaining acreage of vineyard production here now go to another wine crafted by Alvarez family, Alión. The various grape varieties planted in the vineyards at Vega Sicilia are trained differently, depending on the variety. More than seventy percent of the estate's vineyards are planted to Tempranillo, which are cultivated traditionally as individual “bush vines”, while the Bordeaux varietals are trellised and trained along wires. The remaining percentage of the vineyards at Vega are still planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and a bit of Malbec, but it remains to be seen if the Malbec will continue to be grown here (as it is not currently blended into the Valbuena bottling), or if the Malbec vines will eventually be replanted to Tempranillo or Cabernet Sauvignon. With the change in the *cépages* of Único to solely Tempranillo and Cabernet Sauvignon in recent times, the Merlot on the property now goes exclusively to the Valbuena 5 Año bottling, and much of the Malbec and Albillo have been replanted. One should note also that with climate change, Tempranillo has become more and more important in the *cépages* of all the wines at Vega Sicilia, so that the percentages of Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot used in the different cuvées here have been declining, relative to the percentage of Tempranillo, in all of the wines for the past few decades.

The current Director of Viticulture at Vega Sicilia, Enrique Macias and his team do not use either herbicides or insecticides in the vineyards here, and perhaps even more importantly, all of the vineyards on the estate that go into Valbuena and Único are dry-farmed, which keeps yields down rather dramatically. There is a lot of drip irrigation used at other wineries throughout Spain, but it is my impression that this practice will often adversely affect the quality of the finished wine, as it encourages higher crop loads and perhaps robs wines of much of their potential complexity, as the root systems do not need to work deep down in the soil in search of water. During very hot and dry summers, organic compost is used in the vineyards at Vega to help retain moisture in the soils and keep the ripening process on track. In recent times, the

vineyard team at Vega Sicilia has also been perfectly willing to do a green harvest to cut back the number of bunches on the vines if necessary, to keep yields at the desired, low level that provides the concentration and potential longevity for which Único is so rightly famous. The lower yields and commitment to dry farming at Vega are two of the keys to the wine's great quality year in and year out, as the estate is able to attain perfect ripeness to its tannins, while still maintaining more moderate sugar levels and good acidity (the cooler nights in the vineyards at Vega are useful in this respect as well, though one assumes that the estate will practice acidulation if need be in lower acid vintages, as this has been the practice throughout Spain for several generations). All of these elements are key building blocks for crafting an extremely long-lived wine that improves dramatically with bottle age, which is exactly what Único does over the course of decade after decade of bottle aging.



In 2010, the Alvarez family was able to complete construction of a new modern winemaking facility for Vega Sicilia, which has greatly expanded the technical team's ability to vinify each parcel precisely and greatly enhanced the ability to select various lots for blending purposes of Único. With the modern, state of the art winery and cellars, Gonzalo Iturriaga and his cellar team can now ferment all eighty-one individual plots identified in the vineyards on their own, prior to working on their blending trials for what will eventually become the new vintage of Único. The different parcels identified in the vineyards by the team at Vega has been founded on years of research in the vines to identify nineteen different soil types, coupled to the

various grape varieties and age of vines planted, and it is this combination that has evolved into the eighty-one separate plots identified within the vineyards that are dedicated to the production of Único on the property. The wines that are destined to be considered for Único are fermented in eighty hectoliter, older oak fermentation tanks, made by the French *tonnelier* Radoux. If memory serves me correctly, these fermentation tanks were last replaced in the second half of the 1990s and are now more than twenty years old. In contrast, lots of wine already earmarked as destined for Valbuena at harvest time (such as all the Merlot and vines between ten and twenty-five years of age) are fermented in stainless steel tanks, rather than these large oak fermenters (though, of course, any wines not selected to go into the final blend of a given vintage of Único may eventually find their way into the Valbuena and these have all been fermented in oak). All of the wines at Vega Sicilia are fermented with indigenous yeasts.

The winemaking and *elevage* of Único has long been quite unique in the pantheon of the world's greatest red wines, and back in the more distant past, the owners and winemakers here at Vega were not always interested in sharing the precise information on how the wine was made and raised in the cellars, preferring to simply let the wine speak for itself. However, Gonzalo Iturriaga was quite forthcoming at our tasting and with my follow-up questions about cellar practices here for the Único in recent times, removing some of the mystery, as he shared that today, it is typical for a young vintage of Único to spend its first year of aging in smaller oak casks for the start of its *elevage*. These are generally Bordeaux-styled barrels of two hundred and twenty-five liters, made from either French or American oak, with some of the oak purchased and aged at Vega Sicilia prior to being made into casks right on the property. There has also been a move to plant cork oak trees at Vega in this century, so one day, it is quite conceivable that Vega Sicilia will also produce its own cork closures for its wines, in addition to making some of its own barrels. All of this harkens back to the original philosophical vision of Eloy Lecanda all those years ago, who imagined Vega Sicilia as a self-sustaining, agricultural estate of mixed crops that would be an oasis unto itself. Vega Sicilia has been crafting some of its own barrels for thirty years now, with American oak staves purchased and shipped to the winery in Ribera del Duero to be aged for three years' seasoning prior to their being fashioned into casks. French oak staves are bought and stored in France for their three years' worth of seasoning, prior to shipping to the winery for barrel-making. Gonzalo Iturriaga comments about barrel-making on the property today: "we make, more or less, thirty percent of our needs, and buy the remainder from a variety of different suppliers" and "try to adapt our barrel buying to the style and needs of the vintage."

Vega Sicilia Único has long been a wine with an extended and quite particular *elevage* in the cellars here, and today, Gonzalo Iturriaga comments that "Único is a wine that we essentially build over a period of five years." As mentioned above, the first year is always a period of barrel aging in two hundred and twenty-five liter casks, with a fairly high percentage of these barrels new to start a young vintage of Único's cellaring period. Señor Iturriaga was quick to point out that both the percentage of new oak and the percentage of barrels that will be made from American or French oak used for Único is very much a function of what the team here perceives as the style and needs of a given vintage. The amount of new oak will generally range today from seventy to eighty-five percent for this first year of aging, with Gonzalo noting that "the warmer the vintage, the less new oak that we use for Único." Similarly, in years with more heat and ripeness, Único will have a higher percentage of its casks made from French oak, and in

cooler years, the pendulum will swing a bit more towards the use of more American oak casks for Único. The percentage of American oak barrels used for Único will range typically from twenty to thirty percent (depending on the vintage's character) and French casks falling in the seventy to eighty percent range. For example, Gonzalo notes that "in 2015, which was a warm and huge vintage, we used less American oak in this year- around twenty-five percent- and less new oak overall at seventy-five percent, than in other vintages, and also a different level of toasting of the barrels to help retain freshness in the wine." He continued, "in the cooler and less ripe year of 2018, we used more American oak for the *elevage*, at around thirty-two percent, and a higher percentage of new oak, at eighty percent, as well as a different style of toast for the barrels" to better match with this particular vintage's characteristics.

After Único's first year of aging in smaller barrels, a young vintage of the wine will then be racked and "pre-blended" for the first time. In previous eras at the winery, this would often be into a mix of larger oak vessels (always older wood for these), ranging from six hundred liters all the way up to twenty-two thousand liters. However, today, a young vintage of Único will spend the next year of its *elevage* in one of two types of vessels, with a certain percentage racked back into smaller, two hundred and twenty-five liter American oak barrels, but these being now one and two years of age, rather than the new casks that most of the blend started out in its first year. Another percentage of the blend will go directly after that first racking into the large, twenty-two thousand liter oak vats for its next year of *elevage*. As Gonzalo Iturriaga emphasizes, "the percentage of the blend that will go to small, used barrels for that second year, and the percentage that will go to the large vats, depends very much on how we feel about the vintage-about the texture of the wine." He continues, "normally, we will put anywhere from twenty to forty percent of the blend into used American barrels, and the remainder will go into the two hundred and twenty hectoliter vats" for that second year of *elevage*. Gonzalo notes that "we try to rack a vintage of Único only once per year, but will do more rackings if the wine needs it." For the third year of the oak aging process, all of the blend now goes into the twenty-two thousand liter oak vats, where the wine will spend the third, fourth and fifth years of its *elevage*, prior to bottling. However, in the fourth and fifth years, another layer of complexity can be added to the equation of a young Único, as EU wine law allows up to fifteen percent of a vintage wine to include wines from other years, so there is the possibility to add a bit of another vintage to further build the ultimate complexity of Único. For example, Gonzalo notes that the currently aging 2015 Único, now just starting its fifth year in oak, saw four percent of 2016 blended into it in November of last year, while the 2016 Único, beginning year four of its *elevage*, had three percent of the 2017 blended in.

After its more than four years of aging in various oak vessels, the final blend of Único is then assembled and given around another ten months to harmonize completely in older oak vats, before it is bottled. The very large, two hundred and twenty hectoliter vats were last replaced in the second half of the 1990s as well and will probably not be renewed again for at least another fifty years. Once it is bottled and now more than five years out from the vintage, the next release of Único is not yet done aging and ready for departure from the winery in Ribera del Duero, as it will still spend approximately another four and a half years aging in bottles in the estate's cellars before it will be released! That is why the newest release into the market of a vintage of Único was the 2009, at the end of 2019, fully a decade after the grapes for it were first picked. And, keep in mind that the full decade of aging here at Vega Sicilia for the next vintage of Único is the

new “fast track” at the winery, as in the past, a new release of Único could take even longer to emerge from the cellars here! This is pretty remarkable, and one has to appreciate what an investment the winery makes in each vintage of Único, as that is a lot of money tied up in the cellars here for at least a full decade of aging before it can be sold into the market. I often think that if this tradition had not been started far back in the past at Vega Sicilia, as is also the case at some of the great, traditionalist Rioja *bodegas* such as López de Heredia, Cuné, La Rioja Alta or Monte Real, who continue to age their wines for a long time in the cellars before releasing them, it would simply not be possible to start this practice in our era, with wines so much more expensive, as the amount of capital buried in the cellars over that first decade would simply not be feasible for almost all new wineries starting out today.

In the more distant past, Único would not necessarily start out its *elevage* in the smaller French and American oak barrels as outlined above by Gonzalo Iturriaga, as in some vintages, it would go right into the much larger, older oak vats of twenty-two thousand liters for aging after its initial fermentation, and then might be racked back into smaller casks at some point later on in the *elevage*, and then returned to large *foudres* depending on how the vintage was evolving with aging in the cellars. For example, according to wine writer Stephen Brook, the 1964 Único began its *elevage* in those very large, twenty-two thousand liter oak vats for its first two years, then was racked into five hundred and seventy-five liter casks for the next two years, followed with another three years in smaller two hundred and twenty-five liter barrels (all older American oak) before it was finally bottled in 1972 (and not released into the market until 1976, after it had another four years of aging in bottle in the cellars at Vega). There was no specific recipe for what vessels would be used for the barrel aging of Único in the past, nor in which order the wine would pass through different-sized casks, vats or *foudres*, as it would be the wine itself and its structural style that would help determine its own unique path through the oak aging portion of its *elevage*. Additionally, the six years of oak aging now settled on for Único in recent times was not always the standard operating procedure at Vega Sicilia, as in the past, some vintages (like the 1964) might spend even longer in oak prior to bottling. For example, the legendary 1970 Único was not bottled until after it had spent at least ten years aging in various oak casks, *foudres* and those twenty-two thousand liter large vats and it was fully twenty-seven years of age before it was first released from the cellars here!

Another rather unique aspect about Vega Sicilia and its great Único bottling is that its release schedules have never been sequential, and for many decades now it has been standard operating procedure for some vintages of Único to be released ahead of their older siblings. The two most obvious examples of this are the twin legends of 1968 and 1970 Único, both of which were released much later than ten years out from the vintage. In fact, the 1979, 1976, 1975 and 1973 vintages of Único were all released ahead of the 1968 and 1970 versions. This practice has continued to the present time, with the winery releasing both the 2007 and 2008 vintages of Único ahead of the 2006, as they felt that the latter vintage was more structured and demanded even more time aging in the cellars prior to release. So the vintages of Único are never necessarily released in chronological order, and if one were a Vega Sicilia collector back in the day and had already heard the long-swirling rumors of the greatness of the 1968 and 1970 vintages of Único, one had to exercise patience and simply wait for the estate’s timetable for release of those two wines!

With all of this discussion of the very long, extended *elevage* program for Vega Sicilia's "Único" bottling, one might assume that the wine is ready to drink when it is released from the cellars, now typically at around ten years of age. The reality is that this is most emphatically not the case, as Único is probably one of the wine world's longest-lived red wines and invariably, at age ten, it is still a very, very young, moderately tannic and structured wine and is still many, many years away from its plateau of maturity. At our tasting in Houston, Technical Director Gonzalo Iturriaga commented that "it is not really until the wine is at least twenty-five years of age that it really starts to reach maturity and drink well." A couple of flights later, when we had moved back to wines from the decade of the 1970s, he laughed and quipped "maybe I meant to say that it is not really until Único is forty years of age that it is really ready to drink!" The reality is that in most vintages, Único is a wine that does indeed need to be at least thirty years of age before it has really started to enter its plateau of peak drinkability and share all of its beautiful, inherent complexity, but it will often stay at this level, evolving as the years go by, but not even starting to think about descending over the far side of the plateau until another forty or fifty years has passed! This, of course, varies depending on the style and structure of the underlying vintage, and this is one area where the difference between the "good vintages" of Único and the "great vintages" of Único is most apparent- in the ability of the wine to age for very, very long periods of time and to ascend to its apogee in a very slow and deliberate manner. For example, looking back at the Vegas from the great era of the 1960s and 1970s at the estate, the 1975 Único is now gloriously ready to drink and at its peak (at forty-five years of age), but both the 1968 and the 1970 (two vintages of Único that were renowned from the outset for their potential longevity and held back for a very long time in the cellars prior to release into the market in the mid-to-late-1990s) are still not yet really at their peaks and remain in climbing mode. What was considered a moderately successful vintage of Único, the 1979, was drinking beautifully earlier on in its life in bottle and was delicious at age twenty or twenty-five, but was still a beautiful wine to drink at age forty at our tasting and showed no signs of imminent decline.

When we arrived at the truly older wines in our verticals of Único in both Houston and New York, it became readily apparent just how long-lived the wines of Vega Sicilia can be, as wines such as the 1964, 1962, 1959, 1953, 1948, 1941 and 1939 are still all amazingly at their absolute zeniths of vigor and vibrancy, drinking with great beauty (rather than hanging on for dear life) and most emphatically nowhere near decline! This is the real magic of Único, as at fifty, sixty or even eighty years of age, the wines continue to cruise along at their apogees of complexity, and they are a far cry from so many very old wines, which remain quite interesting as fragile, gently fading wines that find much of their merit in their aromatic refinement and historical perspectives, but are rather gently faded on the palate. Not Único. Great old vintages of Único are brilliant wines still at the peak of their powers and at the two vertical tastings that form the foundation for this report, the very oldest vintages were amongst the most stunning wines served on both evenings! This is not to say that the personality of Único does not change with time, as this is most emphatically not the case, but the depth of fruit these wines start out with seems to provide a foundation for the wine that is built to last at least a hundred years out from the vintage! The only red wines that I can think of that possess the same inherent potential for extremely long lives in bottle are the older vintages of Château Latour in Pauillac, which back in the old days took forever to start to really reach their apogees, but which then continued to cruise along as decade after decade rolled by without starting to slide towards an eventual decline. If

anything, old vintages of Único may be even more long-lived than those old school vintages of Latour!

However, the aromatic and flavor profile of Único evolves beautifully over time and it is one of the ways that one can get a feel for just where in its evolutionary arc a particular vintage might be placed. Young Único's fruit profile is most often black fruity in the first few decades of its life, offering up notes of plums, black cherries, cassis and black raspberry, depending on the style of a particular growing season. After three decades or so, many vintages will start to show a far more red fruity side to their personalities, with notes of cherries, raspberries and blood orange often emerging from the wine (often still in conjunction with remaining black fruity tones), and this transition to a more red fruity personality is one of the signature elements that I use to peg a given vintage of Único as truly getting into its extended period of peak drinkability. As time marches resolutely on, the fruit tones of Único start to take on more of a "dried fruit" aspect, with notes of sweet prunes, dried cherries and berries often starting to take over the aromatic and flavor profiles, but still with the vigor of Único's fruit component front and center in the wine. In fact, even the oldest wine at our two verticals, the eighty-one year-old 1939 vintage, was still in this stage, with plenty of mid-palate stuffing and was still many, many years away from a gentle decline into the "delicacy of old age".

While the enduring aspect of the beautiful depth of fruit of Único is one of its most defining elements, these wines are emphatically not "fruit bombs" and there are far more layers of aromatic and flavor complexity to be found in these wines than simply the fruit elements enumerated above. Younger vintages of Único (say twenty-five years or less) are often defined by their mix of vibrant black fruit with notes of tobacco, gentle spice tones, smoke, excellent soil signatures, variations of chocolate and sweet balsamic tones and new oak. Over time, these elements often continue, but morph in different directions with the variations of vintage, so that the tobacco tones might get sweet like pipe tobacco, or more herbaceous like cigar wrapper, or more smoky like cigar ash or tobacco smoke. Similarly, the spice elements change and blossom with long aging, with the early notes of clove or nutmeg turning to a wide variety of elements such as dried eucalyptus, lavender and sandalwood. Also, with decades of bottle age, Único at its apogee will often start to show some of its underlying cabernet sauvignon or merlot notes in the aromatics and flavors, with elements of sweet bell peppers or chipotle peppers often starting to add yet another note to the symphony of complexity here. The chocolate tones at the start can often morph into coffee or mocha elements as well, and it is not a rare occurrence for a meatiness to develop in the wines after forty or fifty years of aging. In terms of complexity, Único is a far cry from so many other wines produced today in Ribera del Duero, particularly in the hotter sections of the D.O., and to my mind, it is a combination of both Único's blend of different grapes (even if still predominantly Tempranillo-based), combined with the superb *terroir* of the vineyards here and their unique microclimates, that gives the wine so much more complexity than virtually any other wine produced in Ribera del Duero. In my experience, some of the very earliest vintages of Pesquera could show some of these extra elements of complexity (though I do not find this true of the newer releases) and the wines of Goya García also seem to have the potential to eventually possess a similar degree of complexity, but without the same bottomless depth and endless potential for longevity of Único!



Vega Sicilia has now produced its flagship bottling of Único in larger formats for quite some time, but it was not until the 1960 vintage of Único was bottled that it was first offered in magnums. I take note of this as 1960 was my birth year, and not a particularly fine vintage in most wine regions around the globe, but this vintage of Único is purported to be quite good (though I have never crossed paths with it) and the fact that it was bottled in magnum still gives me hope that I will come across a magnum and finally be able to drink a very fine wine from my birth year. As one can see from the photo above, each vintage of Único that is bottled in magnum also has its own unique label, with a different painting gracing each vintage's label for magnums. I do not know if the dedicated artwork for the labels of each vintage's magnums originated with the 1960 Único or came along a bit later, but it was certainly part of the beautiful package of the legendary 1968 Único when magnums of it were released in conjunction with the first release of the 1970 Único in regular-sized bottles. Prior to 1960, Único was only available in bottle, and this had been the case since the advent of estate bottling here at Vega Sicilia right after World War I. Today, each bottle of Único will detail how much of the vintage was made available in bottles, magnums, jeroboams and larger formats.

While this article, thus far, has focused on Vega Sicilia's flagship bottling of Único, the estate does indeed produce two other cuvées in addition to the vintage-dated Único and both of these are unique and compelling wines in their own rights. As I mentioned above, with the minimum age of vines that can go into Único twenty-five years of age, the younger vine fruit in

the estate's vineyards remains reserved primarily for use in their bottling of Valbuena 5 Año (or Valbuena 5° as it appears on its labels). Back in my earlier days in the wine trade, there were two distinct bottlings of Valbuena, with one aged for three years prior to release and one aged for five years, but since the 1998 vintage, the estate has only produced their five year-old version of Valbuena. It is made from the exact same vineyards as Único, but from the parcels that have been replanted more recently and still have not attained the twenty-five year-old threshold to make them a consideration for the blend of Único. As I mentioned in passing above, the production from these younger vines that are destined to compose Valbuena are fermented in stainless steel tanks, rather than oak fermenters, with the malolactic fermentation also taking place in tank, and then the wine is aged in small casks and larger *foudres* prior to bottling. Valbuena may also include lots of wine made from older vine fruit that have not been included in a given vintage of Único, so it is hardly a second class wine at Vega Sicilia! In recent years, the wine is composed from a blend of solely Tempranillo and Merlot, so that Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon are no longer part of the *cépages* at Valbuena, though they were often included back in the day. With the Merlot planted on the estate no longer going into Único, but exclusively to Valbuena, the cuvée has plenty of old vine Merlot as part of its *cépages*, to go along with the relatively younger vine Tempranillo. The wine is aged for five years prior to release, with some of this five year period of aging done in cask, *foudre* or very large vats and some after bottling. As is the case with Único, the period of aging in oak vessel varies from size to size depending on the style of a given vintage of Valbuena, so some years will spend more time in two hundred and twenty-five liter barrels and some vintages more time in the twenty-two thousand liter vats.

The other red wine cuvée still produced at Vega Sicilia is their unique, three vintage blend of Único Reserva Especial. This wine harkens back to the very earliest days of the Spanish wine trade, when producers who were bottling their own wines would often produce a vintage-dated wine and a multi-vintage blend, which they called their Reserva Especial. To my knowledge, Vega Sicilia is the only estate left in Spain that still maintains this tradition by producing a multi-vintage blend of Reserva Especial. For many, many decades the Reserva Especial at Vega Sicilia has been composed principally of three different vintages, often with a fairly wide spread of years between the various components in the blend. For example, the newest release is comprised of the vintages of 2006, 2007 and 2009, which are fairly closely grouped together for this bottling (only four years between youngest and oldest wines in the blend), but previous iterations have included blends such as 1985, 1990 and 1994 (ten years apart between youngest and oldest component) and 1960, 1965 and 1972 (thirteen years between components), so the composition of each release of Único Reserva Especial has its own personality. Keep in mind that the wines that go into the blend of Reserva Especial remain in oak until they are blended, so particularly in older iterations of this bottling, the wine would often be released with a more mature aromatic and flavor profile than the vintage-dated bottlings of Único, due to the older components in the cuvée remaining in oak until blending and bottling.

The very first commercial release of Único Reserva Especial was in 1965, so by the long historical standards of Vega Sicilia, this is a relatively new bottling for the estate. The wine is made today from wines that have spent nearly a decade aging in wood prior to bottling. As Gonzalo Iturriaga notes, “nowadays, the Reserva Especial is a wine that we build over those ten years in oak,” with “the first five years in barrel and vat identical to Único, and from then on it is a long process, where we blend two vintages together in oak and then leave them for two years to

come together, before blending a third vintage into the cuvée and then leaving the final blend for at least another year before we bottle the wine.” He concludes, “so you see, it takes us a lot of time to produce the Reserva Especial.” While I stated above that the Único Reserva Especial is nearly always a three vintage blend, there have been exceptions, for on very rare occasions, the wine has been composed of only two different vintages. The only three of these that I am aware of are the following: the 1992 release of Reserva Especial, which was made up of the 1970 and 1973 vintages; the 1990 release, which is a blend of the two legends of 1968 and 1970; and the 1996 release, which was comprised of the 1981 and 1973 vintages. As you will see by the list below of some of the releases of Único Reserva Especial over the years, there can be a fairly wide range of vintages included in the blends, so that some are composed of a closer grouping of vintages and some offer a wider range between the younger and older components in the cuvée. For this reason, each iteration of Único Reserva Especial is just as unique from previous versions as a new vintage of Único will be from the last.

For several decades, there was no exact information of which vintages were included in the blend of a given release of Único Reserva Especial, and it is really only since the Alvarez family purchased Vega Sicilia in 1982 that there has been an attempt to keep more concise records of which wines were included in a given iteration of the Reserva Especial. Sometime after they had purchased the property, they asked Mariano García what the constituent components of each Reserva Especial had been, but as there had been no formal record keeping of these prior to that time, he had to recall what he had put in each blend from his earlier days in charge here, and of course, there were no extant records of which vintages Señor Anadón had used for his versions of Reserva Especial from 1965 until he handed over the reins to Señor García. Happily, since the 2001 release, the winery has included the pertinent information on the back label of which vintages a given bottling of Reserva Especial is comprised. Prior to 2001, there was often the date of release of a given cuvée on the back label(though this was not true of the very earliest bottlings), even if not any specifics about the vintages in the blend, as well as the number of barrels and bottles of the wine that had been produced in a given version, so that one could at least keep track of the number of years out from release for a particular bottle of Reserva Especial. The Rare Wine Company has just put together a comprehensive list of various components of Reserva Especial that they have been able to research, including through contact with the winery, and I have drawn upon this, as well as a list that was shared with me by a Spanish friend who has a long association with the winery and was privy to some of this information as well (I shared his information with The Rare Wine Company prior to their putting together their list recently, so perhaps they were able to utilize or confirm his information as well).

The winery has long felt that the Reserva Especial was the highest expression of Único and has priced it slightly higher than the vintage-dated versions of Único. It is certainly more ready to drink on release than the comparable vintage releases, but personally, I have always enjoyed mature vintage-dated Único even a tad more than the Gran Reserva. Here is a list of the constituent components (to the best of my knowledge) of many of the releases of Único Reserva Especial over the years and their vintage components for each blend (obviously, since 2001, this information has been printed on the back label and is quite accurate):

2020 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 2010, 2009 and 2008 vintages;
 2019 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 2009, 2007 and 2006 vintages;
 2018 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 2007, 2006 and 2005 vintages;
 2017 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 2006, 2004 and 2003 vintages;
 2016 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 2002, 1998 and 1996 vintages;
 2015 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 2000, 1996 and 1994 vintages;
 2014 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 2000, 1995 and 1994 vintages;
 2013 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 2000, 1999 and 1994 vintages;
 2012 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1999, 1994 and 1991 vintages;
 2011 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1998, 1994 and 1991 vintages;
 2010 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1995, 1994 and 1991 vintages;
 2009 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1996, 1994 and 1990 vintages;
 2008 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1996, 1991 and 1990 vintages;
 2007 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1994, 1991 and 1990 vintages;
 2006 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1994, 1990 and 1989 vintages;
 2005 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1996, 1991 and 1985 vintages;
 2004 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1991, 1990 and 1985 vintages;
 2003 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1991, 1990 and 1985 vintages;
 2002 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1990, 1986 and 1985 vintages;
 2001 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1994, 1990 and 1985 vintages;
 2000 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1994, 1990 and 1981 vintages;
 1999 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1990, 1985 and 1981 vintages;*
 1998 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1990 and 1981 vintages;
 1997 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1990, 1986 and 1981 vintages;
 1996 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1981 and 1973 vintages;
 1995 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1974 and 1973 vintages;
 1994 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1974, 1972 and 1970 vintages;
 1993 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1972 and 1970 vintages;
 1992 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1972 and 1970 vintages;
 1991 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1972, 1970 and 1968 vintages;
 1990 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1970 and 1968 vintages;
 1989 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1972, 1967 and 1965 vintages;
 1988 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1972, 1965 and 1960 vintages;
 1987 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1975, 1973 and 1965 vintages;
 1986 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1980, 1975 and 1974 vintages;
 1985 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1976, 1973 and 1972 vintages;
 1984 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1973, 1972 and 1970 vintages;
 1983 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1972, 1970 and 1968 vintages;
 1981 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1968, 1962 and 1960 vintages;
 1980 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1972, 1962 and 1960 vintages;
 1979 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1968, 1964 and 1962 vintages;
 1978 Release of Único Reserva Especial: 1968, 1962 and 1960 vintages;

* *The winery does not list '85 in the blend for the 1999 release, but my friend's older list did.*



While the Reserva Especial here at Vega Sicilia is most often a blend of three vintages, this is not to say that back in its earlier days, it might not include a tiny bit of another vintage in addition to its primary building blocks. For example, if back in the era when Mariano García was the cellar master here, if he had fifty or one hundred liters of a fourth vintage of Único still in the cellars that had not fit into a previous iteration of Reserva Especial, and it happened to work in a particular blend he was contemplating for the next release, he would most certainly have included it in the cuvée and added to the wine's complexity, though it might not be attributed officially in the blend. So, keep in mind, the above table is generally believed to be accurate, but may not tell the entirety of the story of a given release of Único Reserva Especial! I should also mention that a couple of releases included the same blends of vintages (the 2003 and 2004 releases of were both comprised of 1991, 1990 and 1985), but they would not be the same wines, as each of those components would have spent an additional year in oak prior to being bottled for the 2004 release. One of the defining threads of all of the Reserva Especial bottlings, in comparison to the vintage-dated releases of Único, is that the wines are generally more ready to drink when released than is the case with the single vintage versions. The longer *elevage* in oak prior to bottling, as well as the inclusion often of quite older vintages in the *cépages*, combines to give a more mature expression of Único than is the case with similarly aged vintage bottlings.

If we reach even further back into the deep historical well at Vega Sicilia, we discover that there was once also a white wine version of Único produced here at the winery, which seems to have been made on a few occasions back in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. This is not well known and I have never seen the Blanco mentioned in other pieces in English that I have read on Vega Sicilia. According to the winery, the last vintage produced was the 1948 Único Blanco. It apparently was only made during the time when Antonio Herrero owned the estate (recall he purchased Vega in 1903 and owned it for nearly fifty years). No one, even at the winery today, knows exactly what the extremely rare Único Blanco was produced from in the infrequent year when a little was crafted back in the first half of the twentieth century, but one can surmise that it was principally made from the Albillo that was grown on the estate and which may not have been used in a blend of a particular vintage of Único Tinto. Gonzalo Iturriaga notes that “the

Blanco was only produced in some vintages, not every year” and “we are not sure of the grape varieties that went into the wine- of, course, there was Albillo, but we also used to have some other varieties planted here: Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon and Castellana Blanca.” I have never seen a bottle of the Único Blanco, but my Spanish friend with close ties to the estate has seen an extant bottle from one of the vintages of the late 1930s, so there is no doubt that a few bottles are still out there in private cellars and it did indeed exist in small quantities in a few vintages back in the first half of the twentieth century and would have been bottled at the estate.

I have not yet mentioned in this feature that I firmly believe that it is very important to decant vintages of Único before drinking them, as these wines are very structured when first opened (even fifty year-old versions from great years!) and they most emphatically demand proper decanting time to fully show at their finest. Keep in mind that Único has such a unique and long *elevage* that it has already spent plenty of time prior to bottling being exposed to micro-oxygenation (though in those two hundred and twenty hectoliter, old oak vats, it was a very minimal exposure), so the wines really do blossom remarkably with extended time in decanter. I am not sure that they need quite as much as great old Barolo or Barbaresco, but they are not far off of that need for oxygen to really unfold their wings and show all of their inherent complexity. A perfect example of this would be the legendary and powerful 1968 Único, which we were fortunate to have in the lineups at both the Houston and New York tastings. It was in decanter for several hours in Houston, after several previous hours of slow oxygenation in bottle prior to decanting, and it had opened up brilliantly and was the finest bottle yet of the 1968 that I have tasted. In contrast, we did not have quite the same freedom for our tasting in New York and the wine was only in decanter for about an hour before serving and it was much more buttoned down behind its structural elements and never really had a chance to blossom completely before we happily consumed it. So, do not be afraid to really give an old vintage of Único extended decanting time, as these wines take very well to oxygen and really demand it to show at their best.

As I hope the notes below will attest, all three wines currently produced at Vega Sicilia are amongst the greatest wines to be produced in Spain. While much of the feature’s tasting notes are on the most famous of Vega’s three cuvées, their inimitable vintage-dated bottling of Único, both Valbuena 5 Año and the beautiful Reserva Especial are superb wines in their own right. I have plans to do a feature on Valbuena in an upcoming newsletter, as I have recently come across a cache of older vintages of this wine and wanted to allow them to stand on their own in a feature devoted to them, rather than rush and try to include them in this article. My thought is that it is better to let them settle in properly after travel and thereby allow them to show at their best. The parcel includes both Valbuena 5 Año and the now discontinued Valbuena 3 Año, with vintages stretching back to 1982, so it will be a very interesting to see how well these wines have evolved with extended bottle age. My gut feeling is that Valbuena has always been made in the true Vega Sicilia style and built to age long and gracefully and I am already looking forward to putting this hypothesis to the test in the not too distant future.

Vega Sicilia “Valbuena 5 Ano”

2012 Valbuena 5 Ano- Vega Sicilia

The 2012 Valbuena 5° from Vega Sicilia is quite unique in that it does not contain any of the merlot in the blend this year, as those vineyards did not do well in this drought year and consequently, this wine is composed entirely of tempranillo in 2012. The bouquet is young and classy, offering up a lovely framing of smoky, nutty new oak to go along with notes of black cherries, cassis, Cuban cigar, a nice touch of soil and dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, a bit more soil signature than the nose suggests, firm, youthful tannins and lovely length and grip on the promising finish. There are plenty of oak tannins on the backend here that need to be integrated, but there seems to be sufficient stuffing to do so with extended bottle age. I started drinking Valbuena in the vintages of the early 1980s and the wines seemed less oaky upon release back then than this 2012, but this wine is made to age after all, and the new oak should not be an issue down the road. Still, I would love to see it a bit less new oaky out of the blocks, as the purity of fruit and soil signature here are very special under the wood. 2022-2045+. **92.**

Vega Sicilia “Único”

2009 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 2009 vintage is the newest release of Único and it is just now entering the market here in the US. The wine looks to be an absolute classic in the making and in due time, it seems very likely to take its place amongst the finest vintages of the last twenty-five years here. The blend this year is ninety-four percent tempranillo and six percent cabernet sauvignon and the wine comes in listed at fourteen percent octane. The bouquet is still youthfully sappy and adolescent, offering up a blend of black cherries, blueberry, gentle balsamic tones, cigar wrapper, dark chocolate and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with beautiful balance and grip, ripe tannins and impressive nascent complexity on the very long and focused finish. Much more complexity on both the nose and palate will emerge with further bottle aging, but all of the constituent components are in place here for future greatness. 2033-2100+. **95+.**

2005 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 2005 vintage of Único is a riper example than the classically-proportioned 2009, and Gonzalo Iturriaga and I disagreed a bit about its future potential, with Gonzalo loving the wine’s great inner strength and foreseeing great things down the road, but my leaning towards the more impeccable balance of the 2009 as the cornerstone of future magic. In any case, the 2005 is certainly a very fine bottle in its own right and offers up a deep, ripe and sappy bouquet of black raspberries, cassis, chocolate, cigar smoke, a good base of soil tones, pipe tobacco and new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite powerful in personality in this vintage, with a sappy core, ripe, firm tannins and very good balance (particularly for its slightly higher octane) and grip on the long and palate-staining finish. The *cépages* here is the same as the 2009, with ninety-four percent tempranillo and six percent cabernet sauvignon comprising the blend in 2005. I should mention that the last time I tasted the 2005 Único, a couple of years ago, I liked it even better than on this occasion, so the wine may have just gone into one of its more closed phases of late and I am underrating it a touch today! 2027-2100. **94.**

2002 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 2002 vintage of Vega Sicilia’s Único is really a lovely bottle for drinking in the not too distant future, and the wine showed very well at our tasting, despite, as Señor Iturriaga noted

“this is not really that good of a vintage.” The wine’s *cépages* is typical of the more recent releases of Único, combining ninety-five percent tempranillo with five percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine offers up a beautifully refined bouquet of black cherries, blueberries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a hint of nuttiness, dark chocolate and a nice framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and beautifully proportioned, with lovely complexity and grip, still a nice sense of reserve that augurs well for future development and fine intensity of flavor and backend energy on the long and moderately tannic finish. This is nowhere near as powerful at the core as the 2005, but I was really struck by how much I liked its sense of effortless balance and impeccable length on the backend, and I think it will age beautifully and offer a wide window of fine drinking. It could still do with a few more years of bottle age to fully blossom, but it is getting close! 2022-85. **94.**

1998 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 1998 Único is one of the great modern classics at this fine estate. The wine includes just a touch more cabernet sauvignon in the blend than its more recent compatriots, with eight percent of this varietal complementing the ninety-two percent of tempranillo. At twenty-two years of age the wine is really starting to just sneak into its plateau of proper drinking, but has decades and decades and decades of life still ahead of it. The bouquet soars from the glass in a brilliant blend of plums, black cherries, eucalyptus, a gorgeous base of soil, pipe tobacco, dark chocolate, a suave framing of new oak and the first presage of the blood orange to come with extended bottle aging. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and very, very long, with a great core of fruit, lovely soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, gorgeously complex and vibrant finish. This is an impeccably balanced, great vintage of Único! 2025-2100. **97.**

1996 Vega Sicilia “Único”

Our bottles of the 1996 Único were “off” at our vertical in Houston- the only vintage that was not on form, which was pretty good luck, given that we had eighteen vintages at this tasting spanning fully eight decades! I was really looking forward to tasting this vintage, as I have not had good luck with it on the couple of occasions that I had tasted it when it was first released and was very much hoping to get an idea on how the wine is evolving in bottle. But, fate interceded and I will have to remain curious for the time being.

1995 Vega Sicilia “Único”

In contrast to the unrepresentative bottle of the 1996, the 1995 Único was showing very well at our tasting in New York, though it was still a young wine and in need of at least another decade to really start to drink with generosity. The *cépages* this year of the Único was eighty-five percent tempranillo and fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon. It spent its first twenty-two months in very large vats, then twenty-two months in new oak barrels, followed by twenty-eight months in “one wine” cask and then back for its final two years in those large, twenty-two thousand liter vats. The wine offers up a ripe and promising bouquet of black raspberries, black cherries, cloves, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil and a nice framing of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very long, with good, but not great concentration at the core, fine focus and grip and a refined and classy finish. This seems likely to end up a more elegant and middleweight vintage of Único, as the wine is not quite as packed in the mid-palate as the 1994, but there is plenty of complexity here and it will be a lovely wine in due course. Today, it has still not quite absorbed its serving of new oak completely and I would definitely give it more time in the cellar to do so, but as this Único is only twenty-five years of age, it is still a pretty young wine! 2030-2080. **92.**

1994 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 1994 vintage of Único was paired up with the 1995 at our tasting in New York and this seems to hold a bit more promise than the very good 1995 version. The *cépages* of the 1994 is again eighty-five percent tempranillo and fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon. The 1994 Único started out its *elevage* with two years in the very large, two hundred and twenty hectoliter vats, followed by twenty-two months in all new oak barrels (both French and American wood), and then was racked into older barrels for the next two and a half years. Finally, it spent its last two and a half years back in the very large vats before bottling after almost nine years of oak aging. The wine is a bit more black fruity in personality and less spicy today than the '95, offering up a lovely and quite classic aromatic blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of blossoming eucalyptus, cigar wrapper, soil and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with superb focus and grip, lovely balance and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. The 1994 is a stronger Único than the very good 1995 and seems likely to be much longer lived as well. I really like the potential here! 2028-2100. **94.**

1991 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 1991 is one of the great, modern classic vintages of Único, and to my palate, this shares a level of potential up there with some of the greatest vintages of yesteryear at this great estate. Interestingly, this vintage of Único is composed entirely of tempranillo and cabernet sauvignon, like the 1990, with eighty-five percent of the first grape and fifteen percent of the second. It was aged first for its first two years in large vats, followed by a year in two-hundred and twenty-five liter, new barrels (almost exclusively American oak), and then spent years four, five in older barrels. It then was racked back into the two hundred and twenty hectoliter, old oak vats for another three years before it was bottled! The wine today is just edging into its plateau of maturity, where it will no doubt reside comfortably for at least the next fifty years, and offers up a superb aromatic constellation of red and black raspberries, a touch of blood orange, red plums, cloves, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil tones, a hint of bell pepper (as its cabernet component is starting to emerge), cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly complete, with a gorgeous core of fruit, blossoming soil signature, moderate tannins and great length and grip on the complex and tangy finish. I love the backend lift here and the near endless finish. It is still early days for the 1991 Único, but this is a great, great wine in the making. 2020-2100. **96+.**

1990 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 1990 vintage of Único is fully into its plateau of maturity and is drinking beautifully today and it will continue to gain in complexity as it ages further (if history is any guide!). The wine is quite different from more recent vintages of Único, as this wine includes fully twenty percent cabernet sauvignon in it this year, to go along with eighty percent tempranillo. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very complex blend of black plums, chocolate, a fleeting wisp of eucalyptus, a complex base of soil tones that are just starting to suggest autumnal shadings, a nice dollop of sweet bell pepper (from the higher percentage of cabernet sauvignon in the blend?), cigar smoke and a suave base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety, with a lovely core, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the poised and seamlessly balanced finish. This was a fascinating vintage to follow in the glass, as it started out very stylish, but a bit reserved in its expression of complexity (despite now being quite mature), but then proceeded to blossom markedly over fifteen or twenty minutes in the glass and ultimately showed itself to be a complete and quite excellent vintage of Único. 2020-2070. **94+.**



1989 Vega Sicilia Único

The 1989 Único is a classic bottle in the making, but as is typical of this flagship wine from Vega Sicilia, it is still a tad youthful at age twenty-eight and could still do with several more years in the cellar to fully blossom. The promising and refined bouquet offers up scents of plums, black cherries, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, blood orange, a lovely base of soil and a touch of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, still a fair bit of moderate tannins and a long, very well-balanced and classy finish. 2020-2075. **95+**.

1987 Vega Sicilia “Único” (served from magnum)

The 1987 vintage of Único is a riper, more powerful year for the wine, but with still its excellent chassis of acidity and soil drive harnessing the fruit beautifully and offering the promise of great drinkability for decades to come. This is one of the throwback vintages of Único, as the blend still included a five percent dollop of merlot and malbec to augment the other components of eighty percent tempranillo and fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon. I did not have a chance to look at the octane level on the 1987, but I would guess that it is just over fourteen percent in this vintage. Out of magnum, the wine is still a tad on the youthful side at the present time, offering up scents of black raspberries, pipe tobacco, a touch of tariness, a superb base of soil tones, just a whisper of bell pepper, lovely spice tones and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a fine sense of gentle reserve (again, out of magnum), lovely focus and grip, moderate tannins and a very, very long, complex and gently

warm finish. I scored this a couple points down for its touch of backend heat, but that may just be a passing phase (or more apparent in this eighteen vintage vertical!) and it is entirely possible that tasted on its own, I would not even notice this aspect of the wine and it would merit those extra couple of points. 2020-2065. **93.**

1985 Vega Sicilia “Único”

I remember well selling (and drinking) the 1986 Único when it was first released back in the 1990s, but I had somehow missed the 1985 vintage. This wine was included generously by John Chapmen at our New York tasting, as an “addition” to be tasted blind after we had worked through our lineup of known vintages, and it was excellent. The *cépages* of the 1985 included no albillo, but was otherwise pretty much a classic blend for this era: seventy percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and the remaining ten percent split between merlot and malbec. It received one of the shorter *elevages* I have seen for a vintage of Único, as it spent its first year in the very large vats, followed by only eight months in new oak barrels and then two more years in casks of older oak. It was then blended and bottled, so it only spent four years in wood prior to bottling- quite short for Único! The wine is now nicely into its plateau of peak drinkability, but will continue to evolve and improve over the coming decades. It offers up a superb bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, dried eucalyptus, spiced meats, laurel, cloves and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core of pure fruit, moderate, buried tannins and a long, poised, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This is a stellar vintage of Único. 2020-2075+. **95.**

1982 Vega Sicilia “Único”

It had been a long time since I drank a bottle of the 1982 Único, and I was very much looking forward to this wine, as my past bottles have been utterly brilliant. This particular bottle was quite good, but seemed to me to be just a touch oxidative and advanced from my memories of this wine. The bouquet is certainly complex, offering up notes of plums, cherries, cigar smoke, chocolaty tones, a lovely base of soil, Vega spice elements, new oak and a lactic or oxidative topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and velvety, with a good core, lovely focus and grip, melted tannins and fine length, but that same gentle note of oxidation popping out on the finish. I remember this wine being absolutely brilliant, so I have to believe that this bottle was just a touch unrepresentative. It was still a good, 89 point bottle of wine, but there are even better examples out there, if my memory does not deceive me. ???

1981 Vega Sicilia “Único” (served from magnum)

I have probably drunk more bottles of the 1981 Único than any other vintage of this wine, and I have absolutely loved this year since it was first released in the mid-1990s. This year saw a classic blending style of a fully ripe vintage of Único, as the *cépages* is sixty-five percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and fifteen percent of a mix of merlot and malbec. The *elevage* of the 1981 was rather unique at the time for Único, as it was raised for its first eighteen months all in new, French oak casks of two hundred and twenty-five liters. It was then racked into older barrels of the same size (both French and American oak for these) for seven more years of aging (with progressively older barrels used after each yearly racking) prior to final blending and bottling. It never spent any time in those large, old oak vats! The wine has shown brilliant potential since it was first unveiled to the world and out of magnum today, it is pure magic and still a tad on the youthful side, with room to grow with even further bottle age! The celestial bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, blood orange, cigar smoke, beautiful Vega spice tones, eucalyptus, a marvelous base of soil, pipe tobacco and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with a plush

core of fruit, excellent soil signature, zesty acids, outstanding complexity and still some backend tannins buried in the very, very long and pure finish. This is an utterly brilliant vintage of Único that was at its zenith the last time I had it out of regular bottle, but which still deserves another five years of patience out of magnum. 2025-2100+. **96+**.

1981 Vega Sicilia “Único”

I have included my note on the 1981 Único out of regular bottle as well, as we were fortunate enough to have this vintage in our New York lineup. To my palate, there is no qualitative difference between the regular bottles and the magnums of 1981, but not surprisingly, the bottle is a few years ahead of the curve in terms of evolution and is now drinking gorgeously today. The bouquet is pure, precise and shows off marvelous depth in its constellation of plums, black cherries, sweet bell pepper, pipe tobacco, lavender, mocha, cigar ash, new oak and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate, the regular-sized bottles are now beautifully into their apogee, offering up a full-bodied and impeccably balanced format, with a plush core of fruit, beautiful soil signature, moderate, suave tannins and a great long, tangy and very complex finish. Just a magical vintage of Único that is now entering into its peak in bottle, but will still continue to evolve and perhaps even improve a hair more with further bottle age. 2020-2100. **96+**.

1980 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 1980 is not a major vintage for Vega Sicilia, but the wine is still beautifully complex and drinking with great style at the present time. It was obviously a cooler vintage at Vega and the wine is still quite black fruity in personality, offering up a complex bouquet of cassis, dark berries, fresh nutmeg, sweet pipe tobacco, chocolate, a fine base of soil, American oak and a discreet topnote of blood orange. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a very respectable core, melting tannins and a long, complex, tangy and very nicely balanced finish. The 1980 was one of the last vintages of Único to include albillo in the blend, as the *cépages* here is sixty percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon, ten percent merlot and ten percent split between malbec and albillo. It has a fairly short *elevage* by the standards of Único, as it spent its first year in those large vats, followed by eight months in all new, French casks, and then an additional five years in barrel in progressively older casks. This does not have the power of a legendary vintage of Único, but it is a very refined bottle that is drinking at its apogee today and delivers plenty of satisfaction. 2020-2050+. **93**.

1979 Vega Sicilia “Único”

I had not drunk a bottle of the 1979 Único in a long, long time, so I was delighted to find this wine at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability at our vertical tasting and holding its own in a flight with a pair of “heavyweight” vintages at the estate: 1975 and 1970. This may well be the last vintage of Único to include a touch of white wine grapes in its *cépages*, as the blend in 1979 was sixty percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and the balance made up of merlot, malbec and albillo. The wine today has entered that beautiful spice phase of Único, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of black plums, cassis, cigar ash, a very complex base of soil tones, a hint of chipotles, pipe tobacco, new oak and a gorgeous array of sandalwood and nutmeg-like spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and *à point*, with a lovely core of fruit, superb complexity and grip and a long, melted tannin, tangy and superbly focused finish. This is not a great vintage for Único, but it is most assuredly a superb bottle of wine today! 2020-2040+. **94**.

1975 Vega Sicilia “Único”

I have always loved the 1975 vintage of Único, but it is a wine that I have not drunk very often over the long trail of years and was absolutely thrilled to see it as part of our vertical tasting

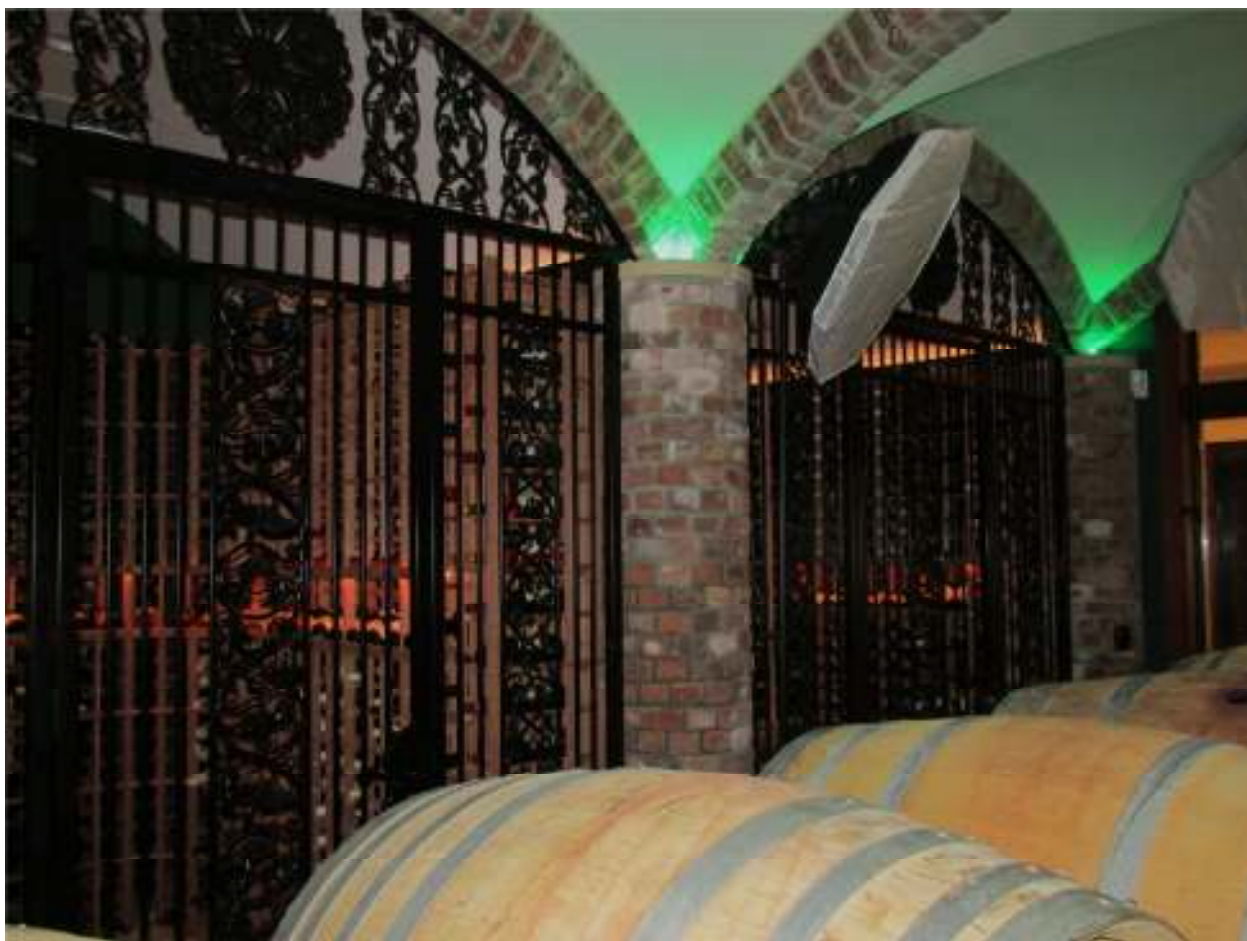
in Houston. The blend of the 1975 again includes a touch of albillo in its array of seventy percent tempranillo, fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon, ten percent merlot and that remaining five percent split between malbec and albillo. The wine is now at its apogee of peak drinkability, soaring from the glass in a very complex blend of plums, black cherries, just a hint of the red fruit to come with even further aging, cigar wrapper, exotic spice tones, chocolate, a fine base of soil and a seamless framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is very deep, very pure and full-bodied, with still a bit of moderate tannin perking up the finish, a bottomless core of fruit, tangy acids and impeccable focus and grip on the long, complex and suavely balanced finish. This is a great vintage of Único that is at its peak, but still has decades and decades of life ahead of it. 2020-2060. **96.**

1973 Vega Sicilia “Único”

I had not drunk a bottle of the 1973 Vega Sicilia in many, many years, but this was a vintage that I used to cross paths with once in a while in the decade of the 1990s and always enjoyed it. It is not a great, legendary vintage of Único, but a very good one, that is now fully at its zenith and drinking with both generosity and refined elegance. The wine is composed in this vintage of a blend of sixty percent Tempranillo, twenty-five percent Cabernet Sauvignon and the final fifteen percent a mix of Malbec, Merlot and Albillo. This wine spent its first year of *elevage* in large vats, followed by thirteen months in new American oak casks, and then racked to older small barrels for the remainder of its oak aging, which lasted until it was assembled and bottled in April of 1984! The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of red and black raspberries, blood orange, cigar wrapper, cloves, mocha, a good base of soil and a lovely framing of American oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with still a whisper of backend tannin, lovely focus and grip, fine depth at the core and a long, complex and tangy finish of fine lift and lingering refinement. Just a beautiful wine. 2020-2055. **93.**

1970 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 1970 vintage of Único was one of the longest-held vintages in the cellar at the estate in modern times, as this wine was first released in the late 1990s and was long considered by former Cellar Master, Mariano García, as one of his greatest vintages ever of Único. There was no albillo included in the *cépages* of the 1970, as the final blend was seventy percent tempranillo, fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon, ten percent merlot and five percent malbec. It spent its first five years in twenty-two thousand liter large vats, but these were of French oak origin, followed by another five year stretch in used barrels prior to bottling. It was then given another sixteen years of aging in bottle before it was finally released! The wine is brilliant and still relatively youthful in its aromatic constellation of black plums, cassis, a touch of youthful tariness, a very complex base of soil tones, cigar smoke, incipient notes of the wide array of spices to come with further bottle age and a lovely framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely rock solid at the core, with great focus and grip, seamless balance and a long, ripely tannic and amazingly, still fairly youthful finish. It is not that this wine is not eminently drinkable today, but when one realizes the almost timeless potential longevity of the very top vintages of Único, it becomes apparent that even though the 1970 is nearly fifty years of age, it remains still a fairly youthful wine and will be even better than it is today with further bottle aging! It is more elegant in personality than the 1968 (at least today) and is just a hair more evolved; it belongs in the same rarefied class as the 1968 and is one of the greatest vintages of this wine ever produced in the long history of the estate. Just an amazing vintage of Único. 2020-2080+. **98+.**



These are not the cellars at Vega Sicilia, but a few of the “lockers” at Vin de Garde wine storage in Houston!

1968 Vega Sicilia “Único”

1968 was the first vintage of Único that I had ever seen held back fully twenty years before it was released into the market and it long had a rumored existence of being one of the greatest wines ever produced at Vega Sicilia, many years before it was finally released. The *cépages* of the 1968 is seventy percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and ten percent a mix of merlot, malbec and albillo. It spent the first five years of its *elevage* in the very large, two hundred and twenty hectoliter vats and then the next six years in small barrels, all of them used and all of them American oak, so the legendary 1968 never saw any new oak during its long time in vat and cask! This bottle of the 1968 in Houston was pure perfection, soaring from the glass in a very deep, pure and complex blend of plums, black cherries, a touch of desiccated black fruit, sweet balsamic tones, chocolate, a complex base of soil, pipe tobacco, a hint of nuttiness and a lovely framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and even a bit more powerful at the core than the 1970, but with the same impeccable balance and grip, still a bit of modest tannin, tangy acids and great focus on the long, complex and simply stunning finish. I should note that we had this vintage again at our New York event in February, where we did not give it quite as much time in decanter, and the wine was still hunkered down and slightly closed, so make sure to treat the 1968 to plenty of aeration (two hours or more) prior to serving it, if you are interested in drinking it today! A legendary vintage of Vega, the 1968

delivers all of the promise that it was long rumored to possess before the wine was finally released at twenty years of age. 2020-2075. **100.**

1967 Vega Sicilia “Único”

1967 was a great year for the Beatles, but only a good year for Vega Sicilia, and it is not too surprising that the 1967 Único has been overlooked in the long shadow cast by the magical 1968. However, this wine showed beautifully at our vertical and exceeded expectations. The blend this year was eighty percent tempranillo, ten percent cabernet sauvignon and the final ten percent a balance of merlot, malbec and albillo. The wine is now fully mature (and probably has been for thirty years), offering up a bright and tertiary blend of dried black fruit, cigar ash, discreet tariness, dried eucalyptus, a touch of chipotle pepper, complex soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with fine focus and grip, melted tannins and a long, tangy and very classy finish. There is just a touch of angularity on the palate of the 1967 Único that suggests that the wine will start to slide down the far side of its plateau in the not too distant future, so it is probably best drunk up over the coming fifteen years or so in regular-sized bottle, as the fruit will eventually fade and leave only the chassis of the wine. But for the moment, there is still a lot of pleasure to be had here. 2020-2035. **92.**

1965 Vega Sicilia “Único”

Our tasting in New York was the first time I had ever tasted the 1965 vintage of Único and I very much enjoyed the wine. This is another of the “very good, but not great” years for Único, but the wine is still drinking beautifully. The bouquet delivers an *à point* blend of sweet dark berries, bitter chocolate, game, dried eucalyptus, a fine base of soil, cigar ash and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and at its peak today, with fine mid-palate depth, melted tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and wide open and generous finish. A lovely bottle for current drinking, but not an iconic vintage of Único. 2020-2040+. **91.**

1964 Vega Sicilia “Único”

This was the first time I had ever tasted the legendary 1964 Único, which prior to the release of the 1968, was probably considered one of the greatest years ever produced here. Our bottles in Houston showed brilliantly well and certainly underscored just how great this year is at Vega Sicilia. The wine is at its absolute apogee today, soaring from the glass in a brilliant constellation of dried plums and black cherries, coffee, eucalyptus, cigar smoke, a glorious base of soil tones, oak and those signature Único spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, plush, full-bodied and velvety, with a great core of fruit, marvelous soil signature, melted tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. The *cépages* of the '64 is sixty-five percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and the balance a blend of merlot, malbec and albillo. This vintage of Único has everything one could ever ask for and is at its pinnacle of peak drinkability. 2020-2050. **98.**

1962 Vega Sicilia “Único”

There is often a correlation of great vintages between Único and Rioja, and this was the case with the 1962 vintage, which is a great year here. We had this at our tasting in New York and it was one of the stars of the evening and had no difficulty following up the flight of the 1970 and 1968, which gives you some idea of just how beautiful the 1962 Único is today! The gorgeous and very expressive bouquet soars from the glass in a mix of red plums, black cherries, fresh nutmeg, cloves, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of blood orange, pipe tobacco and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, superb focus and balance, very good backend lift and a very, very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice. 2020-2050+. **95.**

1959 Vega Sicilia “Único”

As brilliant as the 1962 showed at our tasting in New York, the 1959, which came in the next flight, nosed it out by just a length. This is a great, great vintage of Único and it is drinking at its peak today, but probably still has at least another fifty years of profound drinking ahead of it! The celestial bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of desiccated black cherries and plums, lavender, raw cocoa, fresh nutmeg, sweet pipe tobacco, spiced meats, a hint of bell pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and at its apogee, with plenty of depth, a suave, velvety attack and a very, very long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. This is a legendary vintage of Único that is now drinking in all of its blazing glory, as more than sixty years of age! 2020-2070. **98.**

1953 Vega Sicilia “Único”

Before our tasting in Houston, I had never drunk Único from the decade of the 1950s or earlier, and this 1953 was so gorgeous that I am going to definitely have to put more older vintages of Vega Sicilia on my bucket list! The 1953 Único firmly underscores just how timeless these old wines can be, as this wine remains at its apogee and drinking with great breed and complexity at sixty-six years of age, offering up a beautiful, mature and very complex bouquet of dried black fruit, cigar ash, dried eucalyptus, pipe tobacco, a nice touch of meatiness, cloves, chipotles, complex soil elements and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still beautifully tangy, with a lovely core, stunning complexity and soil signature and a very, very long, suave and utterly refined finish. Though this wine has been fully mature for decades, it retains a seamless, impeccable sense of balance and still has plenty of life ahead of it. Gorgeous juice! 2020-2040+. **95.**

1948 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 1948 Único is another stunning old bottle from Vega Sicilia, and though it is more than seventy years of age, it is not an historical relic, but a living, breathing and utterly beautiful bottle of wine that continues to cruise along in its plateau and seemingly untouchable by time’s passage. The bouquet is tertiary, but still vibrant and very deep, wafting from the glass in a beautiful array of dried black fruit, a potpourri of Vega spices, cigar ash, chipotles, dark soil, dried lavender, chicory, hung game, gentle smokiness and a passing touch of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still at its peak, with a lovely core, great soil signature, melted tannins, a fine girdle of well-integrated acidity and superb length and grip on the very, very elegant finish. The world was a far, far different place in 1948 than it is today, but Único has not changed! 2020-2040+. **95.**

1941 Vega Sicilia “Único”

The 1941 vintage of Único was the oldest wine in our tasting in New York, and as I had experienced the timeless beauty of the 1939 in Houston only a couple of months earlier, I was probably one of the few people at the table who was prepared for just how gorgeous and vibrant the 1941 would be. I have no idea when the estate might have made the 1941 available for sale, but I have to imagine that this wine was probably not made available until sometime after the mid-1950s. Today, as it too closes in on its eightieth birthday, its depth and vibrancy is quite remarkable, as the wine offers up a stunning bouquet of cassis, fresh fig, lavender, pipe tobacco, dried eucalyptus, a beautiful base of soil and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still possesses wonderful depth in the mid-palate, with melted tannins, superb focus and grip, and a very, very long, very complex and gorgeous finish. Simply stunning. 2020-2050+. **95.**

1939 Vega Sicilia “Único”

Surely at eighty years of age we would start to witness at least a modicum of decline in Único? Not a chance! This is an utterly brilliant wine that continues to drink without any signs of imminent decline, offering up a stunning aromatic constellation of lavender, cloves, desiccated red fruit, dried eucalyptus, a hint of blood orange, pipe tobacco, discreetly autumnal soil tones and spiced meats. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still perfectly balanced, with a sweet core of fruit, tangy acids and great focus and grip on the very, very long, very complex and utterly dazzling finish. Often, with wines of this age, one has to appreciate its historical value and be content with a fading picture of its one magical glories, but the 1939 Único remains a wine in full bloom at eighty years of age, with vigor, purity and stunning complexity. Surely one day the sand will run out of the hourglass for the 1939 Vega, but not any time soon! Not only was it a great, great pleasure to drink the 1939 Único, but it was an honor. 2020-2040+. 96.



Vega Sicilia Único Reserva Especial

Vega Sicilia Único “Reserva Especial” (blend of 1968, 1970 and 1972 vintages)

This has long been one of the fabled versions of Reserva Especial from Vega Sicilia, but I had not tasted the wine in more than twenty years, so I was thrilled to see a friend unpacking a bottle during his visit in Burgundy in November of last year. The wine is drinking brilliantly today, having transitioned into a distinguished and very complex state of maturity. The bouquet is beautiful, offering up a tertiary blend of dried black cherries, a touch of blood orange, sweet walnuts, a bit of road tar, cigar ash, dark soil and a lovely touch of wood from the ancient oak

barrels the wine spent so many years aging in. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety, with a lovely core, still a touch of tannin remaining on the backend and superb focus and grip on the very, very long, very pure and complex finish. This was the 1983 release of Reserva Especial and it is a glorious bottle of Vega! 2018-2045. **95.**

RECENTLY-TASTED OLD SCHOOL AND NEO-CLASSICAL AMERICAN WINES



The beautiful, biodynamically-farmed Momtazi Vineyard in Oregon, under gorgeous late afternoon light.

My bi-annual report on Old School and Neo-Classical American wines includes many of my old favorites, as well as some new estates to me this time around. Amongst the newer producers to me is Marcus Goodfellow of Goodfellow Family Cellars in McMinnville, Oregon. I had tasted a few of Marcus' wines previously, but for this report, he generously sent me several different vintages of his top, single vineyard bottlings of both chardonnay and pinot noir (and one very good syrah as well) and I was very impressed by everything that I tasted. I had heard good things about his wines previously, but did not have time to visit the winery on my trip out to the Willamette Valley a couple of summers ago and was very, very happy that he reached out to me and sent along such a comprehensive lineup of his top wines! I also received a broad lineup of wines from one of his neighbors, the St. Innocent Winery in Jefferson, Oregon. Proprietor Mark Vlossak had sent me a case of samples of his wines before I left for Burgundy at the end of October and I had been itching to pull corks and discover his recent efforts, as I had not tasted any wines from his estate in many, many years. Once again, I was very pleased with what I tasted, and I apologize now to Mark, as one of the wines he sent me was corked, but as I opened it only a day or two before sending out the new issue, I did not have the time to reach out

to him to send a replacement bottle. A third new winery to me that appears in the pages that follow is Blue Rock Vineyard in the Anderson Valley of Sonoma County. The estate produces primarily Bordeaux varietal wines and though, a couple were on the threshold of a bit too high in octane for my comfort zone, none were out of balance and were quite promising wines. I do not know if the vintages that I tasted were from hotter years (every year is a hotter year it seems in the age of global warming), but the wines have depth, complexity and a certain sense of old school sensibilities that I found quite appealing.

I anticipate that I will write another feature on American wines in the next few months, as I normally receive a lot of new releases in the mid-to-late spring. However, with all of the global uncertainties surrounding the coronavirus epidemic, I do not know if the release of new vintages from many of my favorite estates in the US will be impacted by the growing crisis. In any event, I am happy to be able to present a truly fine roster of recent releases in the pages that follow. Readers will see that some of my favorite producers are covered below, including Brianne Day in Oregon, who kindly sent me a wide range of recent releases of her beautiful and cellar-worthy wines, after we had exchanged emails after the last feature I wrote on American wines, where I lamented that her wines were selling so well with her New York distributor that I had only received one wine of hers in their range of samples (having sold through everything else prior to my requesting samples!), and I was very happy to be able to share a wide range of notes on her superb wines from the 2018, 2017 and 2016 vintages. I also received, just a week before releasing this issue, the 2018 releases from Jamie Kutch on the Sonoma Coast, and the wines were, once again, across the board stellar. A few of the single vineyard pinots from Jamie in 2018 are a bit deeper and more structured than the last few vintages and will demand some quiet time in the cellar before opening, but all are very, very good and at the accustomed level of excellence we have come to expect from Kutch Wines in only a handful of vintages!

The notes that follow also include the releases from both the 2018 and 2017 vintage from Halcón Vineyards in the Yorkville Highlands section of Mendocino County. The Yorkville Highlands is one of the coolest wine-growing regions in California and proprietors Paul and Jackie Gordon are making absolutely stunning wines from their vineyards here. They are principally specializing in Rhône varietals and make some of the best examples I have tasted of syrah in the US (certainly up in the same league with Steve Edmunds and following his model for classically structured and ageworthy syrah), as well as some stellar blends that include grenache, mourvèdre, and also a very good bottling of pinot noir. The Gordons do not make a lot of wine, but to my palate, they are one of the rising stars in American wine and if you happen to appreciate great syrah, done in the classic style of stem inclusion made famous by folks like Noël Verset and his generation of artisans in the northern Rhône, then you should definitely track down some of the current releases from Halcón Vineyards! There are plenty more outstanding bottles covered below, including new releases from Samantha Sheehan's Poe Wines, Derek Rohlffs' fine Bravium Wines, new releases from Santa Barbara classicist, Morgan Wines (again, truly stunning syrah bottlings included in their current lineup), as well as new releases from icons such as Cathy Corison and Terry and Frances Leighton of Kalin Cellars.

Sparkling Wine

2014 Blanc de Blancs Brut Vintage- Poe Wines (Mendocino Ridge)

This is Samantha Sheehan's first sparkling wine from her Poe Wines label. The fruit for her 2014 Blanc de Blancs hails from the Manchester Ridge Vineyard in Mendocino. The wine was fermented with indigenous yeasts in older casks and aged fully sixteen months in barrel, prior to blending and bottling for secondary fermentation. It spent three and a half years aging *sur latte* and was disgorged in April of 2019. The wine offers up a complex and very refined bouquet of pear, apple, fresh almond, brioche, a nice touch of soil and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a good core, fine mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is starting to drink nicely, but clearly will blossom further with some time in the cellar and should age very nicely indeed. A very, very impressive first vintage of bubbly! 2020-2045. **91+**.

Chardonnay

2018 Chardonnay "Anderson Valley"- Bravium Wines (Mendocino County)

The 2018 Anderson Valley bottling of Chardonnay from Derek Rohlffs is a lovely bottle, offering up a ripe and wide open bouquet of apple, pineapple, salty soil tones, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a good core of fruit, fine balance and grip and a long, new oaky finish. This shows its new oak component a bit more on the backend of the palate than the nose suggests, but it is a good, solid example of chardonnay for drinking over the next few years. 2020-2025. **88**.

2018 Chardonnay "Russian River Valley"- Bravium Wines (Sonoma County)

The 2018 Russian River Valley Chardonnay from Bravium is a touch more aromatically complex than the Anderson Valley version, offering up a lovely nose of pear, apple, fruit blossoms, a lovely base of soil and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the ripe and bouncy finish. This comes in listed at the same 14.1 percent as the above, but my gut feeling is that it is just a touch riper. Good juice. 2020-2028. **89**.

2018 Chardonnay "Sonoma Coast"- Kutch Wines

Jamie Kutch's Sonoma Coast bottling of chardonnay all hails from the Bohan Vineyard, with the vines having been planted in 1972. It is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in twenty percent new oak, with the 2018 version coming in at 13.4 percent octane. It offers up a lovely bouquet of pear, golden delicious apple, a hint of almond, complex soil tones, white lilies and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the vibrant finish. This will age very nicely and it would be a shame to drink too many bottles in the blush of youth, as there are more layers of complexity to unfold here! 2020-2035. **92+**.

2018 Chardonnay "Trout Gulch Vineyard"- Kutch Wines (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2018 Trout Gulch Vineyard chardonnay cuvée from Jamie Kutch is also made from old vines, as this vineyard was planted in 1977. Like the Sonoma Coast, it is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and was raised in twenty percent new oak and also tips the scales at 13.4 percent alcohol. It spent one year in cask and then was racked to stainless steel tanks for six months finishing prior to bottling. The bouquet here is a refined blend of apple, white peach, lovely minerality, a touch of orange peel and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows lovely backend mineral drive, with a good core of fruit, fine

focus and balance and a long, zesty and complex finish. This too will age long and gracefully. 2020-2035. **93.**

2018 “Metallico” Un-Oaked Chardonnay- Morgan Winery (Monterey) screwcap

The 2018 Metallico Chardonnay from Morgan comes in at 13.5 percent octane and did not undergo malolactic fermentation. As the name implies, it is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling and the 2018 offers up a bright and classy nose of white peach, apple, spring flowers, lemon blossoms and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and quite elegant on the attack, with a good core of fruit, sound acids and focus on the long and zesty finish. I know that the closure choice works beautifully for the marketing folks here, coupling nicely with the name of the cuvée, but I get the sense that the wine is already starting to get just a touch clipped on the backend from the screwcap and there might well be more lift and bounce here if it were sealed under natural cork in future vintages. But, other than the slight impingement of the closure on the finish of the wine, there is a lot to like here. But, drink it up quickly, as the screwcap might get more problematic with further bottle age. 2020-2022+? **89.**

2018 Chardonnay “Manchester Ridge Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Mendocino Ridge)

Sam Sheehan’s 2018 Manchester Ridge bottling of chardonnay is nicely ripe at 13.6 percent octane, but still bright and zesty on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of pear, quince, salty soil tones, corn flowers, citrus zest and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, bouncy acids and lovely length and grip on the primary, but quite promising finish. Though this is certainly drinkable today, I would opt to give it a few years in the cellar and let its secondary layering of complexity emerge. 2023-2035. **91.**

2018 Chardonnay “Ferrington Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Anderson Valley)

The 2018 Ferrington Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Poe is a tad less ripe than the Manchester Ridge version, tipping the scales at a very civilized thirteen percent octane and delivering a fine aromatic constellation of pink grapefruit, pear, a touch of *fleur de sel*, orange zest, lovely minerality, dried flowers and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, primary and full, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip, a good core and lovely soil signature popping out on the long and classy finish. This too needs some time in the cellar to blossom, but it will be a fine glass of chardonnay and due course. 2023-2035. **92.**

2017 Chardonnay “Dundee Hills”- Goodfellow (Willamette Valley)

The fruit for the Dundee Hills bottling of chardonnay from Marcus Goodfellow all hails from the Durant Vineyard. The wine is excellent aromatically, wafting from the glass in a complex and slightly reductive blend of pear, apple, almond, iodine, a good base of soil and a well done framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and youthfully closed, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and fine balance on the long and vibrant finish. This is perfectly drinkable today, if one decants it a bit and unlocks the reduction, but it is built to age and will be an even better drink with some bottle age. 2020-2035. **90+.**

2017 Chardonnay “Durant Vineyard”- Goodfellow (Dundee Hills)

The Goodfellow chardonnay bottling labeled as Durant Vineyard hails from two blocks of vines in the vineyard, planted in 1993 and 1998. The 2017 version comes in at a very civilized 13.2 percent octane and again, is a bit reductive out of the blocks, but with swirling, reveals a fine bouquet of pear, golden delicious apple, hazelnut, a touch of iodine, lovely soil tones, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile,

with a lovely core of fruit, good transparency and bounce, bright acids and a long, balanced and complex finish. This is really lovely juice. 2022-2035+. **92.**

2017 Chardonnay “Richard’s Cuvée” Whistling Ridge Vineyard- Goodfellow

The Whistling Ridge Vineyard lies in the Ribbon Ridge AVA. It was first planted in 1990 (with these chardonnay vines going in the ground in 1995) and has a southeasterly exposition and sits high up on its ridge top, with cooling breezes coming in every afternoon and evening. The 2017 Richard’s Cuvée bottling reflects this cooler microclimate, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a lovely and quite floral bouquet of white peach, pear, fresh almond, lovely soil tones, white lilies and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very elegant in profile, with fine soil signature, a good core of fruit, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is lovely. 2020-2040. **92+.**

2017 Chardonnay “Double L Vineyard”- Morgan Winery (Santa Lucia Highlands)

The 2017 “Double L Vineyard” bottling of Chardonnay from Morgan was raised in twenty-four percent new oak and comes in at 14.1 percent octane. Thirty percent of the blend did not go through malo. The wine delivers lovely aromatic complexity in its blend of apple, pear, a hint of fresh almond, acacia blossoms, a beautiful base of Monterey soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a good core of fruit, a nice touch of soil and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is really a lovely bottle of chardonnay. 2020-2025+. **92.**

2017 Chardonnay “Freedom Hill Vineyard”- St. Innocent Winery (Willamette Valley)

The Freedom Hill Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from St. Innocent is produced entirely from Dijon clones, with the 2017 version coming in at 13.5 percent octane. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised entirely in used casks for eleven months prior to bottling. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of apple, pear, almond, fruit blossoms and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, bright acids and lovely balance and grip on the long and classy finish. I like this wine very much, as it reminds me stylistically quite a bit of the Oregon chardonnays I drank from the vintages of the late-1980s, when many of today’s legends were cutting their teeth in the region. 2020-2030+. **91+.**

2017 Chardonnay “Manchester Ridge Vineyard”- Trail Marker Wine Co. (Mendo. Ridge)

The 2017 Manchester Ridge Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Trail Marker comes in at a cool 12.7 percent alcohol and offers up a refined bouquet of white peach, almond, white flowers, a lovely base of soil tones, paraffin and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and vibrant, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature and a long, complex and well-balanced finish that closes with a nice touch of beeswax. Good juice. 2020-2028. **90.**

2017 Chardonnay “Chapel Vineyard”- Trail Marker Wine Co. (Santa Cruz Mountains)

Trail Marker’s 2017 Chapel Vineyard bottling of chardonnay also tips the scales at a very civilized 12.7 percent octane. The vineyard sits at eight hundred foot elevation, near the Pacific, and the wine here sees no new oak during its *elevage*. The 2017 Chapel Vineyard offers up a fine aromatic constellation of pear, apple, fruit blossoms, chalky soil tones, a hint of vanillin oak and a topnote of raw almond. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine backend mineral drive, bright acids and excellent grip on the long and complex finish. Where the Manchester Ridge bottling is suave from start to finish, this wine kicks it into another gear on the backend and is really excellent this year! 2020-2030+. **92.**

2017 Chardonnay “Quink Vineyard”- Trail Marker Wine Co. (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The Quink Vineyard chardonnay from Trail Marker is made entirely from Mount Eden clones, and is new in the winery’s range of offerings in 2017. The wine is just a whisper riper than the Chapel Vineyard bottling, coming in at 12.8 percent this year. It delivers a fine young nose of apple, pear, white soil tones, beeswax, gentle notes of acacia blossoms and a very delicate touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegant on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit and soil signature, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This too has lovely potential, and it is the one chardonnay from Trail Marker in this vintage that I would opt to tuck away for at least a couple of years prior to starting to drink it, as this wine should blossom beautifully with only a short time in the cellar. 2022-2030+. 92.



2016 Chardonnay “Belle Pente Vineyard”- Day Wines (Yamhill-Carlton)

Belle Pente Vineyard is one of the star growers in the Willamette Valley (as well as a great winery) and the 2016 chardonnay made from fruit here by Brianne Day is really lovely. Brianne raises this wine in a new oak, five hundred liter *puncheon* and four older Burgundy casks, so this sees very little new wood, and she does not rush the *elevage*, as this wine spends more than a year and a half in barrel before bottling. The 2016 version comes in at a very civilized 12.75 percent octane and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of pear, a hint of passion fruit, salty soil tones, dried flowers, fresh almond and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the

palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully understated in personality, with a great core of fruit, fine soil signature, zesty acids and great backend lift and grip on the long and complex finish. This is really good chardonnay that is only going to get better as it blossoms with more bottle age! 2020-2030+. **92+**.

2016 Chardonnay “Durant Vineyard”- Goodfellow (Dundee Hills)

The 2016 Durant Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Marcus Goodfellow is just a touch lower in octane than the 2017 version (thirteen versus 13.2 percent) and equally refined, but without the touch of youthful reduction that the 2017 version currently displays. The bouquet is very precise and classy, wafting from the glass in a mix of lemon, apple, complex soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and tightly-knit, with a fine core, excellent transparency and bounce and a long, complex and vibrant finish. First class juice! 2020-2035+. **93**.

2016 Chardonnay “Richard’s Chardonnay” Whistling Ridge Vineyard- Goodfellow

The 2016 Richard’s Chardonnay bottling from Goodfellow Family Cellars is just starting to blossom and shows off a fine aromatic blend of pear, apple, almond, a fine base of soil, dried flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and a touch less open today than the Durant Vineyard bottling from 2016, but with a fine core, a lovely girdle of acidity and impressive length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. I would opt for still tucking this away in the cellar for a couple more years and let it fully blossom, as it will be lovely in due course. 2022-2035. **92**.

2015 Chardonnay “Richard’s Chardonnay” Whistling Ridge Vineyard- Goodfellow

The 2015 version of Richard’s Chardonnay is a touch riper than either the 2016 or 2017 examples, as this warm vintage produced a chardonnay here at 13.6 percent octane. Like the other vintages of this cuvée that I tasted, the wine was aged for twenty-two months in French casks prior to bottling. The 2015 seems to still have a touch of its youthful reduction lurking, with the nose offering up scents of apple, pear, iodine, white flowers, pretty soil tones and a nice touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, but still a bit bound up in its reduction, with a good core, fine soil signature, zesty acids and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. It will need more time to open up on the palate, but the backend lift and energy here are very good and this should be a very tasty bottle, once it has blossomed. 2023-2035. **91+**.

1996 Chardonnay “Cuvée W”- Kalin Cellars (Livermore Valley)

The new release of Kalin Cellars Cuvée W chardonnay comes in at 13.9 percent octane and offers up a beautifully mature and complex bouquet of fresh apricot, honeyed apples, tangerine, toasted almonds, salty soil tones, brown butter and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and zesty, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature and superb length and grip on the precise, complex and very classy finish. The octane does show just a bit on the backend, as there is a whisper of warmth, but I can forgive it this in the face of the climate change we have been living in the face of since the late 1980s. I would’ve loved to have seen this wine at 13.2 or 13.3 percent, but it was not to be in 1996, and these old Wente Clones have still turned out a superb wine even at their higher octane level. 2020-2035. **92**.

Chenin Blanc

2018 Chenin Blanc- Beau Rivage (Clarksburg)

William Kelley's 2018 Beau Rivage Chenin Blanc is even a touch cooler than his lovely 2017 version, as this year the wine comes in at a svelte 11.9 percent octane. Readers may recall that it is barrel-fermented and raised in older barrels for just under one year prior to bottling. The wine offers up a refined and promising nose of gooseberry, chalky soil tones, a touch of lanolin, white flowers, citrus peel and a touch of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, tight and medium-full, with lovely soil signature, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. Like all proper dry Chenins, this will need some bottle age to blossom from behind its girdle of acidity, but it will be a lovely wine when it opens up. 2023-2035+. **91.**

2017 Chenin Blanc- Beau Rivage (Clarksburg)

William very kindly sent me a bottle of the 2017 Beau Rivage along with the new release of the 2018, so that I could see how it was evolving a year out from the last time I tasted the wine. The wine is really starting to drink nicely with an extra year's worth of bottle age, offering up a complex bouquet of apple, quince, lanolin, chalky soil, dried flowers and a topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really starting to blossom, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright acids and a long, complex and zesty finish. Though this is only 12.1 percent octane, and quite similar to the 2018, it is a bigger-boned wine that delivers the same sense of breed and complexity with a bit more stuffing. Fine juice. 2020-2035. **92.**

Off the Beaten Path White Wines

2018 Baby Blue Blanc- Blue Rock Vineyard (Sonoma County)

The 2018 Baby Blue Blanc from Blue Rock Vineyard is composed of a blend of ninety-four percent sauvignon blanc and six percent viognier. The wine is quite ripe, coming in listed at 14.1 percent octane and seeming just a bit riper than that, as its bouquet offers up a blend of tangerine, lime peel, damp grass, honeysuckle, gentle vanillin oak and a bit of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with good cut and grip and just a whisper of heat poking out on the long and vibrant finish. This is very well-made, but I would love to see it just a touch lower in octane. 2020-2025. **88.**

2018 Vin de Days Blanc- Day Wines (Willamette Valley)

The *cépages* of the 2018 Vin de Days Blanc from Brianne Day is a bit different than last year, as the wine is composed of a blend of thirty-eight percent pinot blanc, twenty-three percent müller-thurgau, sixteen percent riesling, fourteen percent pinot gris and nine percent muscat. The wine comes in this year at 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely and complex bouquet of apple, fresh pineapple, gentle spice tones, a hint of fresh almond, white flowers and a lovely vein of minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and quite dry in personality, with a fine core and complexity, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is really good juice! 2020-2025. **90.**

2018 Queen D "Cowhorn Vineyard"- Day Wines (Applegate Valley)

Brianne Day's lovely 2018 Queen D bottling is a fifty-fifty blend of marsanne and roussanne and comes in at a cool twelve percent octane. The wine offers up a bright and complex nose of *mirabelle*, peach stone, wild fennel, coriander seed and a lovely base of white soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and complex, with a good core, sound, but moderate acids and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. There is just a whisper

of backend natural wine wildness here on the finish, but it adds personality. With its lower acidity, I would opt for drinking this in its relative youth. 2020-2023. **88.**

2018 Roussanne- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2018 Roussanne from Halcón Vineyards was produced from a section of syrah that the Gordons budded over to Roussanne the year before. With the vineyard still recovering, they only made a single barrel of this wine, which was picked on October 29th and comes in at a very cool 11.5 percent octane. It was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in an old oak cask. The wine offers up a fine and vibrant nose of tart peach, fresh apricot, white flowers, beeswax, salty soil tones and orange peel. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and soil-driven, with good acids and grip, fine intensity of flavor and plenty of personality on the long and complex finish. This does not taste at all like it is only 11.5 percent alcohol! 2020-2025+. **89.**

Rosé

2018 Hock & Deuce Rosé “Mae’s Vineyard”- Day Wines (Applegate Valley)

The 2018 Hock & Deuce Rosé from Brianne Day is composed of a blend of seventy-five percent syrah and twenty-five percent viognier. The wine is a pale salmon color and offers up a complex and quite unique bouquet of tart orange, cherry skin, spring flowers, turmeric, coriander seed, orange peel and white soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and complex, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, low octane and zesty finish. Good juice and probably the first Rosé I have ever tasted that is predominantly made from syrah. 2020-2025. **89.**



Syrah and Other Rhône Blends

2018 Monkey Jacket Red Wine Blend- Cruse Wine Co. (North Coast)

Michael Cruse is the man behind Ultramarine, California's currently most fashionable sparkling wine, and came to wine by listening to the thoughtful Terry Leighton speak. His Cruse Wine Co. focuses on more off the beaten path varieties, and his Monkey Jacket red is an esoteric blend of fifty-one percent Valdiguié, thirteen percent Carignan, ten percent Syrah, eight percent Pinot Noir and St. Laurent and the last eighteen percent, an unknown field blend. Twenty percent of the blend included whole clusters and the wine was raised in a variety of vessels, including cement tanks, stainless steel and old oak puncheons. The 2018 is 12.5 percent octane and offers up a lovely and complex bouquet of black cherries, lavender, woodsmoke, tree bark, dried eucalyptus and heather. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core and soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a bit youthfully chewy on the backend right now (though certainly quite drinkable), and may be even better with four or five years in the cellar. Fine juice and an utterly unique red wine! 2020-2040. **91.**

2018 Esquisto- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2018 vintage of Esquisto from Paul and Jackie Gordon at Halcón Vineyards is a slightly different blend than the last few years, as this year the *cépages* is sixty percent grenache and twenty percent each of mourvèdre and syrah. With the cool marine layer that defined May and June here, it was a cooler growing season and hang time was extended as a result, with a full fifty days from *veraison* to picking on the first of November. The wine comes in at 13.9 percent octane in 2018, includes forty percent whole clusters and offers up a fine young nose of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, roasted meats, a good base of soil, gentle stem tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, balanced and peppery, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. This reminds me of an old school style of Châteauneuf du Pape like Vieux Telegraphe. Fine juice in the making, but it will need some time in the cellar to soften up. 2028-2060. **92.**

2018 Syrah "Alturas"- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2018 Alturas bottling of Syrah from Halcón Vineyards includes four percent viognier in the cuvée this year, utilized fifty percent whole clusters and was raised entirely in used oak this year (for the first time). It comes in at a very civilized 13.4 percent alcohol and delivers gorgeous nascent complexity in its bouquet of cassis, smoked meats, pepper, lavender, woodsmoke, a nice dollop of youthful stem spice and a superb base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with an excellent core of fruit, firm, buried tannins and outstanding length and grip on the youthfully complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is a great bottle of young syrah, and if you are lamenting the end of Marcel Juge and the old school in the northern Rhône, here is a wine that will stop your grieving. 2028-2065. **93+.**

2018 Syrah "Elevación"- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2018 "Elevación" Syrah from Halcón Vineyards was picked on October 20th in this vintage and comes in at 13.3 percent octane. It was fermented with indigenous yeasts, includes one hundred percent whole clusters and was raised in older French oak puncheons. The wine offers up an absolutely classical bouquet of cassis, dark berries, pepper, grilled meats, a beautiful base of soil tones, a nice touch of youthful stems and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows off exceptional mid-palate depth, with fine focus and balance, ripe tannins and a long, complex finish that closes with good soil signature and

excellent grip. This is a superb wine in the making and will be a stellar bottle a decade down the road, but it deserves extended cellaring before broaching. 2030-2070. **93+**.

2017 Mourvèdre- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2017 Mourvèdre from Halcón Vineyards was produced only because the crop level was a touch more generous than last year, and as proprietors Paul and Jackie Gordon like to keep their Châteauneuf-styled blend, Esquisto to a maximum of twenty percent mourvèdre, there was a bit left over to bottle on its own. The wine includes fifty percent whole clusters, was raised in neutral oak and fermented, like all of the Halcón wines, with indigenous yeasts. It is low octane at 12.5 percent and offers up a pure and beautifully refined nose of dark berries, pepper, bonfire, a fine base of soil, coffee bean, hung game and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. I love the backend lift here! Fine, fine juice. 2024-2045+. **92+**.

2017 Petite Sirah “Tierra”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2017 Petite Sirah “Tierra” from Halcón Vineyards hails all from the cool Theopolis Vineyard, which bounced back nicely from the heat spike at the end of August in 2017 and the petite sirah here was picked on October 11th at an octane level of 13.9 percent. As was the case with the fine 2016 version, the 2017 included fifty percent whole clusters and was raised in a large, old oak *puncheon*. The wine delivers a fine and complex aromatic constellation of cassis, pepper, smoked meats, *garrigue*, black tea, a fine base of dark soil tones, a bit of youthful stems and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, chewy and complex finish. With a steak on the grill, this would already be a tasty dinner companion, but I would opt to give it some bottle age, to let the tannins soften up a bit more and for those stem tones to turn to exotic spices. First class petite sirah! 2026-2050. **92**.

2017 Syrah “Alturas”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2017 Syrah “Alturas” from Halcón Vineyards includes three percent viognier this year, and again saw fifty percent whole clusters utilized. The wine is low octane this year, coming in at 12.7 percent and offering up a complex nose of dark berries, lavender, smoked meats, pepper, sweet stems, a beautifully complex base of soil, just a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a good core, great transparency, ripe, well-integrated tannins, superb balance and grip and a very long, youthful and promising finish. This is going to age into a beautiful middleweight style of syrah that reminds me very much of some of those great Côte-Rôties from vintages such as 1979, 1985 and 1988. Very refined juice. 2027-2060. **92**.

2017 Syrah “Elevación”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2017 Elevación Syrah is only the second vintage of this new bottling from Paul and Jackie Gordon, which is made entirely from Chave clones, is entirely whole cluster and fermented with indigenous yeasts. The 2017, despite the heat spike at the end of August, comes in at a cool 12.8 percent alcohol and offers up a superb aromatic constellation of cassis, black raspberries, bonfire, dark soil tones, black olive, pepper and hung game. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and soil-driven, with a full-bodied format, rock solid core, great backend mineral drive and a long, tangy, ripely tannic and complex finish. This may well be America’s finest bottling of syrah! 2029-2070. **94**.

2017 Côtes du Crow's- Morgan Winery (Monterey) screwcap

The 2017 Côtes du Crow's from Morgan is a Rhône-styled blend of fifty-six percent grenache, thirty-seven percent syrah and seven percent tempranillo. The new release comes in at 14.2 percent alcohol and offers up a superb bouquet of raspberries, red plums, pepper, a touch of meatiness, lovely spice tones (from the tempranillo?) and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a good core, fine focus and grip, suave tannins and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is a really good wine that will probably not be able to meet the reduction challenges of its closure, so plan to drink it on the early side. But, if it were closed under natural cork, it would clearly age nicely for a decade or more, so hopefully the winery will rethink its closure in future vintages, as this is a really good wine and deserving of natural cork. 2020-2030+? **90.**

2017 Syrah "G17"- Morgan Winery (Santa Lucia Highlands)

Morgan's "G17" bottling of syrah is a blend from four different vineyard sources in Monterey and includes five percent each of grenache and tempranillo in the *cépages* in this vintage. The wine was raised in twenty-five percent new oak and comes in at 14.2 percent octane this year. The bouquet is deep, pure and excellent, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of cassis, dark berries, roasted meats, pepper, a hint of chocolate, lovely soil tones, a bit of vanillin oak and a whisper of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and very elegantly styled, with a lovely core, beautiful complexity and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, refined and vibrant finish. This is superb syrah that is drinking well out of the blocks, but will also age very gracefully and will be even better a decade down the road. 2020-2045+. **91+.**

2017 Syrah "Double L Vineyard"- Morgan Winery (Santa Lucia Highlands)

The 2017 Syrah "Double L Vineyard" bottling from Morgan Winery is excellent and built for long-term cellaring. The wine is cooler than the "G17" bottling, coming in at a very civilized 13.5 percent alcohol and shows exceptional potential, delivering a nascently complex aromatic constellation of cassis, black raspberry, smoked meats, a bit of pepper, superb soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak (thirty percent new wood was used here for ten months of the *elevage*.) On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with beautiful balance and grip, a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature and a long, primary and very promising finish that closes with ripe, seamless tannins and enormous potential. This has a touch of the classic northern Rhône reductive elements in its youthful profile, which augurs beautifully for its long and graceful evolution in bottle. This is very, very high class syrah. 2027-2055. **93.**

2016 Hock and Deuce "Mae's Vineyard"- Day Wines (Applegate Valley)

The 2016 Hock and Deuce from Brianne Day is evolving beautifully since the last time I tasted it in January of last year. Readers may recall that this is a Côte-Rôtie-styled blend from Ms. Day, composed of eighty-five percent syrah and fifteen percent viognier. The wine delivers fine aromatic complexity in its youthful blend of cassis, dark berries, smoked meats, pepper, lovely spice tones, a solid foundation of dark soil and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with a fine core, superb soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, classy and intensely flavored finish. This is a low octane beauty of 12.75 percent that recalls some of the old school Côte-Rôtie producers from the 1970s and 1980s, before Marcel Guigal changed the region's style with his influence. The 2016 Hock and Deuce is already very tasty, but it will only get better with further bottle age. 2020-2045+. **92.**

2016 Running Bare “Mae’s Vineyard”- Day Wines (Applegate Valley)

Brianne Day’s unique blend of Running Bare probably should not be listed here in “Rhône blends”, but I do not have a section earmarked for wines with a *cépages* of fifty percent Cabernet Franc and twenty-five percent each of Tannat and Malbec. This is a field blend that Brianne co-ferments and ages in older casks, with the 2016 version coming in at a cool 12.5 percent octane. It offers up a gorgeous bouquet of cassis, cigar smoke, a bit of pepper, roasted meats, dark soil tones and a lovely topnote of sarsaparilla. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. This could do with a few years in the cellar to allow the tannins to soften up a bit on the backend. Fine juice and utterly unique! 2023-2045+. **9.**

2015 TNT “Layne Vineyard”- Day Wines (Applegate Valley)

This is Brianne Day’s one hundred percent Tannat bottling. I had the pleasure to taste the 2015 back at the start of 2019 and I was very pleased to see Brianne had sent another bottle in this most recent shipment of samples. The wine comes in at thirteen percent octane, is raised entirely in older oak and included one quarter whole clusters in this vintage. The bouquet offers up fine complexity in its blend of dark berries, cassis, roasted meats, saddle leather, a bit of pepper, cigar smoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, robust and chewy, with an excellent core, firm, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is cruising along beautifully and will age very nicely. It is not unapproachable today, albeit still fairly chewy (this is Tannat after all!), but I would opt to give it at least a few more years in the cellar to let it soften up a bit more. Good juice. 2023-2045. **90.**

2015 Syrah Reserve “Deux Vert”- Goodfellow (Yamhill-Carlton)

Marcus Goodfellow’s 2015 Deux Vert Vineyard bottling of syrah includes five percent viognier, which grows alongside these syrah vines, which were the first to be planted in the Willamette Valley in 1994. The 2015 version comes in at 13.8 percent octane and delivers a refined and red fruity bouquet of raspberries, pepper, woodsmoke, roasted meats, lovely soil tones, plenty of spice elements and a nice framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and rock solid at the core, with excellent transparency and grip, ripe tannins and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. This will be a lovely bottle in due course, but it needs some time in the cellar to allow its backend tannins to resolve a bit. Fine juice. 2030-2055+. **91+.**

1993 Syrah “California”- Edmunds St. John

The 1993 California bottling of Syrah from Steve Edmunds is still drinking quite nicely at age twenty-seven. It does not have quite the breed or complexity as one of his single vineyard bottlings would have, but it has plenty of character in its complex bouquet of smoky cassis, pepper, a touch of saddle leather, lavender, smoked meats and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and fairly complex, with a nice core, lovely resolution and balance, melted tannins and a long, classy and quite satisfying finish. I like to think of this bottling from Steve as his Crozes-Hermitage, rather than his Côte-Rôtie, and viewed in that context, it is still an immensely satisfying bottle of syrah, though I probably let it stay in the cellar just a bit past its peak. 2020-2030. **88.**

Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier

2018 Pinot Noir “Signal Ridge Vineyard”- Bravium Wines (Mendocino Ridge)

Derek Rohlffs makes really superb pinot noir and his 2018 Signal Ridge Vineyard bottling is excellent. The wine comes in at 13.4 percent octane, taking advantage of the cooler microclimate here at 2600 feet above sea level. The wine offers up a complex, red fruity nose of cherries, blood orange, a touch of beetroot, cloves, woodsmoke, a nice touch of stems, a good base of soil and a discreet foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. This deserves some time in the cellar to really blossom (as well as fully absorb its serving of new wood) and should prove to be long-lived and deliver great drinking for several decades, once it has blossomed. 2028-2055+. **92.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Wiley Vineyard”- Bravium Wines (Mendocino Ridge)

The Wiley Vineyard is closer to the ocean than Signal Ridge and is even a bit cooler as a result, so the 2018 pinot noir here from Bravium comes in at a very refined 13.1 percent octane this year. The nose is more transparent than the Signal Ridge out of the blocks, offering up a beautiful bouquet of strawberries, cherries, beetroot, fresh thyme, a touch of orange zest, cloves, gentle smokiness and a gorgeous base of soil elements. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, soil-driven and tangy, with a nice touch of youthful Mendocino weediness on the backend, suave tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, balanced and complex finish. This will drink a few years ahead of the Signal Ridge bottling, but last every bit as long. First class juice! 2026-2055+. **93.**



2018 Vin de Days Rouge- Day Wines (Willamette Valley)

Brianne Day's lovely blend called Vin de Days is composed in the 2018 vintage of seventy-four percent pinot noir, twenty-four percent pinot meunier and two percent pinot gris this year. The reds are fifty percent whole clusters and the wine is aged in stainless steel. It offers up a pretty and quite nicely ripe nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, forest floor, a hint of beetroot and a lovely blend of spices and sweet herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered for this bottling, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature and a bit of backend tannin perking up the ripe and gently warm finish. This came in at 13.74 percent octane in 2018 and is a bigger wine than past iterations, and I might be inclined to actually tuck it away in the cellar for a couple of years and let its tannins soften up on the backend. 2022-2040. **88.**

2018 Pinot Noir "Oppenlander Vineyard"- Halcón Vineyards (Mendocino County)

The 2018 Oppenlander Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Halcón Vineyards included seventy percent whole clusters in this vintage and was raised entirely in used French oak barrels. The wine comes in at a cool 12.8 percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, hints of the cola to come with bottle age, black tea, lovely soil tones and a whisper of sweet stems in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, young and classy, with a good core, fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and lovely length and grip on the promising finish. This is impeccably balance and so is already approachable, but this is a puppy and it would be crazy to start opening bottles until it has had at least five or six years in the cellar to start to unfurl its secondary layering. 2025-2055. **92.**

2018 Pinot Noir "Sonoma Coast"- Kutch Vineyards (Sonoma)

The 2017 Pinot Noir "Sonoma Coast" bottling from Jamie Kutch is a beautiful wine, with the wine a bit higher octane than customary, but hardly alarming, as it still clocks in at only 13.2 percent. The bouquet is just beautiful, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, strawberries, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, a bit of sweet stems and a topnote of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core of fruit, tangy acids, fine soil signature and a long, moderately tannic and perfectly balanced finish. This is made from declassified fruit from the single vineyard bottlings of MacDougal, Bohan and Falstaff vineyards, used one hundred percent whole clusters, was punched down by foot and saw all older casks during its eleven month *elevage*. Just a superb bottle in the making! 2024-2050. **91+.**

2018 Pinot Noir "Sonoma Coast" Sans Soufre- Kutch Vineyards (Sonoma)

This is the first bottle of non-sulfur pinot noir that I have seen from Jamie Kutch. It is quite a bit lower in octane than the regular Sonoma Coast bottling, as the Sans Soufre comes in at twelve percent, so this is clearly a different blend of fruit, as well as unsulfured. The wine is more open on the nose than the above, offering up a lovely, red fruity mix of strawberries, cherries, beetroot, gentle herb tones, a very pretty base of Goldridge soil and a pretty topnote of rose petal. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-bodied and taut structurally, with lovely intensity of fruit, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. I like this quite well, but would plan to drink it in its relative youth (unless buried early on in a very cold cellar), as it is far more expressive today than the regular Sonoma Coast pinot. But, this is one of the best non-sulfur bottlings I have tasted in quite a while and I do not fear as much for its shelf life as many other wines without SO₂ I have tasted in the last several years. 2020-2035. **91.**

2018 Pinot Noir "Bohan Vineyard"- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The 2018 Bohan bottling from Jamie Kutch is a really beautiful bottle of pinot noir in the making. The wine has a bit more ripeness than customary, as the it comes in at 13.4 percent

alcohol, but still perfectly moderate by contemporary standards. The wine offers up a superb aromatic constellation of black cherries, dark berries, raw cocoa, lovely soil tones, hints of cola to come, woodsmoke, black tea and a topnote of sweet stems that recalls a hypothetical young Domaine Dujac wine without new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with a rock solid core, superb backend mineral drive, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This will need some bottle age to soften up, but will be outstanding. 2026-2055. **93.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Bohan Vineyard” Graveyard Block- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

As I mentioned last year, the Graveyard Block in Bohan Vineyard is the stoniest section of the vineyard and Jamie Kutch decided to bottle this section on its own for the first time starting with the 2017 vintage. The 2018 Graveyard Block is the only pinot noir in the Kutch lineup this year that was completely destemmed, though in all other aspects its *elevage* was the same as the other wines in the range. The wine comes in at 13.1 percent and offers up a very elegant young nose of black plums, black cherries, dark chocolate, stony soil, woodsmoke, gamebird, gentle spices and a hint of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a great core, lovely transparency and grip and a long, ripely tannic and impeccably balanced finish. This is going to be stunning when it blossoms fully! 2026-2055+. **94.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Falstaff Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The 2018 Falstaff Vineyard pinot noir from Jamie Kutch is one of his lowest octane wines in this vintage, coming in at 12.5 percent, but this is hardly a surprise, as this vineyard is one of the coolest on the Sonoma Coast. The wine saw no new oak, is one hundred percent whole clusters and had its punch downs done by foot. The nose wafts from the glass in a superb blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, gorgeous soil tones, sweet stems, woodsmoke, *pigeon* and a gentle topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, transparent and tightly-knit, with a good core, impressive balance and grip and a long, svelte, moderately tannic and vibrant finish. This is one of those pinot noirs that seems very likely to put on weight with bottle age and should start really singing five to seven years out. Fine juice. 2025-2055. **92+.**

2018 Pinot Noir “MacDougall Ranch”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The 2018 MacDougall Ranch bottling is the ripest wine in the Kutch portfolio in this vintage, as this warmer, above the fog line cuvée comes in at 13.5 percent octane. The wine offers up a lovely combination of purity and gentle sappiness in its bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, stony soil tones, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, a bit of sweet stems and incipient notes of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and will be velvety in texture in due course, with a sappy core of fruit, fine mineral drive, surprisingly firm tannins and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. This is structured and will demand some cellaring, but will be a fine drink when it has blossomed. It is one of the few pinots from Jamie Kutch that I can recall being a bit awkwardly adolescent out of the blocks, but all of the constituent components are here. 2028-2055+. **92.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Signal Ridge Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Mendocino Ridge)

The 2018 Signal Ridge Vineyard bottling from Kutch Wines is a lovely bottle in the making, coming in at 13.2 percent octane and offering up the customary precision and depth of all of Jamie’s pinot noirs. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex mix of sweet dark berries, black cherries, sweet Mendocino herb tones, dark soil elements, a bit of youthful stems (this is one hundred percent whole clusters), chicory, a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On

the palate the wine is deep, young and full-bodied, with a nice touch of sap at the core, lovely soil signature and a long, suavely tannic and vibrant finish. This was raised all in used casks this year and is absolutely superb juice in the making. 2026-2055+. **93+**.

2018 Pinot Noir “Manchester Ridge Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Mendocino Ridge)

Manchester Ridge Vineyard sits at two thousand feet elevation and four hundred feet above the fog line, with a cool microclimate that found Samantha Sheehan harvesting here a full month after her vineyards on the valley floor. The 2018 Manchester Ridge Vineyard bottling of Pinot Noir from Samantha Sheehan comes in at thirteen percent octane and delivers a superb, youthful nose of red and black cherries, Mendocino herb tones, espresso, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core of fruit, tangy acids, buried tannins and excellent lift and grip on the very long and promising finish. This is certainly approachable already, as it is beautifully balanced, but it is a puppy and prudence would suggest tucking it away in the cellar for at least five or six years and let those secondary layers of complexity uncoil. 2025-2050. **92**.

2018 Pinot Noir “Van der Camp Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Sonoma Mountain)

The Van der Camp Vineyard was planted in 1953, making these seriously old pinot noir vines by California standards. Sam Sheehan uses a bit more whole clusters here than she does with the Manchester Ridge bottling (roughly twenty versus thirty percent) and the 2018 comes in at the same, very civilized thirteen percent. The wine offers up excellent aromatic complexity in its youthful blend of black cherries, pomegranate, a hint of blood orange, some sweet stem tones, lovely soil elements, hints of the cola to come and a discreet base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more closed and structured than the Manchester Ridge, with a fine core, ripe, buried tannins and a long, focused and still quite primary finish. This will need more time in the cellar to blossom, but it may be a hair longer on the backend and might just be the superior bottling of the two in due course. 2028-2050+. **92+**.

2018 Pinot Meunier “Van der Camp Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Sonoma Mountain)

This is the first bottling of pure pinot meunier that I can recall tasting from California. Like the pinot noir from Van der Camp Vineyard, the pinot meunier vines were also planted here at the top of Sonoma Mountain in 1953. The wine is a tad lighter in color than the pinot noir here and offers up a complex bouquet of bitter cherry, cassis, woodsmoke, espresso, complex soil tones, a hint of cedar, lovely spice tones and a topnote of cherry skin. On the palate the wine is medium-full, transparent and light on its feet, with superb focus and grip, moderate tannins and excellent intensity of flavor on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is more delicately styled than the pinot noir from here, but every bit as good! First class juice. 2025-2050. **92+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Oppenlander Vineyard”- Halcón Vineyards (Mendocino County)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Oppenlander Vineyard” bottling from Paul and Jackie Gordon managed to handle the heat spikes of late August of 2017 very well, as this is a very cool microclimate, and after a brief shutdown due to the heat, the vines jumped back into action and ripened up the crop nicely, with harvest not taking place here until September 28th. The wine this year includes forty percent whole clusters, was raised in twenty percent new oak and tips the scales at a measured 13.3 percent. It delivers a fine, black fruity nose of black cherries, dark berries, a hint of beetroot, bonfire, espresso, a fine base of soil, a touch of fresh thyme and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and soil-driven, with an excellent

core of fruit, good soil signature and a long, fine-grained, tangy and nascently complex finish. This has great backend lift and is a gorgeous wine in the making. 2026-2055. **93.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Double L Vineyard”- Morgan Winery (Santa Lucia Highlands)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Double L Vineyard” bottling from Morgan Winery was raised in forty percent new oak for eleven months and comes in listed at 14.1 percent, which is pretty moderate, given the heat spikes in September. The Double L Vineyard is certified organic. The 2017 version offers up a quite complex bouquet of strawberries, cherries, beetroot, fresh herb tones, a bit of coriander seed, a nice base of soil, woodsmoke and a judicious framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, fine transparency, fine-grained tannins and a long, youthful and tangy finish. I suspect the octane is just a bit above its stated level, but the wine is nicely balanced and really should start to drink well with a bit of bottle age. 2024-2050+. **91.**



2017 Pinot Noir “Manchester Ridge Vineyard”- Trail Marker Wine (Mendocino Ridge)

Emily Virgil and Drew Huffine, the proprietors at Trail Marker, used one-third whole clusters for their low octane Manchester Ridge pinot noir. The wine is light in color and comes in at a svelte 12.4 percent alcohol. It saw no new oak during its *elevage* and offers up a very pretty and red fruity nose of strawberries, cherries, a hint of cinnamon, a nice base of soil, mustard seed, a touch of sweet stems and rose petals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and complex, with surprising sappiness at the core (particularly for 12.4

percent!), fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This has great lift on the backend and is a really superb, low fat example of pinot noir! Natural beauty without makeup. 2020-2045+. **92.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Saveria Vineyard”- Trail Marker Wine Co. (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Saveria Vineyard” from Trail Marker was fermented with two-thirds whole clusters, indigenous yeasts and raised entirely in used barrels. The wine is a touch riper than the lovely ethereal beauty from Manchester Ridge Vineyard, coming in at 13.1 percent octane and offering up a spicy bouquet of cherries, raspberries, cloves, cinnamon, sweet stems, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones and a gentle topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, tangy and still marked by its youthful stem tones, with a lovely core of fruit, great transparency and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and promising finish. Where the 2017 Manchester Ridge pinot is drinking beautifully out of the blocks, the more structured Saveria Vineyard bottling will want some time in the cellar to properly blossom. But, it will be excellent in due course. 2024-2050. **91+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Silvershot Vineyard”- Day Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2016 Silvershot Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Brianne Day is excellent. This comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully precise bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of balsam bough, raw cocoa, superb soil tones, woodsmoke and a deft touch of gently spicy oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and soil-driven, with an excellent core of fruit, tangy acids, ripe, seamless tannins and a very long, nascently complex finish that closes with excellent grip and bounce. This is a superb wine in the making. 2026-2055. **92.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Cancilla Vineyard” Two Pretty Barrels- Day Wines (Willamette Valley)

Cancilla Vineyard is a certified organic and dry-farmed vineyard, just north of the Yamhill-Carlton AVA. Brianne Day felt these two barrels stood out from the rest, so she decided to bottle them on their own in 2016. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and clearly includes a good percentage of whole clusters. The bouquet here wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, a lovely base of soil, incipient notes of cola, bergamot, a touch of cedar and a topnote of sweet stems. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and great length and grip on the nascently complex and energetic finish. This is going to be a superb bottle, but it needs some time in the cellar to let those stem tones turn to cinnamon-like spices. 2026-2055. **92.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Momtazi Vineyard”- Day Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2016 Momtazi Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Day Wines is the ripest of these 2016s, as it comes in at fourteen percent octane. It is beautifully black fruity on the nose (as all the examples from Momtazi have been that I have been fortunate enough to taste), offering up scents of black plum, sweet dark berry, black tea, balsam bough, a beautiful base of soil tones, chicory, gentle spice tones and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, great mineral drive and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and promising finish. While this is the ripest of the 2016 pinots from Brianne Day, it is no less pure or precise and is a great bottle in the making. 2024-2055. **93.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Johan Vineyard”- Day Wines (Van Duzer Corridor)

Brianne Day calls the 2016 Johan Vineyard bottling of pinot noir the “Broken Destemmer” cuvée, as the destemmer was indeed down when these grapes came in and, as a result, this is one hundred percent whole clusters. The wine is nicely ripe at 13.5 percent and offers up a beautifully promising bouquet of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, gentle spice tones, a complex base of soil, sweet stems, a deft touch of lead pencil oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tangy and complex, with a great core of fruit, ripe tannins and stellar length and grip on the beautifully balanced and very promising finish. This is a very young wine and will need time in the cellar to properly blossom, but it is going to be gorgeous when it is ready to drink! 2026-2055+. **93+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Durant Vineyard”- Goodfellow Family Cellars (Dundee Hills)

The 2016 Durant Vineyard cuvée of pinot noir from Goodfellow Family Cellars is an excellent wine in the making, offering up a ripe and classy aromatic constellation of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, lovely soil tones, a hint of the cola to come, a bit of sweet stems from its whole clusters and a judicious framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused, complex and very well-balanced, with a lovely core, excellent backend mineral drive, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and promising finish. All this needs is time! 2026-2055. **92+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Durant Vineyard” Heritage No. 8- Goodfellow (Dundee Hills)

The 2016 Durant Vineyard “Heritage No. 8” bottling of pinot noir from Marcus Goodfellow is from a block of vines planted in 1973. This is a single, older *foudre* cuvée that is made entirely from whole clusters. It comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol in 2016 and spent twenty months aging in cask prior to bottling. The wine offers up a beautifully refined nose of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, cocoa powder, fresh thyme, a hint of blood orange, gamebird and a discreet framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, tangy acids, ripe tannins and a very long, beautifully balanced and complex finish. This is a puppy and deserves some quiet time in a corner of the cellar to properly blossom, but it is going to be a stunningly good bottle of pinot noir when it is ready to drink! 2026-2055+. **94**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Fir Crest Vineyard”- Goodfellow Family Cellars (Yamhill-Carlton)

The Fir Crest Vineyard lies in the foothills of the Coastal Range and is a warmer microclimate, producing black fruity and fairly powerful examples of pinot noir. The 2016 version from Marcus Goodfellow comes in at 13.8 percent octane and offers up a sappy, black fruity bouquet of black plums, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of balsam bough, woodsmoke and a discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven for its octane, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and very classy finish. There is just a whisper of backend heat here, but I suspect that the wine will age very long and gracefully and this will hardly be an issue eight to ten years down the road. Fine juice. 2028-2055. **91+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Whistling Ridge Vineyard”- Goodfellow (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2016 Pinot Noir “Whistling Ridge Vineyard” bottling from Marcus Goodfellow comes in at 13.4 percent alcohol in this vintage and delivers a very refined, ripe and classy bouquet of black cherries, beetroot, a fine base of soil, gentle smokiness, a touch of fresh nutmeg, mustard seed, raw cocoa and a judicious framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and focused, with an excellent core, fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This is fine juice in the making. 2026-2055. **92**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Whistling Ridge Vineyard” Heritage No. 7- Goodfellow (Ribbon Ridge)

The Heritage No. 7 bottling from Whistling Ridge Vineyard is a parcel selection that Marcus Goodfellow shows the most potential in the vintage. It hails from a block in the vineyard known as the “Beloved Acre” in the vineyard. These vines were planted in 1990. The 2016 Heritage No. 7 is more red fruity and transparent on the nose than the above wine, offering up a complex bouquet of strawberries, cherries, beetroot, raw cocoa, a gorgeous base of soil, fresh nutmeg, a hint of thyme from the whole clusters and a nice, understated touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and gorgeously transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, tangy acids, suave tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. I love the breed and backend energy of this wine! 2028-2055+. **94.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Estate” Mercedes Riverblock Vineyard- Gracianna (Russian River)

The Estate bottling of Pinot Noir from Gracianna hails from the Mercedes Riverblock vineyard that lies alongside of the winery on Westside Road. It comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a fine, red fruity nose of cherries, beetroot, pretty spice tones, a good base of soil, cedar and just a touch of Sonoma County weediness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, still some tannin to resolve and a long, primary and well-balanced finish. This still needs a few more years to start to blossom and develop a bit more complexity, but it has good depth and should be quite tasty when it is ready to drink. 2024-2045. **88.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Westside Reserve”- Gracianna (Russian River Valley)

The 2016 Westside Reserve bottling of pinot from Gracianna is a bit riper than the Mercedes Riverblock bottling, as this tips the scales at 14.4 percent alcohol. Despite its higher octane, it shows pretty good purity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, strawberries, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh herbs, a nice foundation of soil, mustard seed, cedar and a floral flourish in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely transparent in personality, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and gently warm finish. I like this wine’s sensibilities, but it shows its octane with just a bit of uncovered alcohol on the finish and keeps its score down a point or two. 2024-2045. **89+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Freedom Hill Vineyard”- St. Innocent Winery (Willamette Valley)

Mark Vlossak started producing a single vineyard bottling at St. Innocent from Freedom Hill Vineyard all the way back in 1994, but those original vines eventually succumbed to phylloxera and had to be replanted, so the age of the vines he works with now in Freedom Hill date back to 2003. This is the ripest pinot in the St. Innocent lineup in 2016, coming in at 14.5 percent octane, but the cool evenings here from the Van Duzer Corridor influence helps keep the acids up and the wine retains very good precision at slightly higher ripeness levels. The 2016 Freedom Hill offers up a fine, black fruity bouquet of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil tones, smoked meats, incipient notes of cola and a judicious framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely vibrant, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. One can sense the higher octane here a bit on the backend, but the wine is so beautifully balanced that I have the impression that it will age very gracefully at this level and will be a fine bottle with a bit of bottle age. 2024-2045+. **91.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Justice Vineyard”- St. Innocent Winery (Eola-Amity Hills)

The Justice Vineyard has a layer of red volcanic soil over a deeper base of sedimentary silt and loam. It was planted in 2001, so the vines are just starting to really hit their prime at age fifteen. The 2016 Justice Vineyard bottling is a bit riper than the Shea Vineyard, coming in at

14.2 percent octane, but retaining good aromatic purity in its bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, a good base of soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and generous on the attack, with good soil signature, a fine core, moderate tannins and a touch of beetroot adding further complexity on the long finish. This is a good bottle in the making, but the slightly higher octane has taken just a bit of the youthful polish from the palate of the wine, so this will demand a bit of cellaring time before it really starts to drink as well as some of its brethren in the 2016 St. Innocent pinot noir lineup. 2025-2050. **89+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Momtazi Vineyard”- St. Innocent Winery (McMinnville)

Readers already know how much I admire the *biodynamically*-farmed Momtazi Vineyard fruit, which Kelley Fox does such good work with at her eponymous winery. The 2016 Momtazi from Mark Vlossak at St. Innocent is another absolutely superb example of this *terroir*, coming in at an even fourteen percent octane and offering up a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, beautifully complex spice tones, a hint of savory elements, espresso, dark soil tones, just a touch of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, suave tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. Fine juice. 2023-2050. **92**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Shea Vineyard”- St. Innocent Winery (Yamhill-Carleton)

The 2016 Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir from Mark Vlossak is really lovely and is showing more complexity out of the blocks than some of these other bottlings. The refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, gamebird, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil, just a whisper of mustard seed, woodsmoke and a discreet foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with lovely soil signature, fine-grained tannins and impeccable balance and grip on the long and nascently complex and tangy finish. This is excellent and impeccably balanced pinot noir in the making, and though it is certainly accessible today, I would bury it in the cellar for at least another six to eight years and really let it blossom fully! 2026-2050. **92+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Temperance Hill Vineyard”- St. Innocent Winery (Eola-Amity Hills)

Temperance Hill Vineyard is farmed organically and is the highest elevation vineyard in the southern end of the Eola-Amity Hills AVA. The oldest vines here were planted in 1982 (on their own rootstocks), but these are slowly succumbing now to phylloxera and will be replanted in the future. The 2016 Temperance Hill pinot noir from St. Innocent is nicely ripe at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a very pretty bouquet of cherries, beetroot, gentle spice tones, a bit of meatiness, lovely soil elements, a hint of mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, refined texture, moderate, buried tannins and good length and grip on the nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is approachable already, though still a puppy, and more complexity will emerge if the wine is allowed some bottle age to blossom fully. 2024-2045+. **90**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Bacigalupi Vineyard”- Gracianna (Russian River Valley)

The Bacigalupi Vineyard has been one of the prized pinot noir vineyards in Sonoma since the 1980s, but I have the sense that this is one of the warmer microclimates in the Russian River Valley and the vineyard has suffered a bit as a result from global warming. The 2015 version from Gracianna is a robust 14.8 percent octane, but still shows good freshness and complexity on the nose, offering up scents of black cherries, plums, a bit of dark chocolate, a good base of soil, black tea, just a bit of spicy oak and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and really quite nicely balanced for its alcohol level, with a good core, a certain lightness on its feet that is impressive, and good length and grip on the long and complex finish. I really like the aromatic complexity here, but the palate is not quite as precise as the nose (due to its ripeness), and though it is long on the backend, I would love to have seen this a half point lower in octane. It is a very good wine for 14.8 percent and tasty, but I just have the gut feeling that there is another step up here waiting for a slightly less ripe vintage to come to the fore. 2023-2045. **89.**



Off the Beaten Path Red Wine Blends

2016 Baby Blue- Blue Rock Vineyard (Sonoma County)

The 2016 Baby Blue bottling from Blue Rock Vineyard could probably have been listed under the “Bordeaux Blends” below, as it is composed of forty-six percent cabernet sauvignon and thirty-five percent merlot. However, the remainder of the *cépages* is six percent each of syrah and malbec, five percent petit verdot and two percent cabernet franc, so not exactly a Bordeaux blend (at least not since the nineteenth century when a few claret were routinely “Hermitaged”). The wine comes in listed at 14.1 percent octane and offers up a fine bouquet of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, a good base of soil tones, just a whisper of pepper (from the syrah), a judicious framing of new oak and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and quite elegant in profile, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, ripe and nascently complex finish. This is really a

lovely wine in the making and all it needs is some time in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Quite impressive. 2026-2055. **91.**

Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Bordeaux Blends

2017 Cabernet Sauvignon- Château La Grande Roche (Napa Valley)

Château La Grande Roche is Ric Forman's second label and his 2017 cabernet sauvignon comes in at 14.8 percent octane in the 2017 vintage. It is made solely from barrels of Forman Vineyards cabernet that Ric feels to not work in the blend for the *grand vin*. The 2017 La Grande Roche is composed of a *cépages* of eighty percent cabernet sauvignon, thirteen percent cabernet franc, four percent petit verdot and three percent merlot. The wine was raised for twenty-one months in "one wine" barrels and saw no new oak. It offers up a fine, youthful bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil, currant leaf and a nice, understated touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, gently warm finish. This carries its alcohol very well, and though it is higher octane than what I naturally gravitate towards, it is clearly a very well-made wine and the only thing that keeps its score down a touch is that wisp of backend heat. 2027-2055. **89.**

2016 Cabernet Franc "Best Barrels"- Blue Rock Vineyard (Alexander Valley)

The 2016 Cabernet Franc from Blue Rock Vineyards is a bit riper than their Baby Blue blend, as this wine comes in listed at 14.6 percent alcohol. However, it does not seem that ripe on the nose, which is very precise and pure, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of cassis, currant leaf, cigar ash, dark soil tones, espresso and a deft framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, elegant in profile and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with ripe, buried tannins, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and gently warm finish. This is a lovely wine that I wish was just a touch lower in octane, as though it would be a tad less approachable out of the blocks, would offer even greater potential for cellaring. That said, this is still very good juice and carries its alcohol very well indeed. 2024-2045+. **91+.**

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon- Blue Rock Vineyard (Alexander Valley)

The 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon from Blue Rock Vineyard is also fairly ripe, coming in listed at 14.7 percent octane, but it shares a purity and refined sensibility with the other wines I tasted from this estate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, smoke and a very well-done base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and just a bit warm in the mouth, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish. Though this is higher in octane than my comfort zone, I appreciate its elegant style and balance for aging, I just wish it was a bit lower in alcohol. Perhaps this is just the world we now live in, with global warming making 14.7 percent wines on the lower side of the spectrum... This is very well-made juice, without any of the cynical fruit bomb elements of so many California cabernets these days, but does it really have to be 14.7 percent alcohol? I do understand that the higher octane allows the texture of the tannins to be svelte enough for those not willing to age the wine to drink it young, but just imagine this wine at fourteen percent and a bit more youthfully structured, but even more precise and promising for the long haul (like one of Cathy Corison's cabernets)! 2024-2055. **91+.**

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon “Kronos Vineyard”- Corison (Rutherford Bench)

Cathy Corison’s 2016 vintage from the Kronos Vineyard comes in at a refined 13.3 percent octane and looks destined to be one of the legendary vintages of this great, old vine cuvée. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very elegant constellation of black cherries, cassis, Cuban cigar wrapper, a gorgeous base of soil, those signature Rutherford Bench scents of allspice, gentle smokiness and a very refined base of new oak. On the palate the wine is very precise, full-bodied and suave in profile, with a great core of perfectly ripe fruit, beautiful undertow from the soil, fine-grained, ripe tannins and stunning length and grip on the nascently complex, seamless and dancing finish. This is classically balanced for long aging and, as a result, is fairly tightly-knit out of the blocks, but with sufficient bottle age, there is nothing but magic that awaits! To my palate, this is one of Cathy’s most brilliant wines of her career, and she has been on a hot streak since Reagan was president! 2028-2085. **96.**

1973 Cabernet Sauvignon- Sterling Vineyards (Rutherford Bench)

I had not drunk a bottle of the 1973 Sterling cabernet since I wrote my piece on Ric Forman’s fine career back in the summer of 2018, so I was happy to have a chance to taste a bottle at the start of the new year. The wine has certainly been fully mature for decades, but continues to cruise along effortlessly, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of black currant, black cherry, cigar ash, menthol, dark soil tones a touch of petroleum jelly in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tertiary in personality, with still a good core, melted tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and *à point* finish. 2020-2030+. **90.**

Zinfandel

2016 Zinfandel Bacigalupi Vineyard”- Gracianna (Russian River Valley)

The 2016 Zinfandel Bacigalupi Vineyard” from Gracianna Cellars is one of the highest octane wines I have deigned to taste in the last ten years, as it comes in listed at fully 15.8 percent alcohol. As I like the winery’s pinot noirs quite well, I pulled the cork on this wine and waded in, but with more than a fair share of trepidation, as this is probably two and a half percent higher in alcohol than I like my ripest wines to tip the scales! The wine is very jammy and stewy on the nose, offering up notes of stewed raspberries, a bit of peanut butter, chocolate, spices and a bit of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a good core, some residual sweetness, melted tannins and a surprisingly long, complex finish. There is some backend heat evident here, but not as much as one might expect, and though I find the nose rather simple and overripe, the palate is really not too bad! Don’t ask me how this was done, but much to my surprise, I did not mind this wine! I would never drink it, as it is just too high in alcohol for my pleasure, but for those more intrepid than I with high alcohol red wines, this is actually pretty good. 2020-2030? **86.**

RECENTLY-TASTED SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE WINES PART ONE- FEBRUARY 2020



Part Two of my annual coverage of the beautiful wines of Spain and Portugal has been delayed a bit more than I anticipated when I first finished up Part One back in October of last year. I had imagined working on the second installment of my coverage of Spain to include in the end of the year issue, but the sheer volume of notes from my time in Burgundy tasting the 2018 vintage there pushed this article to this following issue. On one hand, this was unfortunate, as some of the superb wines featured below have now been in the market for a few months and may already be a bit harder to find in the pipeline, but the delay also allowed for new vintages of many old favorites from around the Iberian peninsula to arrive here in the US and this article is that much deeper and richer for its inadvertent delay in getting rolling. As I sit at my desk writing this introduction, one week out from the end of February, I realize that I may not get to everything that has rolled through my door from the Iberian Peninsula before it is time to send out the new issue, as nearly one hundred more Spanish wine samples arrived yesterday, to add to an already rather impressive mountain of wine that needs to be tasted. But, as the last feature in October focused heavily on a few regions (it was particularly deep in Rioja), I will try to cover a few more bases in this article and taste wines from other regions first (rather than just reflexively reaching for the Rioja samples first ☺). My apologies in advance to importers who sent along

samples for this feature and may not see every single wine they sent in this article; there will be a follow-up in Issue 86 and anything not tasted this time around will feature prominently in the next article.

Many of the wines starting to ship from Spain or building up in the pipeline are from the 2018 vintage, which is very different on the Iberian Peninsula than it was in the more northerly wine-producing sectors of Europe. The blazing heat that helped define the 2018s in France and Germany was not part of the equation in Spain or Portugal during this growing season, which started out very cool and rainy (with a constant threat of mildew) and watched maturity lagging in the vineyards up through midsummer. However, July and August were sunny and warm, but not torrid, and maturity started to catch up and in the end, the vintage of 2018 seems to have turned out quite well. In regions where baking heat can be a challenge, such as the lower altitude sections of Ribera del Duero or Toro, the more temperate backend of 2018 may well have been a blessing- time will tell, as it is still pretty early on in the evolutions of the reds from these regions to see how the vintage will ultimately fare. The 2018s from Rioja, which for many of the classicists in the region are still many years away, are reported to be beautifully balanced wines and lower in alcohol than in several recent vintages; they are likely to make great wines for the long haul. In Galicia, 2018 was slow out of the blocks, but ended up ripening nicely by the time of harvest in the second half of September and the wines seem likely to be quite classical in style and high in quality. The rainy winter and early spring was particularly good news for winegrowers in Portugal, as both 2016 and 2017 had been severe drought vintages here and building up depleted groundwater supplies was of paramount importance in 2018. Like much of Spain, the wet and cool weather early in 2018 eventually gave way to sunny skies and warm temperatures to ripen up the grapes in time for harvest.

2017 was a far more challenging year for winegrowers on the Iberian Peninsula than 2018, with frost, hail, drought and very high temperatures at times making for a volatile mix and multi-faceted challenges for *bodegas*. Northern Spain was hit very hard by spring frosts in 2017, with extensive damage from Bierzo all the way to Ribera del Duero and Rioja cutting back yields heavily in the wake of the freezing temperatures. Crop losses due to frost damage in Ribera del Duero range from forty percent in the lower altitude vineyards to as much as seventy-five or eighty percent in upper elevations such as Gumiel de Mercado. After the frost damage, there was drought and blazing heat, so though the remaining grapes managed to ripen up in the end of summer heat, acidities are low, alcohol levels are high and the wines can be concentrated beyond their normal parameters. In places like Toro, alcohol levels were high in 2017, often without fully ripe phenolic maturity to go with the high sugars. Further west from Bierzo, frost damage was equally bad in Valdeorras and Ribeiro, but Rías Baixas was able to escape freezing temperatures in the spring and this may well be the most “classical” region for wine in Spain in 2017. Ribeira Sacra was not generally as badly frosted as some of these other D.O.s, but drought and heat were antagonists here in 2017 and the generally most gifted sections, such as Amandi, will have produced the most concentrated and powerful wines in the region in 2017, from the combination of heat and drought. Cooler sub-regions here such as Bibei and the Miño River Valley may have fared a bit better.

When one looks back to the 2016 vintage, which was generally unheralded, many of the wines are turning out beautifully. It was a year of high yields in places unaffected by hail damage

(sadly, Ribeira Sacra was pummeled by hail in midsummer and lost more than half the crop), which affected concentration to a certain degree, but in an age of global warming, perhaps the best years for the cellar are going to end up being those that are less concentrated. Flowering was late across Spain in 2016, but it was prolific, and the crop promised to be generous. Though winter and spring had been wet leading into the growing season of 2016, drought conditions descended on many growing regions starting in June and July and then it was very hot during the second half of August. Several producers in Rioja had gone out in the vineyards and had done a green harvest in July, fearing that they would not be able to ripen up all of the bunches out on the vines in the drought conditions, and this proved prescient. All of the heat and drought eventually ended in September, as heavy rains arrived mid-month and unblocked vines suffering from hydric stress and plumped up berries that may have been suffering from dehydration (with the exception of Cataluña, where the rain was modest or non-existent in September and the drought continued through to picking). After the rains cleared through, the *fin de saison* of 2016 was very good and many winegrowers were able to wait until late September and on through the entire month of October to harvest and were able to bring in a large cropload with good maturity. The resulting wines that I have tasted from 2016 thus far have been quite good, with perfectly satisfactory concentration, but not the power we see so often in warmer D.O.s in this age of global warming, which may augur very well for their long-term cellaring potential.

Cava

2017 A.T. Roca “Classic Penedès” Reserva Brut Nature (Agustí Torelló Roca)

The 2017 A.T. Roca Classic Penedès Reserva Brut Nature is composed of a blend of fifty percent Macabeu, thirty percent Xarel-lo and twenty percent Parellada. The wine disgorged in November of 2019, after twenty months aging *sur latte*. It offers up a lovely bouquet of lemon, tart pear, a bit of quinine, *fleur de sel*, complex minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and frothy, with a fine core, excellent *mousse* and impressive backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. This is lovely sparkling wine and really shows depth and detail for a Reserva level bottling! Fine juice! 2020-2035+. **91+**.

2016 Mestres “Cupage Rosé” Reserva Especial Brut

The 2016 Cupage Rosé from Mestres is comprised from a blend of fifty percent Trepát, thirty percent Monastrell and twenty percent Pinot Noir. It takes its light salmon color from around ten hours of skin contact prior to the onset of fermentation, which takes place in stainless steel for this bottling. The wine is aged two and a half years on its fine lees, under cork, with hand-riddling (as is the case with all of the Mestres cuvées) and the 2016 was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter after its disgorgement in March of 2019. The wine offers up a superb and quite complex bouquet of rhubarb, strawberries, rose petals, heather, salty soil tones, a bit of rye bread and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and shows off lovely depth in the mid-palate, with fine focus and grip, lovely *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. The *dosage* here is very discreet and works perfectly at the table with a wide variety of dishes. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2035. **91**.

2014 Bohigas “Gran Reserva” Extra Brut

The 2014 Bohigas “Gran Reserva” Extra Brut is composed of a blend of forty percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent Macabeo, twenty percent Parellada and ten percent Chardonnay, with all of the grapes from the estate’s own vineyards. It is aged on its fine lees for thirty months prior to disgorgement and was finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter in 2014. The wine offers up

a bright and already nicely expressive bouquet, delivering scents of apple, wheat toast, a fine base of soil, a fine note of warm bread from its two and a half years on the lees, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and long, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and fine mineral drive on the long and complex finish. This is a very good example. 2020-2030. **89+**.

2012 Mestres “Visol” Gran Reserva Brut Nature

The Mestres family has been an institution in the epicenter of Cava production, in the town of Sant Sadurní d’Anoia since they built their winery here back in 1861, though the family has documentation of their winegrowing pursuits that predate this by five centuries! Their Visol bottling was the first non-*dosé* bottling of Cava ever produced, having been made first in 1945. Every one of their bottlings is aged under cork, rather than crown cap, and all of the *vins clairs* are fermented in *barriques* made from chestnut and aged six months in cask prior to blending and bottling for secondary fermentation. The new release of Visol is from the 2012 vintage and composed of a blend of forty percent Xarel-lo, thirty-five percent Macabeo and twenty-five percent Parellada and aged nearly six years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement in April of 2019. The wine offers up an outstanding bouquet of hazelnut, wizened apples, salty soil tones, smoke and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully-balanced, with the extended lees aging giving the wine a beautifully buffered structure without *dosage*. The wine has fine depth at the core, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. Mestres is one of the very finest producers of sparkling wine in Spain and their 2012 version of Visol is outstanding. 2020-2035+. **92**.

Rosado

2018 Giné Rosat (Priorat)

The 2018 Giné Rosat is composed of a blend of eighty-five percent of Garnacha and fifteen percent Merlot. The wine has a lovely, deep salmon color and offers up a bright, succulent nose of strawberries, a touch of watermelon, orange peel, a good base of soil and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bouncy, full-bodied and has good depth at the core, with sound acids, fine focus and grip and a nice touch of vinosity on the long and balanced finish. This is very tasty Rosé. 2020-2023. **88**.

2018 Bovale Rosado (Utiel-Requena) screwcap

The 2018 Bovale Rosado is composed entirely from the lovely grape of Bobal, with the wine fermented and aged in stainless steel and coming in at a cool twelve percent alcohol in this vintage. It is a pale salmon color and offers up a bright bouquet of watermelon, cherry skins, dried flowers, a nice base of gently chalky soil tones and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is bright, bouncy and medium-full, with good focus and grip, zesty acids and fine length on the well-balanced finish. Very tasty and a good value. 2020-2025. **88**.

Rías Baixas

2018 Albariño “Leirana” Bodegas Forjas del Salnés (Cambados)

Bodegas Forjas del Salnés is the family winery of Rodrigo Mendez. His Leirana bottling of Albariño is produced from vines planted in the mid-1960s and is fermented and aged in stainless steel. The 2018 Leirana offers up a fine bouquet of breadfruit, lemon peel, briny oceanic tones, dried flowers and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and nicely

complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. This is the entry level bottle of Albariño from Señor Mendez and it is very well-made. 2020-2025+. **89.**

2018 Albariño “Nessa”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas) screwcap

The Nessa bottling from Adegas Gran Vinum is their entry level bottling and made from local growers with whom the winery works each year, with all of the vines used for the production of this bottling hand-harvested and at least twenty-five years of age. The 2018 version is really fine, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of tart pear, lime peel, lovely ocean breeze salinity, good minerality and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and bright, with a lovely core, good soil signature and a long, vibrant and complex finish. There is just the first hint of pinching starting to pop up on the tail end of the finish, due to its closure, so I would opt for decanting this bottle before serving, just to let it unlock completely. It is really too bad that it is bottled under screwcap, as it has the depth and balance to age nicely for five to seven years, but I would fear keeping it that long under screwcap. But, for drinking over the near-term, it is really a lovely example and a superb value! 2020-2023+? **89.**

2018 Albariño “Esencia Diviña”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)

The 2018 “Esencia Diviña” from Adegas Gran Vinum is a lovely example of Albariño. The bouquet is bright, briny and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, lime blossoms, salty soil tones, a touch of wild fennel and a topnote of candied citrus. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core of fruit, lovely balance and grip and a long, salty and zesty finish. This is good juice, with plenty of stuffing at the core. 2020-2025+. **89.**

2018 Albariño “Selección Especial”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)

The 2018 “Selección Especial” from Adegas Gran Vinum is an outstanding young Albariño, offering up superb depth and complexity right out of the blocks, but also with the structure to age very nicely for at least the next decade. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of lemon, tart pear, dried flowers, lovely minerality and a topnote of sea salts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully light on its feet, with a good core, fine focus and grip, bright acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. A very lovely bottle of Albariño. 2020-2030. **92.**

2018 Albariño “Cies” Bodegas Rodrigo Mendez (Meaño)

The Albariño “Cies” bottling from Rodrigo Mendez is produced from vines planted in 1954 and fermented with indigenous yeasts. Half of the cuvée is fermented in ancient wood vats, without temperature control, and the other half in stainless steel, with both halves seeing some extended lees contact. The 2018 Cies offers up a fine nose of grapefruit, limepeel, ocean breeze, lemongrass and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a fine core, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. With part of the bottling aged in older vats, it is more structured than many young Albariños and seems likely to age long and gracefully. It is quite approachable now, but my gut instinct is that it will blossom with a year or two in the cellar. Good juice. 2020-2035. **90+.**

2018 Albariño “La Ola”- Adegas Eladio Piñeiro (Val do Salnés)

Eladio Piñeiro’s La Ola bottling of Albariño is made entirely from his own vineyards, which he farms biodynamically. The average age of the vines for this bottling is thirty years of age, and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged six months on its fine lees in stainless steel prior to bottling. The 2018 La Ola offers up a fine bouquet of fresh lime, bread fruit, lovely, ocean breeze salinity, gentle lees tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate

the wine is crisp, nicely full-bodied and well-balanced, with fine depth at the core, good mineral undertow, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and wide open finish. This is very good Albariño. 2020-2028. **89.**

2018 Albariño- Veiga Naúm (Meaño)

The 2018 Albariño from Veiga Naúm is sealed with a plastic cork, which is my only complaint with the wine, as I worry how long it will keep in the bottle with this particular closure. However, the wine itself is lovely, offering up a complex bouquet of green apple, grapefruit, ocean breeze, gentle leesy tones, lemongrass and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a nice touch of brininess, good acids and balance and a long, vibrant finish. This is very good Albariño, which is imported by Bodegas Riojanas. 2020-2025? **89+.**

2017 Albariño “La Ola”- Adegas Eladio Piñeiro (Val do Salnés)

The 2017 bottling of La Ola from Eladio Piñeiro is from a slightly less ripe vintage than the 2018, and thus has a bit more cut, mineral drive and cooler aromatics than the beautifully generous 2018 version. The bouquet is quite classic in its blend of lime peel, menthol, salty minerality, discreet leesiness and again, a lovely topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish, complex and nicely balanced, with good intensity of flavor, sound acids and very good length and grip on the poised and classy finish. Good juice. 2020-2030. **89+.**

2013 Albariño “Leirana” Luisa Lazaro- Bodegas Forjas del Salnés (Val do Salnés)

This is one of Rodrigo Mendez’s single vineyard bottlings of Albariño, from vines planted between 1954 and 1964. It is the same source of fruit as he uses for his experimental Cies bottling. This wine is aged entirely in stainless steel, but is given extended aging on its fine lees prior to bottling and the 2013 is the current release! The wine offers up a superb nose of lemon, tart orange, gentle leesy tones, dried flowers, a beautiful base of soil tones and a bit of salinity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and focused, with a fine core of fruit, lovely balance and grip and a long, wide open and quite classy finish. Good juice. 2020-2025+. **91.**

Rueda

2018 Verdejo “Egeo”- Isaac Fernandez Selección

The 2018 Verdejo “Egeo” from Isaac Fernandez Selección is a terrific example of this underrated varietal, with the nose jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of lime, green olive, beautiful floral scents, a lovely base of minerality and just a hint of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and beautifully deep at the core, with bright acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This is a stunning value! 2020-2030. **91.**



Ribeiro Branco

2018 Eira Dos Mouros Blanco- Bodegas Casal de Arman

The 2018 Eira Dos Mouros Blanco from Casal de Arman is composed entirely of Treixadura, grown on a combination of granite, slate and sandy soils. The wine is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of fresh lime, tart pear, spring flowers, a hint of green olive and a beautifully complex base of minerality. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature, zesty acids and impressive length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. First class Treixadura! 2020-2030. **91.**

2017 Viña de Martin “Os Pasás” Branco- Luis Anxo Rodríguez Vázquez

The Viña de Martin “Os Pasás” Branco bottling from Luis Rodríguez is made primarily from a blend of Treixadura and Lado, from younger vines (ten to twenty-five years of age), planted on granite. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel tanks for ten months prior to bottling. The 2017 Os Pasás Branco offers up a beautiful bouquet of pear, lemon peel, a touch of paraffin, raw almond, spring flowers, just a whisper of olive and lovely minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, stellar mineral drive, zesty acids and great focus and grip on the long, complex and very classy finish. Señor Rodríguez is clearly one of Spain’s greatest winemakers and even his entry level bottling of Os Pasás Branco is stellar! 2020-2035+. **93.**

2016 A Teixeira Branco- Luis Anxo Rodríguez Vázquez

A Teixeira is a single vineyard bottling from Señor Rodríguez, planted on crumbling granite and primarily planted to Treixadura, but with a bit of Godello and Albariño included in the blend here. This bottling is also fermented with indigenous yeasts, but this time in a large old *foudre*, where it also spends its *elevage* of one year prior to bottling. It is also given an additional year of aging in the cellars in bottle prior to release. The 2016 A Teixeira Branco delivers a superb aromatic constellation of pear, bread fruit, a touch of green olive, complex minerality, dried flowers, gentle notes of beeswax, wild fennel and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, excellent girdle of acidity, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex and very elegant and well-balanced finish. Even at four years of age, this is still a young wine and it will be decidedly more complex with further bottle age. Great juice. 2022-2040. **94.**

2015 Chánselus “Cepas Vellas” Blanco- Bernardo Estévez

The Chánselus “Cepas Vellas” Blanco bottling from Bernardo Estévez is his old vine cuvée, produced from a field blend that is principally Lado and Treixadura, but certainly with other varieties co-planted. It is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a combination of older, French five hundred liter barrels and chestnut *foudres* that date back to Bernardo’s grandfather’s time. Señor Estévez gives the wine more than a year of bottle age after the *mise*, so that the 2015 is the current release and offers up a superbly complex bouquet of peach, green olive, a touch of beeswax, smoky overtones, raw almond and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with great depth at the core, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully balanced and vibrant finish. This has a lovely patina of age now in both its aromatic and flavor profiles and is drinking superbly well. First class juice. 2020-2030. **93.**

Ribeiro Tinto

2017 Eidos Ermos Tinto- Luis Anxo Rodríguez Vázquez

The 2017 Eidos Ermos Tinto from Luis Rodríguez is one of his younger vine cuvées, as he planted these vineyards himself in the early 1990s from *selection massale* cuttings he took from his older vines. The blend is composed of Caiño, Brancellao, Souson and Ferrol. The wine is raised in a combination of older, two hundred and twenty-five liter French casks and stainless steel tanks. The 2017 Eidos Ermos comes in at a very civilized twelve percent octane and offers up a superb bouquet of black cherries, tree bark, espresso, woodsmoke, a gorgeous base of soil tones and just a hint of Emidio Pepe-like botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and juicy on the attack, with lovely soil signature, a good solid core, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. Fine juice that is approachable out of the blocks, but will be even a better drink with a few years’ worth of bottle age. 2020-2040. **90.**

2016 A Torna Dos Pasás Tinto- Luis Anxo Rodríguez Vázquez

The 2016 A Torna Dos Pasás Tinto from Luis Rodríguez is composed of a blend of forty percent Brancellao and twenty percent each of Caiño Longo, Caiño Redondo and Ferrol. The wine is aged in older, three hundred liter French barrels for one year prior to bottling. The wine also comes in at a cool twelve percent alcohol and delivers a superb aromatic constellation of black cherries, pomegranate, pepper, chicory, a bit of smoked meats, graphite, coffee grounds, lovely minerality, gentle herb tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and beautifully structured, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and classy finish. This is built to age (though not unapproachable out of the blocks) and is going to be a stunning wine in due course. 2025-2055. **93.**

Ribeira Sacra Blanco

2018 Vino Blanco- Guímaro (Amandi)

The 2018 Vino Blanco from Guímaro is composed entirely from Godello, grown on slate, granite and sandy-soiled vineyards in and around Amandi in the heart of Ribeira Sacra. The 2018 offers up bright and deep bouquet of pear, lemon peel, a touch of beeswax, lovely soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with a bright girdle of acidity, good soil signature and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This is first class Godello. 2020-2030+. **92.**

2017 Gavela De Pobo Blanco- Datterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo (Quiroga-Bibe)

The Gavela De Pobo Blanco from Laura Lorenzo's Datterra Viticultores is composed entirely of old vine Palomino, grown on a combination of schist and slate soils. The wine is fermented and aged in amphora for eleven months prior to bottling, with no temperature control and no filtration and only minimum SO2 additions at the *mise*. The 2017 offers up a complex and vibrant bouquet of orange peel, walnut, dried flowers, a beautiful base of minerality and a topnote of salinity. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with lovely mineral drive, fine balance and grip and a long, energetic finish. In my experience, Palomino is a far cry from the most complex white wine grape, as this is not its strength, and Laura's beautiful Gavela De Pobo is a lovely wine that somehow does not need complexity to dazzle! 2020-2028+. **91.**

Ribeira Sacra Tinto

2018 Lousas "Viñas de Aldea"- Envínate (Amandi)

The 2018 Lousas "Viñas de Aldea" from Envínate is made from several different vineyards, all of at least sixty years of age. They are planted with ninety to ninety-five percent Mencía, but as these are old vineyards, there are a few other varieties co-planted here. The grapes are foot-trodden, fermented with indigenous yeasts and includes forty percent whole clusters in 2018, with the wine raised for its customary year in the cellar in old oak casks. The bouquet here is beautiful, offering up a black fruity blend of cassis, graphite, lovely minerality, a hint of the pomegranate to come, tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, great mineral drive, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very elegant finish. This is drinkable today, but I would give it three to five years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to start to emerge. Fine, fine juice. 2023-2060. **93.**

2018 Lousas "Cuvée Viticole"- Envínate (Amandi)

The 2018 Lousas "Cuvée Viticole" from the Envínate team is far more expressive out of the blocks than the Viñas de Alea, jumping from the glass in a blaze of pomegranate, a touch of raspberry, pepper, tree bark, chicory, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and graphite. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and gorgeously transparent, with a superb core of fruit, moderate, fine-grained tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. The Cuvée Viticole is raised entirely in cement tanks, rather than old oak casks,

and perhaps this explains its more gracious charm out of the blocks, as it seemingly has nothing to hide. The 2018 has a Burgundian sense of weightlessness that is pretty rare in Ribeira Sacra and very exciting! 2020-2050. **92.**



2018 Lousas “Parcela Seoane”- Envinate (Amandi)

The Lousas “Parcela Seoane” from Envinate hails from an eighty-plus year-old parcel of vines planted on pure slate near Doade. The wine includes one hundred percent whole clusters and was raised in old, five hundred liter barrels for eleven months prior to bottling. The 2018 offers up a lovely, youthful nose of cassis, pomegranate, pepper, gentle spice tones, a hint of tree bark, graphite and a very pure base of slate. On the palate the wine is very pure, precise and full-bodied, with an excellent core of fruit, superb backend mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins and a very long, nascently complex and utterly refined finish that is transparent and light on its feet. This is the ripest of the Lousas 2018s that I tasted, coming in at 13.5 percent, but it seems lower in octane than this! To my palate, this is one of the greatest bottlings in Ribeira Sacra and it is stellar in 2018. Stunning potential. 2026-2060. **94+.**

2018 Lousas “Parcela Rosende”- Envinate (Amandi)

The Lousas “Parcela Rosende” from the very talented team at Envinate is their newest single vineyard bottling from Ribeira Sacra. It is from a parcel of old vines grown on pure slate (much of the Amandi sub-region finds the vines planted on a combination of schist and slate). The 2018 comes in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a cool, classy and black fruity bouquet of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, cigar smoke, tree bark, a classy base of slate, pepper and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and

gorgeously transparent, with a hint of sappiness at the core, great focus and balance, suave, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is utterly seamless out of the blocks, but also a youthful wine that deserves some bottle age to really let it blossom fully. It is a more ethereal example of the magic of Ribeira Sacra than the Parcela Seoane, but perhaps, in the long run, every bit as brilliant. Time will tell. 2026-2055+. **93+**.

2018 Ribeira Sacra Tinto- Guímaro (Amandi)

The 2018 Ribeira Sacra Tinto from Pedro Rodríguez's Guímaro is a lovely example of the vintage, coming in at an even thirteen percent octane and offering superb complexity on both the nose and palate. His regular bottling is composed entirely of Mencía, from vines that average forty years of age, and which he ferments and raises in stainless steel tanks to emphasize earlier accessibility. The wine delivers a fine aromatic constellation of pomegranate, tree bark, a touch of pepper, cigar smoke, a lovely base of slate and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and complex, with already a nice sense of generosity on the attack, a good core, modest tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. Lovely juice. 2020-2045. **90+**.

2017 Ribeira Sacra "A Ponte" Tinto- Guímaro (Amandi)

A Ponte is a new bottling from Luis Rodríguez, produced from a fifteen year-old vineyard that he planted up above Finca Meixemán. He planted a classic field blend here of Mencía, Sousón, Brancellao, Merenzao and Caiño. The vineyard's soils are a combination of slate, granite and sand. The 2015 was the first vintage for A Ponte and the 2017 is a young and closed wine, which went into bottle fairly reductive and needs some coaxing to start to stir on the nose, but eventually offers up a fine blend of cassis, pomegranate, tree bark, bonfire, espresso and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully soil-driven, with an excellent core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and very well balanced finish. Fine juice. 2025-2050. **92+**.

2017 Finca Meixemán Tinto- Guímaro (Amandi)

The Finca Meixemán from Guímaro was the family's superb vineyard that formed the cornerstone for their domaine, when they decided to start bottling and selling their wines commercially back in 1991. The vines are over seventy years of age, all Mencía and planted on schist soils. Luis Rodríguez foot trods the grapes for this bottling, ferments them with about half the stems and allows a long maceration of more than thirty days and ages the wine for a bit more than a year in old, Burgundy casks. The 2017 Finca Meixemán is also a touch reductive when first opened and needs a bit of decanting time to start to show its inherent aromatic complexity, but eventually wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of dark berries, graphite, complex, stony minerality, tree bark, pepper and a beautiful topnote of botanicals that reminds me of Emidio Pepe's wines. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, great mineral drive and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and outstanding focus on the long and complex finish. This will be a great wine in due course, but, though it is approachable now, it is still a puppy and should be given at least eight to ten years in the cellar to really start hitting on all cylinders! 2028-2060. **94**.

2017 Azos De Pobo- Daterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo (Quiroga-Bibeí)

Laura Lorenzo's Azos De Pobo is made from a field blend from an extremely old vineyard (somewhere from eighty to one hundred and twenty years of age- no one is quite sure when it was planted!) and composed of a blend of probably fifty percent Gran Negro and Garnacha Tintorera, and the other half a mix of Mencía, Mouraton, Merenzao and whatever else

might have been available in the first quarter of the twentieth century in Ribeira Sacra. The grapes are destemmed and foot-trodden, barrel-fermented and raised in old Burgundy casks for eleven months prior to bottling. The 2017 version comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully complex nose of cassis, smoked meats, wild fennel, espresso, complex soil tones, lovely botanicals (that will get autumnal like Burgundy with bottle age) and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, moderately chewy tannins and superb focus and grip on the long and very complex finish. This is a superb wine that combines great, traditional country rusticity in its *cépages* with the most refined winemaking sensibilities. 2025-2055. **93.**

2017 Azos De Paraxe- Datterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo (Quiroga-Bibeí)

Out in the wildest outskirts of Ribeira Sacra in the Bibeí valley, Mencía is not necessarily the king red grape of the region. This bottling is composed entirely of Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Bouschet), which is selected out to be bottled on its own in a single cask. It is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in the same cask for a year that in which it is fermented, prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The 2017 Azos De Paraxe is a stunning young wine, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up stunning precision and complexity in its aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, bitter chocolate, complex minerality, chicory, licorice, gentle smokiness, cola and hints of the autumnal shadings that define Alicante Bouschet with bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a lovely core of black fruit, suave tannins and impeccable balance and grip on the long, complex and utterly stunning finish. I have never tasted such a sophisticated example of Alicante Bouschet. 2024-2055. **93+.**

2017 Camino De La Frontera- Datterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo (Quiroga-Bibeí)

The 2017 Camino De La Frontera from Datterra Viticultores is one of Laura Lorenzo's top single vineyard bottlings. It is an old vineyard that is planted primarily to Mencía, but with other grapes included in the field blend traditional in Ribeira Sacra back in the old days. With the drought and heat here in 2017, the wine has crept up in octane a bit from the 2016 version, but still comes in at only thirteen percent. The wine is more black fruity in personality this year, offering up a complex and classic bouquet of cassis, pomegranate, graphite, dark soil tones, espresso, a touch of tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully solid at the core, with excellent soil signature, ripe, moderately chewy tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and very classy finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to allow its tannins to soften up a bit on the backend, but the wine is impeccably balanced and will not take all that long to start to drink with generosity. A very classy bottle of (mostly) Mencía! 2025-2055. **93.**

Bierzo

2018 Godello- Bodegas Luna Beberide

I love the combination of high quality and very reasonable prices in all of the wines from Luna Beberide and their 2018 Godello is another absolute bargain. This is a classic example of this fine varietal, grown in a combination of clay and slate soils at an elevation of over two thousand meters, which allows the wine to stay crisp and soil-driven in style. The 2018 Godello offers up a lovely nose of

2018 Mencía- Bodegas Luna Beberide

The 2018 Mencía from Luna Beberide is produced from thirty year-old vineyards that are planted on clay and limestone. It is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks and bottled

unfiltered. This is the *bodegas*’ entry level bottling of Mencía and it has been a superb value that last three or four vintages that I have tasted. The 2018 continues the string of successes, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of cassis, pomegranate, tree bark, woodsmoke and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with a lovely foundation of soil tones, a good core of fruit, suave, modest tannins and a long, focused and complex finish. This is light on its feet, but has great intensity of flavor and superb backend lift. At well under twenty dollars a bottle here in the US, it is an absolute steal (yet, again)! 2020-2035. **90.**

2017 Mencía “Finca la Questa”- Bodegas Luna Beberide

The Finca la Questa bottling of Mencía from Luna Beberide is produced from decidedly older vines, as these vineyards are sixty years of age and their soils, though still based on clay and limestone, also include plenty of slate. This wine is aged for ten months in older, neutral French oak prior to bottling. The 2017 version is excellent on both the nose and palate, reflecting the more powerful personality of the vintage in its aromatic constellation of cassis, black raspberry, espresso, woodsmoke, graphite, a complex foundation of soil and a topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core and soil signature, ripe, moderately chewy tannins and fine length and grip on the complex finish. The lower acids of the vintage here are apparent in comparison to the 2018 Mencía, but the balance is still impeccable and this wine is going to age beautifully. It is certainly approachable today and quite easy to drink, but another layer of complexity is bound to emerge with some bottle age. 2020-2050. **92.**

2017 Mencía “Art”- Bodegas Luna Beberide

The 2017 Art bottling of Mencía from Luna Beberide is from even older vines than the Finca la Questa, as these vineyards are eighty to ninety years of age, planted at eight to nine hundred meters above sea level and on an almost pure base of slate, so this is much more Ribeira Sacra-like in its soil composition than most of the vineyards in Bierzo. The wine undergoes its malo in barrel and is raised in a combination of a few new French *demi-muids* and older two hundred and twenty-five liter barrels. It spends just over a year in cask prior to bottling. The 2017 Art is pretty ripe for this bottling, coming in at fourteen percent in this vintage and delivering a superb, old viney nose of sweet cassis, pomegranate, graphite, a beautiful base of slate minerality, cigar smoke, wild fennel, a touch of tree bark and a deft foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, precise and full-bodied, with a great core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, polished and complex finish. This is more refined in personality than the Finca la Questa bottling, with the same fine depth, but more a more elegant personality. First class juice. 2023-2050. **93.**

2016 Mencía “Paixar”- Bodegas Luna Beberide

Paixar is, of course, the top of the line bottling from Luna Beberide, hailing from vines that are all in excess of eighty years of age, with most of these old vines stand alone, bush vines, planted at the highest elevations in the *bodegas*’ vineyard patrimony. It undergoes a bit of a cold soak” prior to the start of fermentation and its *elevage* is similar to the Art bottling, though it spends a couple more months in cask. The 2016 Paixar comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a super bouquet of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, licorice, cigar smoke, a very complex base of soil, tree bark and a gentle foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with great mineral drive and core, tangy acids, fine

focus and grip, buried, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is really serious juice and impressively light on its feet, given how much depth and dimension are here. 2024-2050. **93+**.

2016 Ultreia “La Claudina” Blanco- Raúl Pérez

As I have noted before, the Ultreia “La Claudina” Blanco from Raúl Pérez is composed entirely of Godello, with the wine fermented and raised in a single fifteen hundred liter *foudre* and Señor Pérez allows a *flor* to develop on the top surface of the wine in the style of Sherry. He allows the wine to age under its *flor* for one to two years and then bottles it unfiltered and unfiltered. The 2016 version is deep and complex on the nose, offering up scents of lemon, a bit of musk melon, salty soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and shows just a whisper of nutty influence from its *flor*, with excellent mid-palate depth, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and vibrant finish. This is a uniquely-styled and beautifully made wine. 2020-2030. **92**.



Valdeorras

2018 Godello- AdegA A Coroa

The 2018 Godello from AdegA A Coroa is a nice, pretty example of this varietal, made for early drinking and offering up an open and generous bouquet of lime, green olive, a touch of sea salts, good minerality and a touch of candied citrus peel on the upper register (that may suggest a commercial yeasts in play in the cellars here- though I am not sure of this). On the

palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a good core, bright acids and pretty good length and grip on the finish. This is not overly complex, but has good depth. 2020-2027. **87+.**

2018 Godello “Montenovo”- Bodegas Valdesil

The Montenovo bottling from Bodegas Valdesil is their regular bottling of Godello, as they do not do any extended lees contact on this wine, which is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks and produced from relatively young vines for this estate, as they are between five and twenty years of age. The 2018 version is nicely complex for a young wine, offering up scents of green olive, green apple, citrus peel, wild fennel and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and complex, with a good core, bright acids and fine length and grip. This is far more serious than the above. 2020-2030. **90.**

2018 Godello “Sobre Lías”- Bodegas Valdesil

The 2018 Godello “Sobre Lías” from Bodegas Valdesil is made from their oldest parcels of vines, which were planted at the end of the nineteenth century! The wine spends six months aging on its fine lees, with weekly stirrings, prior to bottling. The 2018 is an excellent young Godello, offering up a deep and precise bouquet of lime, pear, a nice touch of olive, a beautiful base of salty minerality, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, beautifully balanced finish. This will age gorgeously, but is already very, very tasty. First class Godello. 2020-2035+. **93.**

Cataluña

2018 Xarel-lo- Bohigas

This very dependable Cava producer also makes a dry, still wine version of Xarel-lo, and the 2018 version is a nicely cool and zesty customer, coming in at an even twelve percent octane. The wine offers up a bright and complex bouquet of fresh lime, green apple, salty soil tones, a hint of green olive, gentle floral tones and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, sound acids and very good length and grip on the gently spritzzy finish. This is a very, very good example of Xarel-lo and an excellent partner at the table. 2020-2025. **90.**

Terra Alta

2018 Las Colinas del Ebro Garnatxa Blanca- Bodegas Abanico (Terra Alta)

The 2018 Las Colinas del Ebro Garnatxa Blanca from Bodegas Abanico seems just a touch riper in its panoply of aromatics in comparison to the 2017 version, though the new vintage comes in listed at 13.5 percent again. The bouquet is ripe and effusive, offering up scents of pineapple *coulis*, wild fennel, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core, a nice foundation of soil tones, sound acids and good length and grip on the bouncy and nicely buxom finish. This is quite tasty, and my comments about last year’s version not being overly complex, but hitting all the right notes, is equally true of this very good 2018. Good juice. 2020-2025. **88.**

2018 Las Colinas del Ebro Garnatxa Negra-Syrah- Bodegas Abanico (Terra Alta)

The 2018 Las Colinas del Ebro Tinto is composed of a blend of eighty percent Garnatxa (thirty-five year-old vines) and twenty percent Syrah (from twenty-five year-old vines). The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks and the 2018 version comes in at a robust 14.5 percent octane and sealed under a plastic cork. It offers up a deep and gently jammy

bouquet of red and black raspberries, roasted meats, *garrigue*, candied orange peel, coffee grounds, bonfire and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with plenty of stuffing and length, a nice touch of backend pepperiness and a long, warm finish. This is a bit out of my comfort zone in terms of octane, but it is complex and well-balanced for its alcohol level, and for those who do not mind this level, there is an awful lot to like here (except for the plastic cork), particularly for \$14 a bottle here in the states. If higher octane wines are up your alley, add three points to me score. 2020-2025+. **87.**

2016 Las Colinas del Ebro “Selección de Viñas Viejas” Tinto- Bodegas Abanico

The 2016 Las Colinas del Ebro “Selección de Viñas Viejas” is made from a blend of forty-two percent Garnaxta, thirty-six percent Syrah and twenty-two percent Cariñena. Part of the blend is fermented in stainless steel (with the malo for this portion taking place in three hundred liter casks) and part in large oak vats, with the malo for this part of the blend taking part in vat. The wine is aged for five months after blending in French barrels, with the 2016 version coming in at a full fifteen percent octane. The wine smells quite a bit like a Priorat, offering up jammy scents of black raspberries, black cherries, a bit of fruitcake, *garrigue*, a nice touch of soil and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, powerful and plenty ripe, with broad shoulders, a rock solid core, firm tannins and a long, chewy and warm finish. This is too high octane for me as well, but clearly, there are some great vineyard parcels underlying this wine and if they could be harnessed at fourteen percent octane, this could be stellar. But north of fifteen percent, it is a bit beyond my comprehension and, as it is also sealed with a plastic cork, I have no idea how it will age. 2024-2040? **84?**

Priorat

2018 Priorat Blanco- Joan Giné (Buil & Giné)

The 2018 Priorat Blanco from Joan Giné is composed of a blend of fifty percent Garnaxta Blanco, twenty-five percent Macabeo, twenty percent Viognier and five percent of Pedro Ximénez and Muscat, all grown on slate soils. The wine is barrel-fermented in six hundred liter, new oak casks, all of which are new, and then aged in these barrels for six months prior to bottling. The 2018 version offers up a deep and complex nose of peach, pear, wild fennel, slate soil tones, a touch of honeysuckle and a well done framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and very nicely balanced, with a lovely core, good bounce and grip and a nice sense of soil on the long and complex finish. This is one of the best white wines from Priorat that I have ever tasted, as it carries its 14.5 percent octane absolutely seamlessly and seems quite cool and precise in the mouth. Bravo! 2020-2025. **91.**

2017 Priorat Tinto- Giné-Giné (Buil & Giné)

The 2017 Priorat Tinto from Giné-Giné is a fifty-fifty blend of Garnaxta and Cariñena, with the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts and the malolactic fermentation taking place in barrel. After the malo, the wine is blended and raised for six to nine months in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling. The 2017 version comes in at fifteen percent octane and offers up a ripe and spicy bouquet of red and black cherries, clove, smoked meats, a good base of soil tones, *garrigue* and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plush on the attack and rock solid at the core, with moderate, buried tannins and very good length and grip on the gently warm finish. This carries its fifteen percent alcohol quite well, but that is still a hefty number and even though this wine is quite light on its feet for its octane, it is not for the faint of heart. 2020-

2030+? **87** (but, add three points if you are more comfortable at this lofty octane level than I am!)

2017 Priorat Tinto “Selección Limitada”- Giné-Giné (Buil & Giné) screwcap

The 2017 Selección Limitada Tinto from Giné-Giné is also a ripe customer, coming in at fifteen percent alcohol, but does not show it all that much and is quite vibrant on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a bright blend of raspberries, spiced meats, *garrigue*, a good base of soil, woodsmoke and a topnote of cloves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really quite well balanced for its octane, with a fine core of fruit, buried tannins and very good length and grip on the complex and surprisingly well-balanced finish. I would, of course, like this even better if it were a bit lower in alcohol, but this is a good bottle in its style. 2020-2035+. **89.**

Campo de Borja

2018 Garnacha Blanco- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

The 2018 Garnacha Blanco from Legado del Moncayo is a fine follow-up to the strong 2017 version. These white grenache vines are grown at high altitude on soils of stony-clay soils. The 2018 comes in at the same octane as the 2017, 13.5 percent alcohol, and delivers a bright bouquet of pear, citrus blossoms, a fine base of soil, coriander seed, wild fennel and a bit of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and has a good core, with fine soil signature, zesty acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced and complex finish. This carries its ripeness quite nicely and remains one of the best white wine values to be found from Spain. 2020-2025+. **89.**

2018 Garnacha Tinto- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

The 2018 Garnacha Tinto from Legado del Moncayo is another superb bottle for its price tag, but like the 2017 version, this will be most rewarding if tucked away in the cellar for at least a couple of years. The bouquet is deep and nascently complex, offering up notes of black raspberries, *garrigue*, smoked game, a hint of pepper and a fine base of soil stones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a fine core, very good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, well-balanced and promising finish. Like the 2017 version, this comes in measured at fourteen percent octane and is going to be a lovely bottle with a bit of bottle age. 2023-2035+. **89+.**

2017 Dry Muscat- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección) Screwcap

The 2017 Dry Muscat from Legado del Moncayo is a bit riper than I would have imagined, as it comes in listed at 13.5 percent, but the wine was fermented to full dryness and is still bright and fresh and reminds me quite a bit of a similar bottling from Alsace. The bouquet offers up scents of pear, nectarine, acacia blossoms, chalky soil tones (this is grown on brown limestone) and orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, sound acids and a complex, though slightly clipped finish. I have the sense that the backend pinching of the wine is from the closure, rather than the wine, and I would opt for dinking this over the next year. At \$14 a bottle in the US, I understand the economics behind the choice of closure, but an agglomerated cork would not cost much more and might allow the wine to age more gracefully. Certainly, this 2017 possessed the constituent components to age several more years under cork! Still, this is quite tasty and just a touch short. 2020-2022+? **87.**

2017 Garnacha Tinto “Vendimia Seleccionada”- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez)

The Vendimia Seleccionada bottling of Garnacha from Legado del Moncayo is aged for nearly a year in older, French oak casks, during its *elevage*, rather than simply in stainless steel, as is the case with the regular bottling from this fine producer. All of the vines that go into both bottlings are at least forty years of age, and the 2017 Vendimia Seleccionada is a touch riper than the regular bottling, hitting 14.5 percent octane and offering up

Calatayud**2017 Garnacha “Acentor”- Isaac Fernandez Selección**

The 2017 Acentor is another fine vintage of Garnacha from this consistently strong estate. The wine is ripe and nicely balanced, offering up a deep nose of black raspberries, bonfire, dark soil tones, spit-roasted game, coffee grounds and a bit of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with a good touch of meatiness and spice, good focus and grip, moderate tannins and just a whisper of backend heat perking up the long finish. This is listed at 14.5 percent, but carries its octane very well and is a tasty example of old vine grenache made without any makeup in the cellar. Good juice in a riper style. 2022-2040. **88.**

Txakoli**2018 Txakoli Malda- Txakoli Zudugarai (Getariako-Txakolina)**

The 2018 Txakoli Malda” from Txakoli Zudugarai is composed entirely from the Hondurrabi Zuri grape and is a lovely example of this lightly effervescent and minerally, dry white wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of tart pear, lime peel, salty minerality and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and slightly spritzy, with good intensity of flavor, zesty acids and a long, tasty finish. Good juice. 2020-2023. **89.**

2018 Antxiola- Txakoli Zudugarai (Getariako-Txakolina)

The 2018 Antxiola from Txakoli Zudugarai includes ten percent Hondurrabi Beltza to go along with its ninety percent of Hondurrabi Zuri. The wine is slightly deeper-pitched in its aromatic profile, offering up notes of bread fruit, a touch of pear, salty soil tones, a touch of leanness and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and vibrant, with a good core and mineral drive, bright acids and a long, gently frothy and long finish. This is just a touch more reserved out of the blocks than the Txakoli Malta bottling- perhaps from the ten percent of Hondurrabi Beltza in the blend? Another very pleasant example. 2020-2025. **89+.**

2015 Bengoetxe “Berezia”- Etxeberria Zubizaretta y Otro (Getariako-Txakolina)

The 2015 Bengoetxe “Berezia” from Etxeberria Zubizaretta y Otro is a reserve bottling from the estate, which is only made in top vintages. It is produced by aging it for one year on its fine lees, with regular *battonage*, and then given at least a year of bottle age in the cellars as well prior to release. The 2015 Berezia offers up a complex nose of bread fruit, citrus peel, salty minerality, a touch of raw almond and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and nicely mineral, with a lovely core of fruit, good focus and grip and a long, very well-balanced finish. A fine bottle, which is composed of ninety-five percent Hondurrabi Zuri and five percent Gros Manseng. 2020-2030. **90.**



Ribera del Duero

2018 Arrocal Tinto- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)

The 2018 Arrocal Tinto from Bodegas Arrocal is composed entirely of tempranillo and only spends eight months in cask prior to racking and bottling. The 2018 is fourteen percent octane and delivers a fine nose of black cherries, cigar smoke, gentle spice tones, a nice touch of soil, a discreet framing of oak and a bit of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, lovely grip and a long, classy and moderately tannic finish. This is a young wine and not overly complex today, but it is quite drinkable already and more complexity is certain to come with some bottle age. In a region with generally pretty over-heated prices, this is a fine value. 2020-2040. **90.**

2018 Nuestro “8 Meses” Tinto- Bodegas Nuestro de Dias Bayo

The Nuestro “8 Meses” Tinto is composed entirely from tempranillo and aged for eight months (as the name suggests) in French oak barrels, prior to bottling. The 2018 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up an attractive bouquet of black cherries, cigar wrapper, a nice base of soil tones, espresso, spices tones redolent of clove and nutmeg and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. These vineyards lie at more than nine hundred meters above sea level and this can be felt in the backend bounce and vibrancy. Good juice. 2023-2045+. **90.**

2018 Aptus Tinto- Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz (Ribera del Duero)

The 2018 Aptus Tinto from Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent Tempranillo and the other five percent a mix of Garnacha and Monastrell, with the vineyards farmed organically. In the torrid European summer of 2018, the Aptus has come in riper than in any previous vintage I have tasted of the wine, as this is a full fifteen percent octane. The wine offers up a nose of backed red and black cherries, a bit of apricot, chocolate, a bit of coffee grounds, soil and a discreet foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and reasonably balanced for its octane, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and just a touch of backend heat on the long finish. This is a strong effort in a very challenging growing season, but it is not at the same level as previous vintages, from more classically-inclined summers. 2020-2025. **87.**

2018 Senda del Oro Roble- Bodegas Vizcarra (Ribera del Duero)

The Senda del Oro Roble is the entry level wine from Bodegas Vizcarra. It is composed entirely of Tempranillo, with the wine undergoing its alcoholic fermentation in stainless steel tanks, its malo in used barrels and the wine sees no new oak, as it is aged for six to nine months in two year-old, French and American casks prior to bottling. The 2018 version is quite pretty, offering up a bright and youthful nose of black cherries, lovely spice tones, a nice touch of soil, cigar smoke and a bit of toasty oak from the used casks. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and bouncy, with a good core, modest tannins and sneaky length and grip on the nicely balanced finish. This is a young wine that is made to be accessible early, but has the balance to also age gracefully over the mid-term and more complexity will arrive for those willing to tuck it away in the cellar for a few years. A good value. 2020-2030+. **88.**

2018 Rios de Tinta (Ribera del Duero)

The 2018 Rios de Tinta is a very pretty young Ribera del Duero, offering up a bright bouquet of cherries, raspberries, cigar smoke, a nice touch of soil, spice tones and just a touch of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, ripe and focused, with pretty good depth at the core, just a whisper of backend tannin and nice shape and bounce on the fairly long finish. This comes in listed at fourteen percent octane, but seems perhaps just a shade higher. This is made for early drinking and is a very tasty example. 2020-2030. **89.**

2017 Arrocal Tinto “Passión”- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)

The Passión Arrocal cuvée is made entirely from tempranillo, with the vines now forty-five years of age. It is not raised in any new barrels, as its *elevage* is done in a fifty-fifty mix of two and three year-old French barrels. The 2017 Passión Arrocal comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a superb bouquet of plums, black cherries, dark chocolate, a touch of cigar wrapper and just a bit of nutty oak from the used casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, good soil signature and a long, ripely tannic and nascently complex finish. This will be an excellent bottle with a few years’ worth of cellaring, but it will probably take a full decade for it to blossom completely and hit its plateau. This is a great value! 2025-2050. **91+.**

2017 Finca La Mata Tinto- Isaac Fernandez (Ribera del Duero)

The 2017 Finca La Mata is a fine follow-up to the lovely 2016 version. These old vines have come in at fourteen percent octane in this vintage and offer up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of black cherries, plums, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, gentle spice elements and a judicious framing of new oak (one-third of the casks are new each year). On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely fruit tones, good soil signature,

buried, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. This is a serious wine and deserves time in the cellar to blossom into its secondary layers of complexity, but for those a bit impatient, it is already pretty easy to drink! 2025-2055+. **92.**

2016 Arrocal Tinto “Selección”- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)

The 2016 Arrocal “Selección” comes in at a very civilized fourteen percent octane and offers up fine precision on both the nose and palate. The wine is raised in fifty percent new oak and the 2016 version delivers fine aromatic complexity in its blend of cassis, black cherries, bitter chocolate, lovely soil tones, cigar ash and a judicious serving of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely reserved in personality, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is beautifully built to age and will need some time in the cellar to blossom, but it should prove to be long-lived and a superb bottle for many decades to come. 2028-2055. **93.**

2016 Nuestro “15 Meses” Crianza Tinto- Bodegas Nuestro de Dias Bayo

The 2016 Nuestro “15 Meses” Crianza from Bodegas Nuestro de Dias Bayo is from slightly older vines than their “8 Meses” bottling (thirty years of age, versus twenty) and hails from equally high altitude vineyards. The wine spends fifteen months of its *elevage* in a combination of French and American oak casks, and then another fifteen months of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release! The 2016 is excellent, offering up a deep, complex and still youthfully vibrant bouquet of black cherries, plums, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a nice mix of both spicy and smoky oak and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, classy finish. This is an outstanding value, as even here in the over-heated US market, this sells for just over \$25 per bottle! Fine juice! 2024-2050. **92.**

2016 El Pedrosal- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas (Ribera del Duero)

The 2016 El Pedrosal from Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas is a beautiful example of the vintage, perhaps taking advantage a bit of the higher general yields of 2016 to ripen up a bit lower in octane than the 2015 (fourteen versus 14.5 percent alcohol) and trading just a bit of concentration for an even more refined silhouette. The bouquet is gorgeous, offering up a perfumed blend of plums, cherries, fresh nutmeg, cocoa powder, a nice touch of soil and a nicely done framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very elegant, with good depth at the core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and classy finish. I know some folks will crave a bit more of the modern power of Ribera del Duero here (that has been routine for the last fifteen years or more), but for me, the slightly less concentrated style of the 2016 El Pedrosal harkens back to the region’s golden outset in the decade of the 1980s. This is a beautifully balanced wine that is approachable today, but really has a bit of tannin that should be allowed to resolve before drinking it in earnest. 2023-2045+. **92.**

2015 Arrocal “Ángel” Reserva- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)

The Ángel bottling from Bodegas Arrocal is one of the *bodegas’* old vine cuvées, with the 2015 version hailing from the eighty-plus year-old tempranillo vines of the Finca Clara vineyard. The wine is raised entirely in new French oak, with the malolactic fermentation also taking place in barrel. The 2015 Ángel comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a deep and classy bouquet of red and black cherries, a hint of raspberry, a fine base of soil, cigar wrapper and a very refined framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a fine core, really good soil signature and a long,

riply tannic and classy finish. As I mentioned in my note on the 2014 Ángel, this is quite new oaky in personality out of the blocks, but it is impeccably balanced and will age beautifully. 2030-2060+. **93.**

2015 Arrocal “Máximo” Reserva- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)

As I have noted in the past Bodegas Arrocal’s Máximo bottling is their top of the line cuvée, made from seventy-five year-old vines in a prime section of the El Portillo Vineyard in the village of Gumiel de Mercado, which is one of the highest elevation villages in Ribera del Duero and hence, has good diurnal temperature swings to keep freshness in the wine in the hot summers here. The 2015 Máximo is a touch riper than the Ángel, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol and delivering fine aromatic sophistication in its blend of red plums, black cherries, cocoa powder, cloves, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil tones and a suave base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with lovely focus and grip, a very good core of fruit, good soil signature and a long, ripely tannic and gently warm finish. The balance here is very good and I have no doubts the wine will age long and gracefully, but it would have been ideal to see it come in a half degree lower in octane, so that the backend of the palate was as pure as the attack. But, in this twisted world of global warming, this is really a beautiful bottle from a warmer region in a world aflame. 2028-2060. **93+.**

2015 Ribera del Duero Tinto- Isaac Fernandez (Ribera del Duero)

The 2015 Ribera del Duero Tinto from Isaac Fernandez is produced from more than eighty year-old tempranillo vines that are grown in the el Pago de Las Tenerías vineyard that sits at eighty hundred and fifty meters of elevation. The wine undergoes its malolactic fermentation in stainless steel tanks, prior to racking into one hundred percent new French barrels for two years of *elevage*. The 2015 offers up a superb, young nose of plums, black cherries, cigar ash, a touch of lavender, fine soil tones and a well-done foundation of gently spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, youthful and very, very promising, with excellent mid-palate depth, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex and very classy finish. This has excellent potential, but it is built for the cellar and will take at least a decade of bottle age to start to sing. It should age very long and gracefully. Impressive juice! 2028-2055+. **92+.**

2015 Viña Pedrosa “La Navilla” Reserva- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas

The 2015 Viña Pedrosa “La Navilla” Reserva is composed entirely of tempranillo and is an outstanding example of this fine vintage. The bouquet is deep and youthfully complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of plums, red and black cherries, fresh nutmeg, a hint of clove, a fine base of soil tones, cigar wrapper and a judicious framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, vibrant and classy young finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but seems cooler to my palate, due to its simply impeccable balance. This will want a bit of time in the cellar to really blossom, but it is going to be outstanding! 2025-255. **93.**

2015 Nuestro “20 Meses” Tinto- Bodegas Nuestro de Dias Bayo

The “20 Meses” bottling from Bodegas Nuestro de Dias Bayo is their oldest vine cuvée, being made from seventy year-old vines that grow nine hundred meters above sea level. The wine is composed entirely of tempranillo, sees its malolactic fermentation take place in four hundred and fifty liter French casks and is raised for twenty months in these barrels prior to bottling. After bottling, the wine is given another year and a half of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. The 2015 “20 Meses” comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and offers up a

superb bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, bitter chocolate and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied, focused and shows off beautiful mid-palate depth, with lovely focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and excellent length on the complex finish. The raw materials here are obviously superior to the “15 Meses” bottling, as the vines are so much older, but I wonder if a bit of this advantage was lost with the malolactic fermentation taking place in cask here? In any event, this is really good wine, which is starting to already drink very nicely, but which will be even better four or five years down the road. 2020-2050. **92+**.

2015 J. C. Vizcarra Tinto (Ribera del Duero)

The 2015 Tinto from J. C. Vizcarra is composed entirely from tempranillo, from vineyards planted in 1980 and planted at a high altitude of eight hundred and fifty meters. The wine is raised in a combination of French and American oak casks for fifteen months prior to bottling and the 2015 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane. The wine offers up a ripe and nicely focused nose of plums, black cherries, chocolate, cigar wrapper, a nice touch of spice tones and a lovely blend of vanillin and spicy oak tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly powerful in personality, with a fine core of fruit, firm, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the robust, but fairly well-balanced finish. This is carrying a fair bit of new oak and there is still a bit of backend wood tannin showing as a result, but it seems to have the stuffing to absorb it fully with a bit more bottle age. This is a broad-shouldered example of Ribera del Duero, and though this is not my favorite style of wine from the region, this is a very well-made example of its genre, and if you fancy the more muscular style in Ribera del Duero, then add three points to my score. 2024-2050. **89**.

2014 Ribera del Duero Tinto- Isaac Fernandez (Ribera del Duero)

The 2014 Ribera del Duero bottling from Isaac Fernandez hails from a different vineyard source than the 2015 version. This cuvée hails from the Pagos de La Calabaza vineyard, which is planted to sixty year-old tempranillo vines and is a touch higher in altitude than the 2015 version’s vineyard, as these vines sit at nine hundred meters above sea level. Again, the malo here is done in tank prior to racking into barrels, with the 2014 version raised all in new oak, but with ninety percent French and ten percent of the casks made from American oak in this vintage. The *elevage* here was also a bit longer than the 2015, with the wine spending fully two and a half years in cask prior to bottling. The 2014 offers up a superb bouquet of plums, red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil, lovely spice tones and a well-done framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, tangy acids, firm, well-integrated tannins and just a wisp of heat perking up the long and nascently complex finish. There is no alcohol listed on the label here, as the bottle was shipped from the winery, but I would guess that it is around 14.5 percent, which is pretty standard fare in Ribera del Duero these days. It is a very good wine in the making, and the only way I would seek to improve it would be to get the octane down just a half point and make it a touch cooler on the long finish. 2028-2055. **92**.

2012 Pérez Pascuas “Gran Selección” Tinto Gran Reserva

The 2012 Pérez Pascuas “Gran Selección” Tinto Gran Reserva is made entirely from tempranillo and comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol. This cuvée is raised in a combination of French and American oak casks of two hundred and twenty-five liters, with only fifty percent of them new. It spends twenty-six months in barrel, followed by a minimum of four

years additional aging in the cellars prior to release. Amazingly, even at seven years of age, this remains a young wine deserving of more cellaring time, but it has outstanding constituent components and will be stellar in due course. The bouquet remains a touch reserved, but offers up impressive depth in its mix of black plums, cassis, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil, fresh nutmeg, eucalyptus, a touch of clove and a fine base of cedary and smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly tannic, with excellent depth of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is certainly approachable today with some decanting time, but is still young and will be even better five to ten years down the road. 2025-2055. **92+**.

2012 Viña Pedrosa “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas

The 2012 Viña Pedrosa “Gran Reserva” from Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas has a *cépages* of ninety percent tempranillo and ten percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine offers up a beautifully black fruity aromatic constellation of cassis, black plums, nutmeg, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, just a hint of clove and a well-done framing of new oak (both French and American). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully detailed, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very promising finish. At age eight, this is just starting to show a bit of velvetiness on the attack, but is not yet at its apogee and will be even better with another four to five years in the cellar to allow those backend tannins to fall away a bit more. First class Ribera del Duero. 2024-2055+. **93**.

2006 El Pedrosal “Reserva”- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas

The 2006 El Pedrosal Reserva from Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas is the first vintage I have ever seen of this wine as a Reserva. The blend here is ninety percent tempranillo and ten percent cabernet sauvignon and the wine comes in listed at 13.5 percent alcohol. It offers up a lovely, mature and nicely black fruity bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, beautiful spice tones, a fine base of soil, a fine framing of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully resolved at age fourteen, with a good core, fine complexity and focus, melted tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is drinking at a lovely point in its evolution, but still has plenty of life in it. 2020-2030+. **91**.

Rioja Blanco y Tinto

2018 Rioja Blanco “Fermentado en Barrica”- Bodegas Monte Real

The 2018 Rioja Blanco “Fermentado en Barrica” from Bodegas Monte Real is composed of a blend of eighty percent Viura and twenty percent Malvasia de Rioja. It spends five months aging on its fine lees prior to racking, after its fermentation in American oak casks. The 2018 version offers up a lovely, new oaky nose of apple, lemon, salty soil tones, spring flowers and coconutty new American oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the gently oaky finish. All of the casks for this wine are new, but as it only spends five months in the barrels, it has a new oaky personality, without the underlying fruit or minerality being overwhelmed. This is a good bottle that should also age nicely and I would bet it will be even more attractive with another four or five years’ worth of bottle age, as the oak should submerge even more. 2020-2040. **89**.

2016 Rioja “Alma”- Bodegas Casa la Rad

I know I do not get around as much as I used to, but this is the heaviest bottle of Rioja I have ever crossed paths with, including some of those glass behemoths from Roda. However,

despite the heavy-gauged glass, the wine is quite classical in its sensibilities, being composed of a blend of forty percent Tempranillo, forty percent Garnacha and ten percent each of Graciano and Maturana. It is a single vineyard bottling from the la Rad vineyard and was fermented and underwent malo in eight hundred liter French casks, after which it spent fourteen months in new French oak barrels prior to bottling. This is a very limited bottling, as there are only four hundred and sixteen cases produced, which is too bad, as the wine is excellent. The complex and classy bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of raspberries, cherries, Rioja spices, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of nutskin and a very deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and focused, with an excellent core of fruit, impressive soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and gently warm finish. This is listed at 14.5 percent octane and is a bit warm on the backend, but also long, complex and balanced. I would love to see it a bit lower in octane, but there is serious depth and complexity here and I suspect it will age quite gracefully, even at 14.5 percent alcohol. Given my predisposition for the traditional camp in Rioja, I was surprised just how much I liked this wine! It is slightly modern in style, but still pays homage to the great *terroir* of Rioja and is more hybrid than brazenly modern in personality. It is certainly a very, very good wine in the making! But, given that the world is burning, could we perhaps bottle future vintages in a less heavy bottle? 2024-2055. **92+**.

2015 Rioja Tinto- Sierra de la Demanda- Alberto Orte (Rioja Alta)

The 2015 Rioja Tinto from Sierra de la Demanda is made from high altitude, north-facing vineyards overlooking the Ebro River. This bottling is fairly unique in being seventy-five percent garnacha (from ninety year-old vines!), twenty percent tempranillo and five percent Viura. It is raised in French oak casks and fermented with plenty of whole clusters. The 2015 version comes in a thirteen percent octane and offers up a fine, red fruity and quite transparent bouquet of raspberries, cherries, cloves, celery seed, a fine base of soil tones, peppercorn, youthful stemmy tones and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, young and medium-full, with a fine signature of soil, ripe, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a young wine that will need a few more years in the cellar to start to really blossom, as there are some backend tannins to soften up and bottle age will let those whole cluster tones turn to cinnamon-like spice. This has a fine future. 2024-2045+. **91**.

2015 Rioja Blanco- Sierra de la Demanda- Alberto Orte (Rioja Alta)

Alberto Orte's 2015 Rioja Blanco is composed of blend of eighty percent Viura and twenty percent Garnacha Blanca. Like the red, this hails from the highest elevation vineyards in all of Rioja. The wine is aged in a combination of French oak and Acacia wood barrels. The 2015 version comes in at a cool twelve percent octane and offers up a bouquet that shows its acacia wood casks fairly vigorously in its combination of pear, almond, salty soil tones, a touch of wild fennel and plenty of acacia wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and fairly complex, but also quite woody, with good length and grip, but with some of the acacia wood tannins perking up the long finish. Today, this wine is absolutely dominated by the acacia wood casks, but there is plenty of vibrant fruit and soil tones underneath, and if the acacia can eventually be integrated better, this will be very good. But, I am not sure the wood can ever be fully buried in the wine. It is certainly drinkable today, albeit the acacia wood has the upper hand, but there is lift and grip on the backend that will give the wine a fighting chance. 2020-2035+? **85-89+?**



Tempranillo grapes ready for harvest in mid-October in the Rioja Alavesa region.

2014 Viña Otano Rioja “Reserva”- Bodegas y Viñedos Union Viticultores Riojanos

The 2014 Viña Otano Rioja “Reserva” is composed of a blend of eighty-five percent tempranillo, ten percent graciano and five percent mazuelo. It was raised for eighteen months in a combination of both French and American oak barrels, with rackings every six months. The wine shows a bit of its French oak influence in its fine bouquet of raspberries, cloves, cigar smoke, a good base of soil, just a hint of meatiness and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and already nicely silky on the attack, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, tangy finish. This is fourteen percent octane, which has allowed the wine to absorb a bit more wood tannin that needs further resolution on the backend, but it has fine constituent components and with a few more years in the cellar, should be a lovely drink. I would not mind this wine at all raised entirely in older American casks, as texturally, it has a lovely old school style already and the cedary French wood seems somehow slightly inappropriate. But, that said, this is a well-made wine. 2022-2045+. **89+**.

2012 Viña Otano Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas y Viñedos Union Viticultores Riojanos

The 2012 Viña Otano Rioja “Gran Reserva” has a slightly higher percentage of graciano in the *cépages* than the 2014 Reserva, as this wine is fifteen percent of that grape, to go along with eighty percent tempranillo and five percent mazuelo. This bottling sees fully two years in a combination of American and French casks prior to bottling, and then an additional three years

bottle aging prior to release. The wine offers up a complex aromatic constellation of black cherries, black raspberries, cigar smoke, a bit of spiced meats, dark soil tones, Rioja spices and a deft framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a suave attack, a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature and a long, modestly tannic and tangy finish. There is a bit of toasted coconut from the American oak here on the backend that is very enjoyable (at least to a classicist such as myself). Fine juice. 2020-2050. **91+**.

2010 La Antigua Clásico Rioja “Gran Reserva” Tinto- Alberto Orte (Rioja Alta)

The 2010 La Antigua Clásico Rioja “Gran Reserva” hails from high altitude vineyards in the Sierra de la Demanda Mountains, with the majority of the blend from garnacha vines planted in 1940. The *cépages* of the 2010 Gran Reserva is sixty percent of this old vine garnacha, thirty percent tempranillo and ten percent graciano. The wine is aged for six years in cask prior to bottling, with forty percent of the casks American wood and sixty percent French. The 2010 Gran Reserva offers up a superb bouquet of raspberries, cherries, smoked meats, a hint of *garrigue*, celery seed, complex soil tones, cigar wrapper and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely velvety on the attack, with a spicy personality, a good core of fruit, modest tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a fine bottle that is really starting to drink well at ten years of age, but has the balance to age very long and gracefully. 2020-2050+. **93**.

2007 Viña Tondonia Rioja “Reserva”- López de Heredia (Rioja Alta)

The 2007 Viña Tondonia Rioja “Reserva” from López de Heredia is the newest release of this bottling into the market- one has to love a winery that gives a wine twelve years’ aging in the cellars prior to letting it out to slake a thirsty world! The 2007 Viña Tondonia “Reserva” is still emphatically a young wine, despite it being thirteen years of age now, and though it is very tasty, it is still in climbing mode and will be even better with more bottle age. The wine comes in at a classic thirteen percent octane and offers up a lovely bouquet of raspberries, cherries, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, adolescent Rioja spices tones, coconutty American oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tangy and still modestly tannic, with a good core, lovely structure and focus and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is quite tasty in its relative youth, but will be even better five or ten years down the road. Fine juice. 2020-2060. **92**.

Toro

2017 Toro Tinto- Elias Mora

The 2017 Toro Tinto from Elias Mora is a ripe wine at 14.5 percent, but it also has a good sense of balance and carries its octane quite well. The deep nose offers up scents of black cherries, chocolate, cigar smoke, a touch of tariness and a bit of cigar wrapper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, but buried tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and gently warm finish. This is a classic example of Toro in this era of global warming, with plenty of muscle and the structure to age, and with the alcohol managed fairly well. It will need some bottle age to soften up, but should be a pretty good drink when it is ready to go. 2024-2045+. **88**.

2016 Crianza Tinto- Elias Mora

The Crianza bottling from Elias Mora hails from vines that are a bit older than the Descartes below, but these are not at elevation and do not have a northerly exposition, so they realize a bit more octane and the 2016 version comes in listed at a full fifteen percent alcohol. The wine does not see any new wood, but is raised in a fifty-fifty mix of American and French barrels that are “one wine-old”. The 2016 offers up a deep, ripe and surprisingly fresh nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, balsamic overtones, cigar ash and a nice touch of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plump and nicely light on its feet for fifteen percent octane, a good core, slightly coarse tannins and good length and grip on the slightly warm finish. Not bad in its idiom. 2023-2040. **88+**.

2015 Descarte Tinto- Elias Mora

The 2015 Descarte from Elias Mora is composed entirely of tempranillo, from a forty year-old vineyard that faces north and sits at seven hundred meters above sea level. The is aged for one year in a combination of new and older oak casks prior to bottling and the 2015 version comes in tipping the scales at 14.5 percent octane. The wine delivers a ripe and generous bouquet of black cherries, black raspberries, coffee grounds, cigar smoke and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a rock solid core, suave, buried tannins and very good length and grip on the impressively well-balanced finish. This carries its alcohol beautifully and is quite cool in the backend. Good juice in that riper and plusher style. 2020-2040. **91**.

2014 Gran Tinto- Elias Mora

The 2014 Gran Tinto from Elias Mora is from their oldest parcel of vines, as these tempranillo vines are fully ninety years of age. This vineyard also sits up at elevation, being planted at seven hundred and fifty meters in a stony sand and clay soil foundation. The spends seventeen months in French casks prior to bottling and the 2014 is a full fifteen percent octane. It offers up deep and ripe bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, cigar ash, a good base of soil, spit-roasted meats and smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a bottomless core, excellent focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and gently chewy finish. This is really good wine, and only shows a touch of backend heat, which is pretty remarkable for a wine that is fifteen percent alcohol! 2024-2050. **92**.

Jumilla

2017 Porta Regia Monastrell “Colección Privada”- Bodegas Sierra Norte

The Colección Privada bottling of Porta Regia from Bodegas Sierra Norte is produced from fifty year-old Monastrell bush vines, which are farmed organically. The wine is aged exclusively in “two wine” barrels for one year prior to bottling, with sixty percent of the casks of French origin and forty percent made from American oak. The 2017 version is 14.5 percent octane and offers up a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, cassis, roasted meats, bonfire, menthol, a fine base of soil and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with ripe tannins, good grip and length and just a bit of heat poking out on the complex and robust finish. Good juice and a fine value. 2023-2040+. **90**.

La Mancha

2018 Sauvignon Blanc- Pago De La Jaraba

The 2018 Sauvignon Blanc from Pago De La Jaraba is an impressively cool customer, coming in at twelve percent octane and offering up a bright, youthful and vibrant nose of lime, tart apricot, fresh-cut grass, lovely soil tones, gentle smokiness and just a whisper of upper register botanicals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and gently grassy, with a lovely core, fine cut and grip and a long, complex and tasty finish. This is a lovely, low octane example of the varietal. 2020-2023. **88.**

Almansa

2018 Garnacha Tintorera “Albahra” - Envínate (Almansa)

The 2018 vintage of Albahra from Envínate comes in at an even thirteen percent and is excellent on both the nose and palate. Readers may recall that this is made from thirty-plus year-old Garnacha Tintorera (or Alicante Bouschet) vines, vinified with fifty percent whole clusters, indigenous yeasts and the raised in old *barriques*. The new release offers up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, tree bark, woodsmoke, pepper, hung game, coffee grounds and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature, lovely focus and balance and a long, ripely tannic finish that closes with an overt note of peppercorn. Fine juice that is structured as if it wishes to be Spain’s answer to Hermitage. 2025-2050+. **92.**



Sierra de Gredos

2017 “GR-10” Tinto- 4 Monos Viticultores (Viños de Madrid- Sierra de Gredos)

The 2017 “GR-10” Tinto from 4 Monos Viticultores is made from a field blend from vineyards in three different villages in the mountains. The wine includes fifty percent whole clusters, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised for ten months in a collection of three, four and five hundred liter, old French casks. The 2017 is nicely ripe at 13.5 percent and delivers a beautifully expressive bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of sweet dark berry, bonfire, lovely minerality, anise, lavender, gentle spices and a hit of the cola tones to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with lovely mineral undertow, moderate tannins and a long, complex and very compelling finish. This will age very nicely on its chassis of well-measured tannin, but it is already pretty easy to drink. Fine juice. 2020-2040+. **92.**

2016 “Car”- 4 Monos Viticultores (Viños de Madrid- Sierra de Gredos)

The 4 Monos bottling of Car is their Cariñena bottling, produced from thirty-plus year-old bush vines grown in sandy topsoils over a base of granite in the mountains at elevations from six to twelve hundred meters above sea level. As I have mentioned in the past, the winemakers here ferment the Cariñena with whole clusters, indigenous yeasts and the wine’s *elevage* is done in old casks for fifteen months prior to bottling. The 2016 Car is beautifully light on its feet, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up superb aromatic precision in its blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, complex soil tones, just a touch of clove, wild fennel, discreet smokiness and hints of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and beautifully transparent, with lovely intensity of flavor, gentle tannins and a long, tangy and soil-driven finish. This is a lovely middleweight of breed, complexity and no undue weight. 2020-2030+. **91+.**

2016 Aguja del Fraile- 4 Monos (Sierra de Gredos)

The Aguja del Fraile from 4 Monos is an old vine bottling of red from this fine young winery, hailing from vineyards that are seventy years of age planted on pure granite at eight hundred and fifty meters above sea level. I assume that this is a field blend from the old vineyard, as I could not find any information on its *cépages*. The 2016 is a lovely wine, bright, light on its feet and offering up a lovely and very complex blend of both red and black fruit in its bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, bonfire, cumin, lovely stony soil tones, chicory and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and transparent, with an excellent core of fruit, superb backend mineral drive, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and energetic finish. Like all the 4 Monos reds, this wine is light on its feet, but loaded with personality and intensity of flavor. Fine juice. 2020-2040. **93.**

2016 La Danza del Viento “Molino Quemado”- 4 Monos Viticultores (Sierra de Gredos)

As I have mentioned before, the Molino Quemado bottling from 4 Monos is produced from seventy-five year-old Garnacha vines planted in rocky, granitic soils. The wine is fermented with eighty percent whole clusters with indigenous yeasts and aged in older, three and five hundred liter barrels. The 2016 Molino Quemado comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of raspberries, red currants, spiced meats, a hint of *garrigue*, wild fennel, a superb base of soil, incipient notes of cola and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and stunningly transparent, and spicy, with a good core, great backend lift and grip, ripe tannins and a very long, pure, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is

one of the most transparent and light on its feet examples of Garnacha I have ever tasted! 2023-2045+. **93+**.

Extremadura

2016 Tinto Amarela “Parcela Valdemedel”- Envínate (Extremadura)

I have not seen this bottling from the talented quartet at Envínate since the 2013 vintage. This is made from the Trincadeira grape, which was traditionally grown widely in the Alentejo region of Portugal, an hour to the west of Extremadura. Its finicky nature has seen a lot of it replaced in the Alentejo in recent times. As I have mentioned previously, the Trincadeira grown in the Parcela Valdemedel benefits from the north-facing orientation of the vineyard, the five hundred meter elevation and the fine base of limestone in the soil, which helps offset some of the heat of the region and which allows the grape to thrive. The 2016 Parcela Valdemedel again

Alicante

2018 Bodegas Curii “Una Noche Y Un Dia” Tinto

The Una Noche Y Un Dia bottling from Alberto Redrado and Violeta Gutiérrez is composed entirely of the Garnacha grown in Alicante, which in this region is known by the local name of Giró. The vines range from fifteen up to sixty years of age. It includes some whole clusters, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised for six months in stainless steel, with the 2018 version coming in at an even thirteen percent octane. It offers up a lovely nose of raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, smoked meats, a fine base of soil, bonfire and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and spicy, with fine mineral drive, a good core and a long, moderately tannic, bouncy and complex finish. This reminds me of those excellent Clos du Mont Olivet Châteauneufs from the first half of the 1980s- but with a bit more breed! Fine juice. 2023-2040+. **90**.

2015 Bodegas Curii Tinto- Uvas Y Vinos Alberto & Violeta

The 2015 Curii Tinto is riper than the last couple of vintages from this dynamic couple of Alberto Redrado and Violeta Gutiérrez, coming in at a hefty 15.5 percent alcohol in the hot summer of 2015. As readers may recall, this is their old vine bottling of Garnacha produced up in the mountains of Alicante. The vineyards are all on limestone and the wine is fermented with fifty percent whole clusters and given an old school, leisurely élevage of one year in old French barriques and an additional year in even older, American oak foudre prior to bottling. I had loved this bottling in both 2013 and 2014, and though the 2015 is way above my octane comfort level, there is still a lot to like here for the intrepid. The 2015 Curii offers up the beautifully

Jerez

2018 Viña Matalán Blanco- Bodegas Primitivo Collantes

The 2018 Viña Matalán Blanco from Bodegas Primitivo Collantes is made entirely from the Palomino grape, the king of the Sherry region. The wine grows in the Albariza soils of the region, which are high in calcium carbonate and produce a very salty soil impression. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel, with a bit of fine lees aging, prior to bottling. The 2018 version offers up scents of lemon, citrus peel, green olive, a bit of Palomino nuttiness and a nice touch of salty soil. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the quite serious finish. This is good juice and

perhaps a look into the future of some of the fine wine production in the region of the Jerez. 2020-2025+? **89.**

2017 Socaire Blanco- Bodegas Primitivo Collantes

The Socaire Blanco from Bodegas Primitivo Collantes is also made entirely from Palomino, but rather than being fermented and aged in stainless steel, this wine is barrel-fermented and aged in older barrels, which have been used previously for Sherry production. The wine is aged fully two years in cask prior to bottling, with frequent topping up, to avoid the development of *flor*. The 2017 Socaire is excellent, offering up a complex bouquet of bread fruit, lemon peel, gentle nuttiness, a good base of white soil tones, dried flowers and a bit of older oak shadings. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, soil-driven and nicely balanced finish. Another good bottle in the making, the 2017 Socaire seems likely to age longer than the Viña Matalán and will improve with a bit more bottle age. 2020-2030. **90+.**



Portugal

2017 Quinta de Saes Tinto (Dão)

The 2017 Quinta de Saes Tinto is made from a *cépapes* of twenty-five percent each of Tinto Roriz (Tempranillo), Touriga Nacional, Alfrocheiro and Jaen. These are fairly young vines that go into this bottling, with the vineyards having been planted between 1992 and 2002. The soils of the vineyards are granite laced with clay, and the wine is fermented with indigenous

yeasts and raised in two and three year-old *foudres* for a year and a half prior to bottling. The wine is a touch reductive when first opened, but with a bit of air blossoms beautifully to offer up a youthfully complex bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a touch of saddle leather, cigar smoke, chicory and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, moderate, well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. With extended time in decanter, this wine really opens up, but it is built to age and will be even better with some bottle age. Excellent juice and a very good value! 2020-2045. **91+**.

1996 Quinta do Poço do Lobo Reserva- Caves São João (Bairrada)

The 1996 Quinta do Poço do Lobo Reserva is composed of a blend of ninety percent Baga and five percent each of Castelão Nacional and Moreto. The 1996 is a recent release from the winery and it is excellent, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, saddle leather, deep soil tones, fallen leaves, a hint of mint and other, more savory elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully resolved today, with a lovey core of fruit, impressive focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a beautiful, earthy and soil-driven wine that is at its apogee at age twenty-four, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. A great value. 2020-2040+. **92.**

1995 Quinta do Poço do Lobo Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva- Caves São João (Beiras)

The 1995 Quinta do Poço do Lobo Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva is a dead ringer for an old school, fully mature Haut Médoc from the old days of the 1970s or early 1980s, before producers were trying to pump up the volume. The wine offers up superb aromatic complexity in its mix of cassis, cigar ash, lovely soil tones (probably clay), just a hint of dried eucalyptus, still a bit of tobacco leaf and incipient notes of sealing wax. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with still a bit of backend tannin, excellent soil signature and a long, poised and very classy finish. This is really, really good juice! 2020-2050. **92+**.

CATCHING UP WITH THE 1982 BORDEAUX VINTAGE AS IT CLOSES IN ON ITS FORTIETH BIRTHDAY



Château Figeac, home to a brilliant 1982, basking under the sun on a warm spring afternoon.

Like many American wine lovers of my generation, the 1982 vintage in Bordeaux holds a seminal place in the history of my wine-collecting life. I am just a tad too young to really have benefited from the initial release of the 1982 Bordeaux, as I was still at the university and did not have any disposable income (let alone, any income at all, for that matter!) when the wines were first released as futures at what are today stunningly low, bargain basement prices, so I did not get to benefit directly from this legendary vintage upon first release (and sadly, my cellar is not bursting at the seams with 1982s). After I had attained my degree and started working in the wine trade, most of my best customers were a bit older than I was and had been in position to absolutely cram their cellars full of the 1982 Bordeaux, which they very sensibly did, so as time went on, I was able to greatly benefit from their generosity and hone my palate by tasting a great many 1982s in their relatively early years. Over time, I was able to chip away at this gaping hole in my cellar and put away some 1982s of my own, but never had a great selection of estates, due to my late entry into the game. Like everyone else with whom I tasted wine with at the time, I absolutely loved what I tasted from this vintage! In those formative years of my career, the 1982 vintage in Bordeaux was one of those mythical vintages that come along only rarely and I

lamented the timing of my completion of my studies, as I would have been delighted to have been able to lay in a serious cache of the 1982s during their Futures campaign!

For readers who are a bit younger than me and may not remember how the 1982s found their way into the pipeline at such advantageous pricing for consumers, let me recap briefly how this vintage came to market. In the spring of 1983, many European claret experts were of mixed opinions about the ripe 1982 vintage on the Gironde, as many commentators possessed of classical, English palates (who were by far the world's most important wine writers in this era) were a bit put off by the fleshy, ripe fruit tones and low acidity of the plush, young 1982s. Many had either declared that the vintage was not going to be the stuff of legend and was inherently flawed in some manner, or were still sitting on the fence about its ultimate potential when a relatively obscure, country lawyer in Maryland named Robert Parker declared that it was a brilliant vintage and should be widely purchased by anyone with a few hundred dollars of spare cash at hand. At the time, relatively few people had heard of Robert Parker or his newsletter, The Wine Advocate, which he had started on a part-time basis in 1978, but it was starting to gain a following, particularly in the nearby Washington, D.C. market, and he had more than enough readers in 1983 that merchants and wine collectors at least took notice of his rave reviews of the vintage. This was at a time when the Reagan administration had taken steps to strengthen the US dollar in the currency markets, in an attempt to improve trade deficit numbers leading into a planned reelection campaign, so that the dollar was trading at historically high levels against the French Franc, making what was already a well-priced 1982 vintage seem absolutely cheap for American merchants and consumers. Happily, a great many in the US wine trade accepted Robert Parker's assessment of the vintage and bought heavily, so that orders were very strong for the new vintage in the United States. When the wines eventually arrived and futures orders were completed, wine lovers started pulling corks on these 1982s, were absolutely delighted with what they tasted, and Robert Parker's reputation was cemented for the rest of his career.

I am not sure that readers today who are accustomed, for better or worse, to contemporary Bordeaux pricing, can really understand the huge chasm between today's pricing and those back in 1983 and 1984 when the vast majority of this particular vintage of Bordeaux was being sold. To give just some idea of how fantastic prices were for consumers in this era, the 1982 First Growths from Médoc were widely sold at \$360 per case of twelve bottles on futures, and there was plenty of wine available, so one did not have to be the first one in line at your merchant to actually buy a case or two of the 1982 Château Mouton-Rothschild or Château Margaux at thirty dollars a bottle! Even the far more limited 1982 Château Pétrus was available for \$600 per case of twelve, or fifty dollars a bottle on futures, though one had to find a merchant with a pretty good connection to the estate's importers at the time, to get a case of Pétrus. But, it was out there for those who put in a little effort and decided to shell out for Pétrus in 1982-though many collectors decided that rather than a case of Pétrus, another case of Mouton, Latour or Lafite and a case of Pichon-Lalande or Léoville Las Cases on the side might be the better way to spend that same \$600! Of course, futures prices moved up incrementally over time, as merchants sold through their first *tranches* of the vintage and had to go back and buy more, but there was plenty of wine available and it was very easy for retailers to order more of the 1982s at slightly higher prices and continue to offer them to clients. And, even as prices mounted step by step, the very strong US dollar still made the vintage a bargain for wine consumers, even those who had not bought the vintage when the initial futures offerings had come out. Demand in the

states remained very high for the 1982s (and not necessarily all that strong in other traditional Bordeaux markets, due to the measured enthusiasm of wine writers outside of the US), and the *Bordelais* were very happy to send more and more wine from the vintage here to America.

While all of this was happening, I was still a sophomore and junior in college and not really aware of what was passing me by in the wine world, though, by my senior year, when I started to really develop an interest in wine and began to work part-time in wine shops in my college town, I heard stories about the bargains that had come and gone with the 1982s during their first year or two in the market. One could still find an occasional example of 1982 Bordeaux on the shelves when I started working part-time in the trade (though if it was still on the shelf, the general rule of thumb was that it was priced relatively too high or was a *petit château*), but the vintage that was currently readily available was the very good, but far less flashy, 1983 vintage, and much of the huge pond of 1982s in the US market had been swallowed up by the insatiable thirst of American wine collectors and had moved from store shelves into individuals' wine cellars. As I alluded to above, when the very first shipments of the 1982s had arrived here in the US and had been delivered to those who bought the wines on futures, bottles were opened forthwith and the general consensus was that Robert Parker had been absolutely correct about the greatness of the 1982s on the Gironde and the remaining stocks in the American pipeline had been snapped up with alacrity. Hence, the reason why there were still plenty of 1983s on shelves when I was first starting to work in the business, but most of the 1982s were already sold through the pipeline.

As subsequent top flight vintages came along from Bordeaux with the remainder of the decade unfolding (the fine 1983s were followed by superb wines again in 1985, 1986, 1989 and 1990), subsequent vintages all remained to some degree in the long shadows of the 1982s. This vintage had seemingly ushered in the advent of the modern day vintages on the Gironde, where sun was delivered with far greater frequency than had been the case at any previous time in the region's deep history, crop sizes mounted dramatically (but also ripened up very nicely with the changes to Bordeaux's climate) and the short-lived "Golden Age of Bordeaux" was unleashed. The great value that the 1982s had offered initially colored much of the remainder of the decade, with the *Bordelais* increasing prices in subsequent top years and merchants also taking larger cuts along the way, realizing that they had passed on unintended great bargains to consumers with the 1982s. In this regard, even the superb 1985 vintage, when it arrived only three years behind the 1982s, was perceived at the time as "too expensive" and Robert Parker had strongly discouraged American claret lovers from buying the wines on futures because of their high prices, though by today's standards, all of the best vintages of the second half of the decade of the 1980s were still flat out steals! But, Bordeaux's "Golden Age" did not end up lasting much beyond the close of the decade, for a myriad of reasons, as the vintages of the early 1990s were not particularly blessed growing seasons for the *Bordelais* and by the time the next top flight vintage came along in 1995, prices had mounted dramatically enough, and the US dollar had cooled against European currencies, so that the raging bull market for claret of the 1980s was never again repeated. By the end of the 1990s, financial investors had replaced private collectors and restaurants as the target clientele for the very top Bordeaux estates and prices multiplied accordingly, as both sellers and buyers had a vested interest in overly inflated prices, and the "Golden Age of Bordeaux" had died an ignominious death less than two decades after its birth.

But, this still leaves us with the superb wines from the decade of the 1980s, which I have written about often in these pages, as it was truly a remarkable string of outstanding vintages and probably the finest decade for claret in the history of the region. And, above all others, the reputation of the 1982s has stood above subsequent years from this amazingly good ten year span. As time has gone by, I have often wondered if the 1982s were every bit as good as their reputation suggests, for there were other factors beyond their inherent quality involved in their huge popularity when they were unleashed into the market and which might also account for some of their great popularity. First, prior to the 1982s, there had been a rather dramatic dearth of “great vintages” on the Gironde since 1970, with what would have been a truly brilliant year in 1981 largely undone by untimely and heavy rains right before harvest. Looking back into the latter half of the 1970s, though the 1978 and 1979 vintages produced some very solid wines, they were emphatically not the stuff of legend. In 1975, which had been touted as a top flight vintage at the time by a wine trade desperate for a “great vintage”, the only region that was truly brilliant was Pomerol. In 1975, some quite good wines were also made at selected estates in St. Émilion and the Graves, but the wines of the Médoc were generally quite overrated and the vintage lost whatever luster it had possessed out of the blocks as the years rolled by and their alleged early promise eventually turned out to be mostly an empty sales’ pitch. The 1971 vintage was very good, but not the stuff of legend, and though it has aged very nicely and defied early expectations of its potential longevity, it was never considered a “great vintage” in Bordeaux. So, the market was more than ready for a truly great vintage and 1982 provided that brilliantly.

Secondly, as I outlined above, at least here in the US, the confluence of currency fluctuations, initially tepid critical acclaim in Europe and a burgeoning interest in fine wine in America all added to the allure of the 1982s when they were first released on the market as futures. The wines were very, very good, widely available and extremely inexpensive by contemporary standards, so it is certainly reasonable to assume that their stunningly favorable prices for consumers could have also played a role in their unbridled popularity and reputation as the “finest vintage” of the great decade of the 1980s. There is no doubt that the fine years that unfurled in the wake of the 1982s certainly had to live in the shadow of that earlier vintage, but the question remains whether the 1982s were really the finest vintage since the twin towers of 1959 and 1961, or if vintages such as 1985, 1986 (particularly on the Left Bank- if the wines ever fully come around), 1989 or 1990 were the equals of the 1982s and only paled in comparison because of the factors we discussed above that made the 1982s the first of that decade’s top vintages and also the very best values in that magical ten year run? I have gone back and forth with these questions over the last decade or so, as the 1985s put on weight in bottle and really began to shine with the luster of peak maturity, some top ‘86s started to creep their way towards blossoming, and the brilliant 1989s started to turn on the charm and wildly surpassed my initial expectations for the vintage. The only vintage that I am quite certain is not in the same league as 1982 is the 1990 vintage, which initially showed perhaps the greatest promise of all of the post-1982 vintages in the decade, but which has aged faster and developed a bit of a “roasted” personality from its torrid growing season as the years have gone by, and while the best wines on the Gironde in 1990 are still quite good, they are clearly outclassed by their counterparts from 1982.

The growing season of 1982 was about as fine a warm vintage as the *Bordelais* could have hoped for, and after the great hopes for the 1981s had been dashed by heavy *fin de saison*

rains that diluted the potential of a truly legendary vintage, it seemed almost impossible that Mother Nature was back to make amends for the September rains of '81 with yet another extremely promising growing season, but this is exactly what happened! The June flowering of '82 unfolded under ideal weather conditions and promised yet another big crop (1981 had delivered very large yields by historical standards). The midsummer weather continued beautifully, with plenty of sunshine and heat in July, slightly cooler temperatures, but still plenty of sun in August, and then just a bit of rain to at the end of the month to get the plants working ideally into putting the finishing touches on the maturity of the bunches going into harvest. The crop was big, ripe and in beautiful condition when the harvest of 1982 got underway on September 13th, and the *Bordelais* were excited right from the outset. One of the potential Achilles' Heels of the vintage was fairly low acidity (particularly by historical norms on the Gironde), which had many European commentators wondering about the potential longevity of the vintage. The other big concern for European critics at the outset was the size of the crop in 1982, which was flat out double that of 1959, and would end up being larger than 1985, 1986, 1989 or 1990 as well. Yes, the wines were flashy out of the blocks, but how could a vintage with such large yields really have sufficient stuffing once the puppy fat of fruit faded, and could they age fifty to seventy-five years in bottle with such low acidity? Many European commentators decided these questions in the negative in the early days, while Robert Parker on this side of the pond was very, very positive about the vintage.



Ultimately, time has proven that Robert Parker was spot on in his evaluation of the 1982 vintage, and as the years rolled by, the initial suspicion in the critical press about the quality of

the '82s also abated in Europe. But, this does not mean that every 1982 commune was as successful as another, as there had been a bit of isolated hail in the Graves in the summer of 1982 (most tragically, undoing the vintage at Domaine de Chevalier), and the commune of Margaux was not as blessed as their neighbors in this vintage, with the 1983 vintage a step up for the wines from this appellation over the 1982s. But, 1982 was extraordinary in Pomerol (really putting this small commune on the international map in a grand manner, much to the disappointment of the claret connoisseurs of the *Benelux* countries, who had long harbored great and quiet admiration for the wines of Pomerol and had much of that market to themselves), extremely good in St. Émilion and exceptional up and down the Médoc, with the aforementioned exception of the wines of Margaux. It was also a sensational vintage for the smaller, *Cru Bourgeois* producers, who did not have (and most still do not) the financial means to surmount Mother Nature's challenges in less blessed growing seasons, but who made stunningly good wines for their levels in 1982. In fact, the first solid case of wine I ever bought for my cellar was a case of the 1982 Château Latour de By while I was a senior in college, as this very good producer in the Haut Médoc made an excellent wine in 1982 and it was affordable even for a senior at the university, as I laid it in at the cost of \$4.50 per bottle! The fanciest wines from the Haut Médoc, such as La Lagune, Sociando Mallet and Cantemerle were all extremely successful as well in 1982.

While 1982 is often described as “the first of the modern Bordeaux vintages”, it is also, in some respects, the very last of the old school vintages on the Gironde. Yes, it is one of the very first (at least in a long time) really warm vintages in Bordeaux, which have become quite commonplace in the wake of global warming, but it was also the last vintage (along with 1983) where the *Bordelais* were not awash in free cash, so that expensive additions like high percentages of new oak and cellar gadgetry were not widely part of the landscape on the Gironde when the 1982s came along. So, in this respect, it is really quite traditional in style and a vintage which found most of its character out in the vineyards, with less new oak than we see today at almost all of the Classed Growths, less stringent selection and higher quantities of wines produced at the larger estates (much of which would find its way into a Second Wine today) and perhaps, a bit less qualitative difference between the top twenty or thirty estates and the rest of the field on both sides of the Gironde, due to no one really being flush in the bank account at these properties going into the 1982 vintage. Remember, Bordeaux had suffered a financial crash of immense proportions back in the mid-1970s, and many estates and wine brokers in the city had been forced to unload huge stocks of steeply-discounted, older vintages into the market just to stay afloat in the wake of the profound economic dislocations brought about by the terrible vintages of 1972, 1973 and 1974. So, the *Bordelais* were not generally feeling particularly affluent as the 1982s hit the market, and spending lavishly on very high percentages of new oak was not in the cards. Additionally, though the 1982s are generally considered a very ripe vintage, the wines are typically in the twelve to 12.5 percent alcohol range, which is another aspect of their stylistic alliance with the great vintages of the past, rather than with more modern vintages. Even by the end of the decade of the 1980s, top wines on both sides of the Gironde were closer to thirteen percent (or more) in octane and much more influenced by new oak than were the 1982s.

However, in one aspect, the 1982s were truly the first modern vintage in Bordeaux, and that is in regards to the frequency that these wines changed hands in the marketplace as the years

went by. One could see this with great vintages of the past, such as the 1961s, which were already commodities when I was getting started in the wine trade in the first half of the 1980s, but they were the exception to the rule and as the vintage had been a short crop, one did not see vast quantities of wines available from 1961 twenty-odd years out from their release, but simply a few isolated examples. This was not true of the 1982s, which started to trade hands with frequency as *En Primeur* prices for subsequent vintages moved up and people started to look backwards to the prolific crop of 1982s as a better purchasing option for their claret needs in the cellar than stepping up to buy 1995 futures for example. As so many American wine collectors had purchased their cache of 1982s at very advantageous prices, it became commonplace in the 1990s to hear “I am going to sell a few cases of my 1982s, so that I can drink the rest of the vintage in my cellar for free” from some of these collectors who had bought the 1982s in quantity. Prices for the vintage also moved up exponentially once the American auction market became legalized in that decade, and for much of the last years of the twentieth century, the 1982 clarets were amongst the hottest commodities on the new auction floors in the US. Many financial services professionals also took note of the great returns that collectors had realized with their 1982s, if they had bought them early, and the responsibility for the advent of professional financial speculation in Classed Growth Bordeaux can probably also be laid at the doorstep of the 1982 vintage.

So, these days, bottles of 1982 claret should often come with stamped passports, given how often they have changed hands since the 1990s, and this may help explain some of the varying impressions of the vintage that I have read from younger wine writers in the recent past. To paraphrase one gentleman writing recently on the vintage, 1982 was great in Pomerol and Pauillac, quite good in Ste. Estèphe, but poor in St. Émilion, the Graves, Margaux and St. Julien. While I do not know this gentleman and hence, cannot comment on the skills of his palate, he is patently incorrect about these communal broad brush strokes, and perhaps, his experience is limited to bottles that may have crossed the International Date Line too often before he had a chance to drink them? In any event, the quality of the vintage on a commune by commune basis is actually as I outlined above, with only Margaux and the isolated, “hailed upon” properties of the Graves “missing” on the vintage, and everyone else making superb wines. And even in Margaux, the wines are not bad, just not as great as everywhere else in 1982. To go back to the aforementioned commentator (I will allow him to remain anonymous out of politeness), he continues his oration on the vintage by stating that the winemaking in St. Émilion today is so far ahead of 1982 that this accounts for much of what he perceives of as the under-achievement of most of the estates in this commune, with only Cheval Blanc having made a great 1982 in his opinion. This is pure rubbish. St. Émilion today is making some of the worst wines, on average, of any wine-producing region in the world, and back in 1982, there were plenty of great wines here that tower over all but a select few today. Give me 1982s from Figeac, Magdelaine, Ausone, Canon, l’Arrosée, la Dominique (not to mention Cheval Blanc) and you can keep all the cookie cutter, leaden, soddenly over-oaked, modern St. Émilions from the Über consultants as your heart desires, as they are not even remotely close in quality to the top 1982s in St. Émilion.

In point of fact, 1982 is a very consistent vintage of impressive excellence, and those who did not make a great wine in this vintage often did so for reasons other than climactic. For example, one of the great and most consistent Margaux estates of the 1960s and 1970s, Château Giscours, fell flat on its face in 1982 and made a very indifferent wine (even by the communal

standards of the vintage here in Margaux), but this was alleged to be the result of gambling problems on the part of the owner and their attendant influence on decisions here, rather than on the potential of the vintage. A strong 1982 at Giscours would have been a most welcome addition to the firmament of the year, as only the season before, Giscours had made an outstanding 1981, and their '82 could have been great. But, that is hardly an example that winemaking today in Bordeaux is so far ahead of what it was in 1982! In fact, it is actually the opposite that is true, as back in 1982, a lot of properties that eventually lost their way completely in the move to “modernize” their style and play follow the leader with an Über consultant, actually made great wines in 1982. Some of the greatest traditional wines made in this vintage were made at properties such as Châteaux Leoville-Poyferré, Ausone, Haut-Brion and La Mission Haut-Brion (which was the last vintage here crafted under the ownership of the Woltner family before the property was sold to the Dillons) and their 1982s are a completely different breed from what is being crafted in these same cellars today.

But, as we touched upon above, the *Bordelais* were not awash in cash when the 1982s started to ship, and this did influence how much wine was produced and sold as *Grand Vin* and also played a role in helping to shape some of the more classical aspects of the 1982s (such as lower percentages of new oak used for most wines). Happily, the vintage was of such excellent quality that not consigning a sizable percentage of production to a Second Wine did not hurt the quality of any of the top Classed Growths in 1982. Paying close attention to costs was not something exclusively part of the producers' universe when the 1982s found their way into the pipeline, as brokers, *négociants* and many merchants had also taken a serious hit during the financial crisis in the Bordeaux wine trade in the mid-to-late 1970s, so added expenses like shipping the wines in refrigerated containers and ensuring that they had proper storage once they had arrived at their destinations in export markets were not always sanctioned, and there was more than a few isolated cases of 1982 Bordeaux that were mishandled somewhere along the way. A case in point might be the 1982 Château Ausone, which as I mention below, I had never tasted a non-cooked example of this wine until this most recent bottle, despite the fact that Ausone was initially considered one of the greatest wines of the vintage when tasted out of cask! The reality of this situation may account for some of the erroneous commentary on the vintage such as what was discussed above.

So where do the wines stand today? For the vast majority of successful Classed Growths, the 1982 vintage is now at its apogee of maturity, but right in the heart of it and the top wines still have many, many decades of superb drinking ahead of them. There are a few isolated examples, such as Château Branaire-Ducru in St. Julien, that seem to have begun to edge towards the far side of their plateau (though, as discussed just above, this might only be a reflection of the particular bottle of the wine I tasted in preparation for this report), but most are at their peaks now and drinking beautifully or still in climbing mode and will even continue to improve with further bottle age! Clearly, the early pessimists who said a vintage with such relatively low acidity would not age long and gracefully have been proven wrong. The wines are wonderful. But, are they a step up from the best examples from 1985, 1986 and 1989? In terms of general vintage quality across a broad gambit of the top wines in each year, they are not distinctively superior to the best of '85 and '89 (leaving aside for the moment whether or not the top wines from 1986 will ever come around, as they are still decidedly tannic beasts today!). The '82s are more plush and slightly more powerful than the 1985s, but the latter vintage has a leg up in terms

of refinement and perfumed complexity, so it really comes down to which attributes you value more in your claret. The 1989s can match the 1982s for textural generosity and mid-palate depth, though it really comes down to a wine by wine basis which vintage you might prefer, not to mention how much new oak you like in your mature Bordeaux, as 1989 pretty much across the board has more toasty new oak tones in the wines than was the case with its corresponding 1982. All three of these vintages have a very large number of truly gorgeous wines and decades of fine drinking still ahead of them and it seems foolish to try and rate one ahead of the other two, as all three years are brilliant.

The one commune where I might give the 1982s an edge over every other vintage in Bordeaux's golden decade of the 1980s is Pomerol, as these wines are truly special and one really probably has to fast forward to the 1998 vintage here to find wines of such extraordinary quality and beauty. To my palate, most 1982 Pomerols have greater precision and purity than their counterparts in 1989, and far greater density at the core than the very pretty and complex 1985 versions of each wine. Though they are truly spectacular today, this is not to say that the '82 Pomerols have not opened and closed over the course of the last thirty years, as there was a period where they were quite shut down and monolithic, with a few, such as Château Lafleur, showing a borderline touch of *sur maturité* in its aromatics and flavor profile, but the last dozen years or so have found the wines open, starting to peak and absolutely stunning across the board. I do not drink 1982 Pomerols with anywhere near the frequency that I would like (having missed out on those futures opportunities!), but it is always a special occasion when I do cross paths with a bottle of 1982 from the commune. I have only tasted the 1982 Pétrus on a single occasion (now many, many years ago), so do not know where it stands today in its point of evolution, but Lafleur and Trotanoy were starting to really drink brilliantly the last time I tasted each and are clearly legends of the second half of the twentieth century. Vieux Château Certan is another 1982 that has started to really hit its peak today, after an extended period of deep hibernation, and is clearly one of the greatest wines made in all of Bordeaux in this vintage. Other stalwarts in the commune such as La Conseillante, Certan de May, Latour à Pomerol are stellar, and the last time I enjoyed a bottle of Lafleur-Pétrus it too was just lovely. Château Certan-Giraud was also outstanding in 1982 and one of the sleepers of the vintage, as the property was purchased by the Moueix family a few years later and renamed as Château Hosanna, so no one today even thinks about Certan-Giraud. The one 1982 Pomerol where I have not had good luck with is l'Evangile (which is quite good, but my expectations have always been for greatness here in '82), but perhaps it has just been the couple of bottles that I have tasted, as I never had a chance to cellar the wine myself.

While discussing the superb nature of the 1982 vintage in Pomerol, it would probably be worth a moment to mention one of the highly-touted wines of the vintage from this commune that I am most emphatically not impressed with, and that is Château Bon Pasteur. The wine is of historical importance, no matter its actual quality level, as its lavish praise by Robert Parker served as a springboard for the career of Michel Rolland, who owns Bon Pasteur and the 1982 was his first highly praised wine. I have not tasted it in a number of years, but I can still remember my excitement to have purchased a large, perfectly-stored cellar of Bordeaux in the early-1990s that included a cache of ten cases of the 1982 Bon Pasteur. I had never previously tasted the wine and believed at the time the high score from Robert Parker to be accurate (95 points at the time, if memory serves me correctly), so I was delighted to be able to offer it to my

customers. I tasted the wine on a handful of occasions out of those ten cases and was really quite astonished by what I found, as the wine was deep, dense and four-square to the extreme, with very little complexity and a coarseness to its tannic structure that was out of place with my experience with other 1982 Pomerols. Perhaps the wine has gotten better with another couple of decades in the cellar, but at the time, it struck me as a patently uninteresting example of the vintage. Given, how much damage has been wrought on the Right Bank and in the Graves during the subsequent course of Monsieur Rolland's career, the '82 Bon Pasteur merits at least a mention in a feature on the vintage, even if I have not tasted it now in quite some time, as it was the wine that launched a hundred subsequent claret catastrophes.



This report has been in the works for a few years now, as I had initially hoped to be able taste deeply in the vintage as they celebrated their thirty-fifth birthdays. However, as this vintage has remained one of the most expensive vintages of the 1980s on auction floors, my having missed purchasing the vintage on futures and stuffing my own cellar with 1982s has slowed the accumulation of tasting notes on the top wines of the vintage. Of course, as I alluded to above, the vintage tasted so good in its early years (one of the signs that early nay-sayers would cite as why the vintage would not stand the test of time) that it is extremely unlikely that I would have possessed the self-control not to have drunk up most of my 1982s by now, even if I had bought a ton of them on futures, given how much younger wine I used to drink out of my cellar back in my formative tasting days! But, in any case, I was still in college at the time and did not start out

my cellar with a great cache of 1982 Bordeaux, so I have had to piece together the notes that follow over the course of a few years of tastings. My friend Mark Golodetz was working on a series of tastings of the 1982s over the last year, of which I attended one focused primarily on St. Julien and the Graves, but he has not yet had the opportunity to complete his series and I did not want to hold up the report any longer, so some key wines from the vintage are missing in the notes that follow. Most of these are the First Growths, which are expensive wines today at auction, so I was not inclined to drop a small fortune for bottles whose passports I could not verify. As 1982 First Growths are also some of the most popular wines for counterfeiters, I opted to release the report as is, rather than roll the dice by searching those wines out at auction to fill out the report.

I have drunk all of the 1982 First Growths with some frequency in the past (with the aforementioned exception of Pétrus) and have been dutifully impressed. However, the only First from 1982 that I have crossed paths with recently is Latour, so that is the only wine for which there is a recent note on the wine in the tasting notes that follow. Consequently, for the 1982s from Mouton, Lafite and Margaux, which I have not drunk in close to a decade, I have simply included my impressions of the wines based on my previous tasting notes from the more distant past. With the 1982 Château Haut-Brion, I last wrote it up in my feature on this estate back in the early days of View From the Cellar and have included below my note from that article in the summer of 2007, as I do not have a more recent note on that great wine. In my experience, all five of these wines are truly stunning and amongst the very best wines produced in this legendary vintage, though I have read reports elsewhere that the 1982 Lafite-Rothschild has not aged as gracefully as the other First Growths from this vintage and is the laggard in the group. Not having drunk it in many years, I can only report that this was most emphatically not the case when I last had the good fortune to share a bottle of the 1982 Lafite, and as it was consistently excellent back in the days when I drank 1982 First Growths with a bit more regularity, so my faith in the quality of the wine has not been shaken by reports of its more recent lackluster performances by tasters whose palates I have no knowledge of beyond what they have written about the wine (particularly given Lafite's popularity in recent times in the global market and the propensity for the 1982s to change hands so often that provenance is always a concern in these cases).

The following wines have generally all been tasted over the last three or four years, as this report has been on the "to do list" for quite some time now. A few notes date further back than this, and can be spotted by the first date in the projected window of drinkability at the end of a particular tasting note. One of the things that prompted me to publish this article now, rather than wait for a few more tastings and more "completeness", was that a few notes on some of the rarer wines of the vintage were starting to get a bit dated, and the likelihood of my drinking the wine again in the near future was not all that high, so it made sense to publish the feature now, rather than organize a few more tastings of the usual suspects from the vintage. The wines are listed first by commune, and then alphabetically by property within each communal subset. The couple of notes written in "italics" are the impressions of the wines taken from notes dating back to the late 1990s or first decade of the 2000s and which have not been tasted in recent times. They are only included here to reference my impressions of the wines, based on how beautifully they showed in the past and to underscore my gut instincts that they remain

brilliant and (as in the case of Lafite-Rothschild in certain circles) any reports to the contrary are likely explained by things other than the actual quality of the wine in question.

St. Émilion

1982 Château Ausone

Prior to this bottle, I had never tasted a pristine example of the 1982 Ausone. As I alluded to in the introduction, some importers seem to have been more scrupulous shipping this wine than others, and I was never fortunate with the 1982 prior to our vertical tasting in February. Happily, this most recent bottle was imported by Château and Estate and was in perfect form, so I was finally able to sample the magic of this wine, which was the most famous wine in Bordeaux during the period of barrel sampling of the '82 vintage! The bouquet is deep, pure and still youthful, offering up a mix of black cherries, plums, gamebird, a brilliant blade of limestone, nutskin, bonfire, dark chocolate and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and broader-shouldered than the 1983 paired up with it, with great building complexity, a plush core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and marvelous mineral drive on the very, very long and complex finish. Though this too is a fairly powerful vintage of Ausone, it is more precise and classically inclined than the 1989, and it ultimately will be the superior vintage of Ausone. 2030-20100. **97.**

1982 Château Canon

The 1982 vintage of Château Canon continues to drink beautifully and is really one of the more flamboyant vintages I have ever tasted from the property. The superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, menthol, a hint of nutskin, a beautifully complex base of limestone soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very sappy at the core, with excellent focus and grip, melting tannins and a very long, voluptuous and classy finish. A complete, very complex and utterly marvelous Canon. 2018-2050. **94.**

1982 Château Cheval Blanc

This wine has now been very shut down for the last four or five years, and though there is so much raw material here that the wine is still a joy to drink, bottles sampled today only represent twenty-five percent of what this wine will show at its glorious apogee. The bouquet is unmistakably Cheval, with scents of black cherries, bell pepper, dark chocolate, menthol, tobacco, herbs, espresso and vanillin oak wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep, black fruity, and totally dense at the center, with excellent structure and delineation, great length and grip, and a fair bit of ripe, well-integrated tannin framing the finish. This is very elegant and only medium-full on the palate today (in notable contrast to its thick, luxurious and voluptuous youth), with great depth now buttoned up quite tightly at the core. I would opt for burying this treasure for at least another decade. 2010-2060. **96+.**

1982 Château La Dominique (St. Émilion)

The 1982 vintage of La Dominique has always been one of my favorites for this property and the wine continues to drink very nicely at age thirty-six. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, menthol, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a fairly generous base of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with good complexity and grip, still a touch of backend tannin and a long, well-balanced and focused finish. Good juice with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2018-2040. **92.**

1982 Château Figeac

To my palate, Figeac is one of my absolute stars of the 1982 vintage, and I wish I had exercised more self-control back in the day, as I bought a case of this wine early on, but could not keep my hands off of it in its gorgeous youth and all those bottles are now long, long gone. This most recent bottle was brought to our Ausone vertical tasting (that formed a foundation for my recent article on the estate) to serve as a proper interlude at one point in the evening by a generous friend, and it showed beautifully. The bouquet is deep, complex and beautifully refined, wafting from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, plums, chocolate, hazelnuts, a complex base of soil, a touch of summer truffle, discreet Figeac herb tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with lovely depth at the core, suave, melting tannins and beautiful balance on the long, focused and complex finish. A glorious vintage of Figeac that is now nicely into its plateau of peak maturity. 2019-2060. **95.**



In the ancient and beautiful heart of downtown St. Émilion.

1982 Château Magdelaine

The 1982 vintage of Magdelaine gets better and better every time I come back to it and this is probably going to end up being the greatest wine produced at this estate between the 1961 and the 1998. Today, the '82 is wide open and revels in its sappy goodness, offering up a beautiful aromatic combination of sappy cassis and black cherries, menthol, a very complex base of chalky soil tones, cigar ash and a lovely, almost autumnal topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very plush on the attack, with a great core and stunning transparency for a 1982. The finish is very, very long, with modest tannins, excellent complexity

and a sense of elegance and refinement that borders on First Growth quality. A stunning wine that is now entering its apogee. 2018-2060. **96.**

1982 Château Pavie

While readers are no doubt aware that I am hardly a fan of what Château Pavie has become in the last several years, we should remember that there is no need to romanticize the previous several decades at this well-situated St. Émilion estate, as the reality is that the property had probably not had a strong run of vintages since the end of the 1940s. By all accounts, the 1982 vintage is the high watermark for this property in the intervening era and the wine is a good, solid bottle, but hardly life-altering in its quality. The bouquet offers up a rather ashy blend of cassis, dark soil tones, cigarette ash, a touch of celery salts and a topnote of tobacco smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit dense and over-extracted, with a good core, still some tannin to resolve and good, solid length and grip on the modestly complex finish. A solid citizen, but not one I would vote into public office. 2018-2035+. **87.**

Pomerol

1982 Château Certan-Giraud

The 1982 vintage of Château Certan-Giraud is the finest I have ever tasted from this property, which today is known as Château Hosanna and owned by the Moueix family. Back in this era the property was owned by the Cruse family (of Château Corbin fame) and the '82 is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a deep and complex nose of cherries, red plums, fresh herb tones, coffee, menthol, a touch of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and velvety, with a fine, plush core of fruit, fine soil signature, modest tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This was more old-fashioned winemaking in this era than what one sees today from this *terroir* under the Hosanna label, but it is a fine example of an '82 Pomerol and well worth looking out for if one is fortunate enough to cross paths with a bottle. 2014-2035+. **92.**

1982 Château Certan de May

I have drunk a lot of Certan de May from the fifteen vintage stretch from 1975 to 1990, but the superb 1982 is one of the vintages that has crossed my path the least often during this time. So, one can imagine my delight when a friend emailed me that he could not find his bottle of '82 Bourgneuf he was planning for a "lesser 1982s" tasting I was hosting, so he was going to bring the Certan de May! I loved the wines from this property during this stretch and the 1982 is perhaps the very finest of this magical run, as it offers up a superbly complex bouquet of black plums, black cherries, bitter chocolate, cigar ash, a superb base of soil, black tea, woodsmoke and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and suave on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, great focus and detail, still a bit of ripe, backend tannin and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is truly a stunning wine. 2020-2070. **95.**

1982 Château La Conseillante

I had not tasted a bottle of the 1982 La Conseillante since 1997, but happily, I had the opportunity to share my lone remaining bottle in the cellar with some visiting friends from Burgundy back in April, where the wine showed quite well indeed. Like many of the 1982s, the La Conseillante is currently not drinking particularly well, as it seems to have settled into a fairly shut down period again and really deserves more time in the cellar to really start to hit on all cylinders. However, the quality here is very evident in its excellent nose of plums, black raspberries, chocolate, tobacco smoke, gravelly soil tones and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a pure core of fruit,

moderate, buried tannins, and lovely length and grip on the currently fairly reticent finish. With extended air this wine shows the opulence of the 1982 vintage that will come with more bottle age, but it is currently just a tad disjointed and adolescent on the palate and I would keep it tucked away in the cellar for at least another four or five years to allow it to more calmly integrate all of its components. It is a lovely vintage for La Conseillante. 2015-2050. **93+**.

1982 Château l'Enclos

I had never previously tasted a bottle of the 1982 Château l'Enclos, but had high expectations, based on a few bottles of the superb 1989 that a good friend has shared with me over the years. The 1982 did not disappoint, offering up a deep, pure and beautifully ripe bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and grip, still a bit of buried tannin perking up the backend and a long, complex and classy finish. L'Enclos does not have the finest *terroir* in Pomerol, so there is not quite the same complexity here that one would find in wines such as Latour à Pomerol or La Conseillante, but this wine hits all the right notes in 1982 and is a very, very good bottle of Pomerol at its apogee, but still with several decades of life ahead of it. 2020-2050. **91**.

1982 Château l'Evangile

The 1982 l'Evangile is a very good wine, but given how superb this wine is in vintages like 1975 and 1981, I was hoping for just a touch more brilliance in the 1982. Perhaps this bottle is not one hundred percent up to snuff? In any case, the bouquet is deep, complex and very stylish in its aromatic blend of dark plums, black cherries, tobacco smoke, saddle leather, a bit of roasted game, summer truffle and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit leathery in personality, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, slightly medicinal finish. A very good wine, but perhaps just not quite up to the reputation of the vintage and this fine estate. 2011-2040. **92**.

1982 Château Lafleur

I once owned a solid case of the 1982 Lafleur, but in a fit of madness, I sold it to buy more red Burgundy in the wake of the release of the 1990 vintage. I had dipped my toe in the water here for a few bottles out of the case before I sold it, and loved the first couple, which I found brilliantly complex, multi-dimensional, and full of magical promise for the future. The last bottle that I opened (probably around 1992 or so) had gotten a bit raisiny in its fruit profile (though not losing any of its inherent complexity), and I was able to rationalize selling the rest of the case off to buy a cache of Rousseau Chambertin and Roumier Bonnes-Mares! It is too bad that younger wine professionals are not paid better in New York, so that I could have kept my Lafleur '82 and still bought all those 1990 red Burgs! © Consequently, I have not crossed paths with the 1982 Lafleur in a very, very long time. My gut feeling is that the 1982 Lafleur's period of "sur maturité" was just a passing phase around its tenth birthday and the wine is now probably every bit as brilliant today as it was when I opened my first couple of bottles out of the case. But, not having drunk the wine now in many, many years, I cannot comment further as to its point of evolution today.

1982 Château Latour à Pomerol

It has been almost two years since I wrote my domaine profile of Château Latour à Pomerol and I have been fortunate to drink the 1982 vintage from this property on a couple more occasions since the historic vertical tasting I attended in early 2016 that formed the basis for my article. This is a great vintage for this historically underrated property, and the wine continues to just cruise along at its plateau of peak maturity. The bouquet is deep, complex and sappy,

offering up notes of baked plums and black cherries, a touch of blood orange, cigar smoke, a touch of Pomerol herbs, chocolate, incipient nutskin and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush with the vintage's generosity on the attack, with a superb core, ripe, melting tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. The wine is drinking very nicely indeed, but is still climbing and will show even more nuance with further bottle age. A lovely, lovely example of the vintage. 2017-2045+. **94.**

1982 Château Rouget

The 1982 Rouget is a good, solid example of the vintage, but it is not a first division Pomerol and not quite in the same league as the wines this property produced back in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. The bouquet is ripe and very pretty, offering up notes of plums, balsamic tones, a bit of roasted meats, a malty undertow and a gentle framing of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chunky in style, with a ripe core of fruit, melted tannins and good length and grip on the slightly four-square, but quite solid finish. Not bad. 2018-2035. **87.**

1982 Château Trotanoy

At our January vertical tasting, we had a very, very good bottle of 1982 Trotanoy, but I have had even more open and opulent examples in the last few years. That said, with some extended aeration, this wine started to open up nicely and offered a superb bouquet of black plums, black cherries, new leather, a very complex base of soil tones, a nice touch of meatiness, vanillin oak and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full and powerful in profile, with a plush core, superb focus and grip, a very long and well-balanced finish and still just a bit of ripe tannin perking up the backend. This is a legendary vintage of Trotanoy that still has a very, very long life ahead of it. It is probably one of the greatest three or four wines ever made at this venerable estate. 2023-2075. **96.**

1982 Vieux Château Certan

The 1982 Vieux Château Certan is an absolute classic and one of the finest vintages produced at this estate since its golden era in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The bouquet today is still ripe, young and stellar, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of black plums, cassis, mocha, espresso, dark soil tones, gentle nuttiness, singed tobacco and a nice touch of VCC botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with firm, moderate tannins, excellent focus and grip, really good acidity for the vintage and great length and grip on the very precise and complex finish. This is a great, great 1982! 2022-2100. **96+.**

Graves

1982 Château Haut-Bailly

The 1982 vintage of Haut-Bailly is one of my favorites from this underrated estate in the decade of the 1980s. The bouquet is precise, complex and just starting to really blossom completely, as it offers up scents of red plums, cherries, nutskin, cigar wrapper, a beautiful base of soil, smoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and marvelously transparent down to its *terroir*, with a lovely core, modest tannins, nice, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the complex finish. Like all top Haut-Baillys, this is not a blockbuster, but a perfumed, elegant and refined bottle of utterly classic claret. 2018-2040+. **93.**

1982 Château Haut-Brion

In its early years the '82 Haut-Brion was really the odd man out amongst the First Growths, as the wine seemed a tad silky and easy-going in comparison to the larger than life

profiles of the '82s from the likes of Mouton, Lafite and Margaux. However, as can so often be the case with Haut-Brion, the wine has put on weight with bottle age, and at age twenty-five this really does look to be a clone of the legendary 1959. The bouquet is deep and roasted, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of dark plums, roasted cassis, grilled walnuts, cigar smoke, herb tones and a serious base of Graves soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very powerful, with a palate profile that is a dead-ringer for a younger version of the 1959, with layers of fruit, strong soil signature, moderate tannins, and great length and grip on the palate-staining finish. As is the case with the beautiful 1990 and 1985 HBs, I would strongly advise keeping the paws off of the 1982 Haut-Brion for several more years, for as good of a drink as it is today, it will continue to improve with further bottle age. Beautiful wine. 2015-2075. 97+.

1982 Château La Louvière

The 1982 Château La Louvière is a good, solid and nicely plush example of the vintage that has been fully mature for decades, but continues to cruise along quite well. The nose is pretty and plump, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash dark soil and just a bit of inkiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, resolved and quite tasty, with still a nice kernel of fruit at the core, good soil signature, melted tannins and good length and grip on the wide open finish. There is not a whole lot left here in reserve and this wine will probably start to slide down the far side of its plateau in the not too distant future, but today, it is still a good drink. 2017-2030+? 88.

1982 Château La Mission Haut-Brion

I have drunk an awful lot of 1982 La Mission Haut-Brion over the years, and cannot believe I do not have a more recent note in my archives. I have to assume that I have a recent note somewhere, but I could not locate it prior to printing this report. This is a great, great vintage of La Mission and one of my favorite wines from the property in the second half of the twentieth century. As I noted above, it was the last vintage produced at the property when it was still owned by the Woltner family, who sold the property to the owners of Haut-Brion, the Dillon family, the following year. The 1982 La Mission is a great, classic example of this stellar property, with a slightly meaty, wild and borderline exotic veneer of black fruit tones, buried within the peat, cigar smoke, singed earth and gravelly terroir of the wine. It is not as massive as the 1989 version from the estate, but to my palate, every bit its equal, and one of the great wines of the 1982 vintage.

1982 Château Pape Clément

The 1982 Pape Clément has never had a great reputation, but I like this wine very much and find that it is far better than what most people believe. I last tasted a bottle of the 1982 here when I wrote my historical feature on the estate back in 2012, and that particular bottle had been purchased at auction in California and shipped to me back in New York only a couple of months prior to my including it in the article. This most recent bottle was purchased at the same time, but benefited from having slumbered in my cellar an additional eight years, and it is now quite clear that I should have let the last bottle also fully recover from its cross-continental journey! This bottle was excellent, with signature complexity on both the nose and palate, but perhaps not quite the mid-palate plumpness of the very top echelon of 1982s. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a gorgeous blend of black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, walnut, complex, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and a wonderful, almost exotic topnote of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very complex, with just a wisp of *fluidité* at the core, but excellent focus and grip. The finish is long and classy, the balance here is impeccable, the tannins are melting away and the wine is really showing a step up in quality from the bottle I opened a few years

back. This is clearly a sleeper of the vintage, particularly if you value complexity and elegance in your mature claret. 2020-2055. **92.**



Médoc and Haut Médoc

1982 Château Cantemerle (Haut Médoc)

While I have had the good fortune to drink dozens and dozens of bottles of the 1983 Château Cantemerle over the years, this was the first time that I can recall having a bottle of the 1982! This is a superb wine that is unfairly overlooked when great vintages of this estate's wines are mentioned, and I strongly recommend searching this wine out in the marketplace. The 1982 is at its absolute apogee of peak maturity and drinking with great style, as it offers up scents of sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, cardamom, a Latour-like whiff of sweet walnut, dark soil tones, cedar and a whisper of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with melting tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, pure and seamlessly balanced finish. A superb wine. 2014-2035. **93.**

1982 Château Coufran (Haut Médoc)

Château Coufran is another Haut Médoc property that lies just to the north of St. Estèphe, on the same parallel as Château Potensac, but further east and overlooking the Gironde River. It is a big property and quite unique in this section of the Médoc in that it is primarily based on merlot, which comprises eighty-five percent of the blend here, to go along with fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon. In the 1980s, this large property was harvested by machine (perhaps it still

is?) and was typically cropped at pretty high levels, and these actions probably have slightly deleterious effects on overall quality. That said, the 1982 Coufran is still a lovely wine, with the vintage's depth making up a bit for the high yields here, as the wine offers up a really lovely and expressive bouquet of plums, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, violets, a touch of fresh herbs and smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and velvety on the attack, with a bit of *fluidité* in the mid-palate, but lovely length and grip on the suave, fully mature finish. The tannins here have all melted away and the wine has no rough edges, but the wine has fine balance and will continue to drink with surprising complexity for at least another dozen years or more. It is a very tasty bottle and quite unique, with its predominance of merlot. 2020-2035+. **88.**

1982 Château La Lagune (Haut Médoc)

Though La Lagune is listed as a wine from the Haut Médoc, I have always thought of it as really a wine from Margaux, as it lies just outside of the communal boundary there and stylistically, shares much with the wines of Margaux. The 1982 vintage of La Lagune remains the very finest year I have ever tasted from this consistently outstanding property. Today the wine is drinking at its apogee, but still has decades and decades of life ahead of it, with the superb bouquet offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, French roast, cigar ash, some gently roasted fruit elements, dark soil and a touch of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely velvety on the attack, with a sappy core, lovely focus and grip and a long, meltingly tannic and opulent finish. 2016-2040. **94.**

1982 Château Sociando-Mallet (Haut Médoc)

I have always liked the 1982 Sociando-Mallet well enough, but felt that the property did not really start to hit its stride until the 1985 vintage was released, and the wines made here in the second half of the decade of the '80s were a step up in terms of relative refinement than the more muscular 1982. Sociando-Mallet is the most famous of the Haut Médoc properties that lie just a couple of miles north of St. Estèphe. This most recent bottle of the 1982 confirmed this impression, as this wine is deep, loaded at the core, but still a bit rustic in comparison to subsequent vintages of Sociando. The nose offers up serious depth in its blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, saddle leather and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in profile, with a rock solid core, still some backend tannin to resolve and plenty of grip on the long, robust finish. This is a very good wine, but I prefer the '85, '86 and '89 vintages here. 2018-2050. **90.**

1982 Château Latour de By (Médoc)

The 1982 Château Latour de By is a very, very good wine and it has aged far longer and more ably than I ever would have imagined when I first purchased a case of the wine while I was still in college. This estate is located north of St. Estèphe, next to Château Greysac, and is one of the largest properties in this section of the Médoc, as its production throughout the decade of the 1980s was forty thousand cases per year. The *cépages* of the 1982 is seventy percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-six percent merlot and four percent cabernet franc. It is cruising along beautifully and still has plenty of depth and mid-palate stuffing and a bit of tannin remaining, and I would be surprised if it does not continue to drink well for another twenty-five years! The bouquet is deep and bright, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a bit of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite solid at the core, with good focus and grip, still some backend tannin and impressive length on the fairly complex finish. There is a certain rusticity here that shows the wine's *Cru Bourgeois* pedigree, but other than this characteristic, the wine is really quite good. I am truly amazed how well it has aged and how much life it still has left in it! 2020-2045+. **88.**

Margaux

1982 Château Margaux

I had always loved the plush and pure beauty of the 1982 Margaux in its relative youth, and this is the one First Growth that I have not tasted in more recent times that I wish I had crossed paths with, just to check in on how the wine is doing today. Back in the late 1990s, which was the last time I drank this wine, it was not quite as complex as Mouton, Lafite, Latour or Haut-Brion, but a beauty in its own right for its plummy, plush red fruit, chocolaty overtones, chalky soil elements and discreet framing of new oak. Ripe, full and seamlessly opulent, in the best sense of the 1982 vintage, I have always thought of this wine as the Richebourg of 1982 claret and rank it as one of the top vintages of Margaux of the last fifty years. Given how my faith with some of the other vintages of Château Margaux from the decade of the '80s has not stood the test of time so well, I would have loved to have drunk a bottle of the 1982 Margaux for this report, but it was not to be.

1982 Château Palmer

The 1982 vintage at Château Palmer produced a very good wine, and though it is not one of the legendary examples of either the vintage, or the last quarter century at this outstanding property, it has never stopped me from immensely enjoying my bottles of the '82 Palmer. This most recent bottle is fully mature, complex, perfumed and beautifully balanced, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of mulberries, cherries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, violets and summer truffles. On the palate the wine is plush on the attack, full-bodied and easy-going stylistically, with slightly low acids, good, but certainly not great depth at the core, but lovely focus and grip on the complex, meltingly tannic and immensely satisfying finish. This is just a whisper *fluide* at the core compared to vintages like 1983 or 1989, but it is still a lovely example of this inimitable *terroir* and a very worthy wine. 2017-2040. **92.**

1982 Château Prieuré-Lichine

It has long been written that the 1982 vintage was less successful in the commune of Margaux than elsewhere in Bordeaux, and the 1982 Château Prieuré-Lichine bears this out. This is a good, solid and acceptable wine, but hardly special. The nose offers up a still slightly green mix of cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and bell pepper. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and a touch sinewy, with sound focus and grip, moderate complexity and still a bit of backend tannin perking up the finish. Clearly, this wine did not get fully ripe in 1982 and is a bit malnourished still today. The 1983 Château Prieuré-Lichine is a huge step up from the '82 and is more representative of just how good this property's wines can be when they everything goes right! The '82 has plenty of life still ahead of it, but I have a hard time imagining it improving. 2018-2040. **86.**

1982 Château Rausan-Ségla

Popular claret culture, in the wake of Robert Parker's pronouncement many years back that the 1986 vintage of Château Rausan-Ségla was the first top flight vintage here in a generation, tends to ignore the wines made here in the first half of the decade of the 1980s. However, I have been very impressed previously with both the 1983 and 1985 versions, and had higher expectations than any of my guests for the 1982 Château Rausan-Ségla in our lineup. Happily, my expectations were born out with a superb bottle and this has to be one of the finest wines made in the commune in 1982. The bouquet is beautifully complex and quite exuberant, jumping from the glass in the property's signature blend of black raspberry, black cherry, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a beautiful spread of spice elements, just a hint of nutskin and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really has an

excellent core of fruit (particularly for a 1982 Margaux, as this commune is not as universally successful as most others in this vintage), with excellent focus and balance and still a bit of suave tannin adding backend grip to the long, complex and utterly satisfying finish. This is a bit more sappy at the core than the classical 1983, and has a bit less silky elegance of the 1985, but these three vintages at least prove that the reports of Château Rausan-Ségla not starting its renaissance until the 1986 vintage were a bit tardy! Fine, fine juice. 2020-2050. **92.**



The beautiful and massive façade of Château Ducru-Beaucaillou, looking directly out over the Gironde River.

St. Julien

1982 Château Beychevelle

I had not crossed paths with a bottle of the 1982 Château Beychevelle since I wrote my feature on this fine estate back in the spring of 2011. The wine remains quite youthful for the vintage, offering up a deep and sappy nose of black cherries, cassis, a touch of bell pepper, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of gravelly soil tones and a fine dollop of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very refined in profile, with melting tannins, a sappy core and excellent length and grip on the just blossoming finish. This is quite tasty today with some time in decanter, but it is still climbing and in a perfect world, bottles would still be left alone in the cellar for another five years. 2018-2060+. **93+.**

1982 Château Branaire-Ducru

This has always been one of my favorite vintages of Branaire, but either I was unlucky with this last bottle or the bloom is off the rose. The old perfumed sappiness that made this wine such a special year here has faded and when most 1982s are just entering their true peak of maturity, this seems to have started to slide down the far side of the plateau. The bouquet offers up good depth in its mélange of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, soil and toasty oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still solid at the core, with pretty simple and four-square today, with still a bit of tannin on the plush, but rather charmless finish. This is okay still, but if this bottle was representative, then the wine has lost quite a bit in the last half dozen years and seems to be headed into decline. 2018-2035? **88?**

1982 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1982 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou remains one of the very finest wines of the vintage on the Left Bank and it is just now starting to blossom properly and hit on all cylinders. The bouquet is pure and displays First Growth depth and complexity, soaring from the glass in a fine constellation of sweet cassis and dark berries, a very complex base of gravelly soil tones, Cuban cigar wrapper, gentle smokiness and a deftly turned base of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with stellar focus and balance, still a touch of ripe tannin perking up the backend and a very, very long, refined and complex finish. This is a great, great vintage of Ducru that may one day rival the near perfection of the 1961. 2018-2075. **97.**

1982 Château Gruaud-Larose

The 1982 Gruaud-Larose is just starting blossom at age thirty and is a lovely example of the vintage. The deep and complex bouquet offers up a black fruity mélange of cassis, a bit of spiced meat, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of petroleum jelly, nutskins and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just coming out of its adolescent phase, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe tannins and lovely length and grip on the modestly tannic and impressively tangy finish. For purists, there is a touch of *brettanomyces* here that they may find off-putting, but it is quite modest and I have no problem with this level of brett in a wine. 2015-2065+. **93.**

1982 Château Leoville-Barton

I have always loved the 1982 vintage of Leoville-Barton, but at our St. Julien tasting of the 1982s, the Barton was sadly corked and hence, I have no note here on the wine. It is a first class vintage from the property.

1982 Château Leoville Las Cases

The 1982 Leoville Las Cases is a very nice and youthful wine, but I have always been under the impression that this wine was made in the cellar, rather than the vineyard, and will never really attain the level of greatness that is attributed to it elsewhere. The wine is certainly deep and concentrated in personality, offering up a still quite primary bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, a touch of mint and plenty of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, quite extracted in profile and still fairly tannic, with a good core, fine focus and grip and very good, but not great length on the youthful finish. Maybe this will eventually become the complex wine of its considerable reputation, but I am skeptical, and rather expect the '82 Las Cases to always trade on its power, but never develop the complexity of the truly great wines of this vintage. Call it good, not great. 2023-2075. **93.**

1982 Château Leoville-Poyferré

The 1982 vintage at Château Leoville-Poyferré has always been one of the reference point vintages for this property during its last stage of classical wines, prior to Michel Rolland being invited in to consult here in the 1990s. The wine showed beautifully at our recent '82 St. Julien tasting, offering up impressive soil signature on both the nose and palate and plenty of the vintage's superb fruit tones. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, cigar ash, a complex and classy base of soil tones, well done toasty new oak and a lovely touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core, impressive transparency, melting tannins and excellent balance on the very long and suave finish. A lovely wine. 2018-2050. **94.**

1982 Château Talbot

The 1982 Château Talbot is a stellar example of this property's wines, and along with the 1986, this has to be one of the greatest vintages produced here in the twentieth century. I had not drunk a bottle in more than a decade, so was very happy when a friend coming to taste 1982s with me for this report told me he was bringing this wine along. Like many of the top Talbots from the decade of the 1980s, there was just a bit of leathery overtones to this wine during its extended adolescence, but that is now long gone as the wine hits its stride at age thirty-eight. The bouquet is pure, complex and offers up just beautiful fruit tones in its blend of sweet cassis, blackberries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of celery seed, violets, cigar smoke and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, a very elegant profile, still a bit of suave backend tannin and outstanding focus and grip on the complex and very long finish. This is a really beautiful bottle of Talbot! 2020-2060+. **93+.**

Pauillac

1982 Château Batailly

The 1982 Château Batailly is another underachiever in this top rate vintage. The wine is solid, but no better, offering up a high-toned nose of cassis, a touch of bell pepper, cigar ash and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, simple and tasty, with a respectable core, fine balance and modest length and grip on the now fully mature finish. This is okay, but there is not all that much to it and it lacks a bit of both depth and complexity. Perfectly passable claret, but no better. 2018-2035. **87.**

1982 Château Grand Puy Lacoste

The 1982 Grand Puy Lacoste is a very good example of both the vintage and the property and is now drinking at its apogee- but, still with decades of life in it. The bouquet offers up a black fruity mélange of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, a bit of bell pepper, dark soil tones and cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, still a bit of backend tannin and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a very good bottle, but it is a tad rustic in personality *vis à vis* many of its contemporaries. A good honest wine, but not a great wine. 2018-2050. **91+.**

1982 Château Haut Bages Libéral

The 1982 Château Haut Bages Libéral is a good, solid example of the vintage. The bouquet is complex and now fully mature, offering up a blend of roasted black cherries, cigar ash, fresh herb tones, a nice base of dark soil elements and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with a respectable core, melting tannins and quite good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not the most complex of Pauillacs, but it is nicely

representative of its underlying *terroir* and shows good generosity on both the nose and palate. Good, solid juice. 2016-2030. **88.**

1982 Carruades de Lafite-Rothschild

Back in 1982, Lafite-Rothschild's second wine was labeled as Moulin des Carruades, but I have listed the wine here by its more recent name change. The wine is really excellent and drinking at its apogee at age thirty-eight, offering up beautiful breed and complexity in its bouquet of cassis, blackberries, a very complex base of gravelly soil tones, Cuban cigar, a hint of sage and a very gentle foundation of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and impressively transparent down to the soil, with still a touch of backend tannin, superb balance and grip and a long, complex, elegant and focused finish. I love the lift on the backend here, which recalls the *grand vin*. This is obviously still a second wine, and does not possess the same mid-palate depth and dimension of the last bottle of 1982 Lafite that I drank several years ago, but the Lafite imprimatur of refinement is quite apparent and this is a beautiful bottle of elegant claret in its own right. 2020-2045. **91.**

1982 Château Lafite-Rothschild

My experience with the 1982 Lafite-Rothschild has always been outstanding and I have never once doubted the quality of this wine. It has shared a plushness to its fruit component that is part and parcel with the finest wines of the 1982 vintage, coupled with the great perfumed elegance and impeccable balance that are the calling cards of Lafite. For some reason, looking back through my old tasting notes from the decade of the 1990s, I drank more bottles of Mouton, Haut-Brion, Margaux and Latour than I have Lafite from 1982, but my five sightings of this wine have all been very, very satisfactory and this remains a great vintage of Lafite-Rothschild in my book. Keep in mind that people who track counterfeit wines will often report that there is more fake 1982 Lafite-Rothschild circulating around China today than was ever produced in France, so it is quite possible that reports of indifferent bottles of 1982 Lafite are more likely to be attributable to counterfeiting or poor provenance, rather than any inherent flaws in the wine. This impression was further reinforced by how beautifully the Carruades 1982 showed in one of my tastings for this article!

1982 Les Forts de Latour

The 1982 vintage of Les Forts de Latour is outstanding and is drinking with style and grace at the present time. The bouquet shows a bit more red fruit in this vintage than is typical of this bottling, soaring from the glass in a fine constellation of red and black cherries, a touch of raspberry, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, still a whisper of weedy cabernet overtones and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full and sappy at the core, with excellent focus and complexity, suave, modest tannins, gorgeous transparency and a lovely grip on the very long and classy finish. I love this vintage of Les Forts. 2016-2035+. **93.**

1982 Château Latour

The 1982 Latour is a brilliant example of the vintage, which continues to show potential for long-term evolution, but is starting to drink with plenty of generosity at age thirty-two. The bouquet shows a bit of the veneer of the ripe and generous spirit of 1982, coupled to classic Latour power and depth, as it offers up scents of sweet cassis, black cherries, the first signs of black truffles, cigar smoke, dark, gravelly soil tones, almost a touch of meatiness and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with ripe, suave tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, complex and gorgeous finish. This is not as classically Latour-like as a vintage such as 1970 or 1966, as the ripe style of 1982 is certainly prominently displayed here, but this is a great Latour by any measure. 2014-2100. **96.**



Château Latour in all its splendor under a sunny, early April morning.

1982 Château Mouton-Rothschild

The 1982 vintage of Mouton-Rothschild is the single finest wine I have tasted from this property since the twin titans of 1959 and 1961, and it is every bit as stunning as its reputation. To my palate, it towers above the equally praised, but nowhere near as serious, 1986 Mouton. The wine is deep, complex, and beautifully balanced, with the classic Mouton spice and red fruit elements presented in a rock solid and plush style that is truly magical. The wine has always been beautifully structured and built for the long haul, and it was not ready for primetime drinking on any previous occasion when I drank the wine, but I have never had any doubts about its potential greatness when it was fully ready to drink. Based on my experience with this wine back in the day, I would fully expect it to be in a similar stage of evolution to Latour and starting to finally drink in its plateau of maturity, but with decades and decades of life still ahead of it.

1982 Château Pontet-Canet

I cannot recall ever having tasted a bottle of the 1982 Pontet-Canet until this most recent tasting, and the wine was really very, very good and exceeded my expectations. The bouquet is very deep and classic, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of cassis, cigar smoke, dark, gravelly soil tones, a touch of shoe polish, cigar wrapper and just a whisper of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very well-balanced finish. This is not the most complex wine in the commune of Pauillac in 1982, but it has the depth of fruit and

superb balance of the vintage and is a very, very satisfying wine that is just reaching its apogee and still has many decades of fine drinking ahead of it. 2020-2060. **90.**

1982 Château Pichon-Lalande

Blame it on the excess of youthful excitement, but my original purchase of 1982 Pichon-Lalande has now been gone from my cellar for many years, and I would love to have those bottles back today, as this vintage has just gotten better and better with the passing of time and is clearly the greatest Pichon-Lalande after the 1961 that I have ever tasted! It had been four years between bottles and this recent showing at our vertical was sheer perfection and clearly the finest showing of the 1982 that I have seen yet, as the wine offers up stunning depth and aromatic purity, tied to a lovely veneer of exoticism that even the superb 1989 cannot keep pace with at this time! The bouquet soars from the glass in a celestial blend of plums, sweet black cherries, mocha, a lovely touch of musky violet, cigar smoke, summer truffles, gorgeous soil tones, almost a hint of smoked meats, menthol and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is very pure and precise, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with stunning complexity and grip, melting tannins and a very, very long, very pure and utterly profound finish. I have always loved this vintage of Pichon-Lalande, but it seems that it has finally reached its true apogee of peak drinkability in the last couple of years and I have clearly underrated this wine in the past! 2019-2075+. **100.**

Ste. Estèphe

1982 Château Calon-Ségur

The 1982 Calon-Ségur remains one of my favorite vintages all time from this excellent estate in Ste. Estèphe, and as it closes in on its fortieth birthday, it is at its apogee of peak maturity. The bouquet is deep, pure and superb, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a fine base of gravel soil tones, black truffles, a lovely touch of violets and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully plush at the core, with utterly classical proportions, superb soil signature and grip, mellowed, buried tannins and outstanding focus on the very long, complex and very classy finish. This is a great example of Calon at its zenith today, but with decades and decades of excellent drinking still ahead of it. 2017-2050. **94.**

1982 Château Cos d'Estournel

I was very impressed with the 1982 Cos d'Estournel in its relative youth, but this most recent bottle did not show particularly well and was borderline overripe in personality. The nose is deep and powerful, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, a bit of prune, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fat on the attack and lacking complexity, with a good core, low acids and not a lot of structural integrity evident on the fairly short and simple finish. Is this bottle really representative? 2016-2025+? **86?**

RECENTLY-TASTED BEAUJOLAIS THE FIRST OF THE 2018 VINTAGE AND PLenty OF OLDER WINES



As I write about Beaujolais at least twice a year and drink it with quite a bit of regularity, it is surprising to me that I have not written a piece on the region since August of last year, which seems like a longer gap than typical between features on the region. The last article featured mostly tasting notes on the 2016 and 2017 vintages in Beaujolais, which were about as climactically challenging as any in recent times in the region. Both years featured both frost damage and hail damage, with the hail in both 2016 and 2017 centered around Fleurie and hitting several of the Cru appellations around Fleurie particularly hard. Both vintages produced a large number of excellent wines, but one had to navigate around the hail issues, which often caused wines from affected vineyards to lag behind unaffected parcels in terms of ripeness of fruit and textural sophistication of tannins. But, both vintages had a large number of very successful wines, with the style of the successes very classical in personality and built to age long and gracefully. The 2018 vintage, in contrast, was not a growing season characterized by Mother Nature's sullen side, so that both frost and hail were non-issues in this year and, like much of the rest of Europe in 2018, the big challenge of this growing season was the blazing heat of midsummer. But, happily, though it was hot and dry in both July and August, there was sufficient ground water reserves built up going into the heat that hydric stress did not factor into

the vintage equation and most *vignerons* in the region were very happy with both the quantity and the quality of the fruit that they were able to begin harvesting at the end of August and the first week of September in 2018.

Spring and early summer in 2018 were amongst the wettest recorded in many, many years in the Beaujolais region, with rainfall thirty percent above average in May and twenty percent over average in June as well, which turned out to be beneficial, as July and August were drought months and blazingly hot. With all the rain in May and June, mildew was a constant threat out in the vines in the region and *vignerons* had to be vigilant to keep that at bay, but once midsummer arrived, the vintage started to look quite promising, as the fairly large crop was ripening nicely and there was no longer any threat of rain. After the two very, very difficult growing seasons of 2016 and 2017 (particularly in the Cru villages centered around Fleurie and Morgon that were pummeled with hail in back to back years), a worry-free backend to the summer of 2018 was more than welcome! The only real issue, other than the blazing heat, was *millerandage*, where berries of different sizes affect bunches, but this may have ended up a benefit in 2018, as it seems to have helped provide a bit more brightness and bounce in some of the wines in comparison to the last torrid vintage in the region, 2015, where the wines out of the blocks seemed a bit heavier-handed and roasted in personality than most of the 2018s that I have tasted. Certainly, the well-built up water reserves from the winter, spring and early summer were also essential to keep the vines on track through the heat and drought of July and August, so that physiological ripening was quite complete by the time *vignerons* started to think about bringing in bunches at the end of August and first week of September.

The earliest pickers got started in Beaujolais on August 28th in 2018 and almost everything was brought in by the end of the first week of September, with the crop looking, ripe, bountiful and in marvelous condition, with good phenolic ripeness, which is not always the case in blazingly hot summers (as sugars can outpace tannin ripening in very high and sustained temperatures). August of 2018 had been the hottest on record in Beaujolais since 1959, but surprisingly, the wines have turned out slightly lower in alcohol than their counterparts from the hot summer of 2015 and the wines have more freshness and bounce than those more roasted 2015s. However, 2018 can be, at times, a big, broad-shouldered and powerful vintage for Beaujolais, with straight Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages benefiting from this characteristic to pack more mid-palate stuffing than is customary with all but the finest handful of cuvées (such as the Chermette family's Coeur de Vendanges and Jean-Paul Brun's Cuvée l'Ancien) from these appellations. When one gets to the Cru Beaujolais of 2018, the added musculature is even more apparent for some of the wines and there can be more black fruit in their aromatic and flavor profiles than is the case with certain wines from less warm vintages. This is particularly true of some of the more red fruity communes such as Brouilly, Morgon and Saint Amour, which often have quite black fruity elements to them in 2018. However, not all of the 2018s that I tasted for this report are bigger and more powerful than usual, as some *vignerons* clearly decided to bring in their fruit on the earlier side and guard against higher alcohol and power in their wines, so I have also tasted quite a few examples of the 2018 that fall in the 12.5 to thirteen percent range of alcohol and are not broader-shouldered than the same cuvées from 2016 or 2017- just deeper and more solid at the core, and often, they also have a bit of backend tannin that was not present in the previous vintages. So, there is quite a range of highly successful styles to be found in the 2018 vintage of Beaujolais.

As is the case in the Côte d'Or in 2018, the vintage in Beaujolais is not uniformly successful and there is certainly some heterogeneity of style amongst even the most successful wines. But, in general, I would say that the percentage of successful wines in Beaujolais in 2018 is higher than further north, and while one might say that there are some amazingly beautiful wines in the Côte d'Or in 2018, the vintage in general is too inconsistent to rate as excellent. This is not the case in Beaujolais, where there are a far higher percentage of superb wines in 2018 and (at least based on the rather broad selection I have tasted thus far) it is truly an exceptional vintage for Beaujolais. As I noted above, though many of the 2018 Crus are not as classically-styled as their most successful counterparts from the previous two years (those communes that escaped the wrath of the Hail Gods in 2016 and 2017 often made absolutely stellar classics), they are excellent wines in their own, more singular styles and should age very long and gracefully. In fact, there are examples from Cru villages such as Fleurie, Juliéna, Chiroubles and even Brouilly in 2018 that are going to demand a bit of cellaring time, more like typical young wines from Morgon or Moulin-à-Vent, rather than the usually wide open and welcoming wines of Fleurie and Brouilly right out of the blocks.

So, where does all this leave us in terms of the style of the successful wines of 2018? Let's first look at the percentage of the vintage that are surprisingly lower in octane than expected, given the hottest August on record since 1959 the region. The wines that fall into this camp tend to be deep, pure and beautifully soil-driven in personality, but with a nice fleshiness to their fruit textures, as well as also a bit more tannin on the backend than one found with the same wines in 2016 and 2017. This camp resembles the outstanding 2011 vintage in Beaujolais to a certain degree, though not always quite as muscular as the 2011s. Then, there are the riper, but still very successful wines of 2018 in Beaujolais, which often will fall between 13.5 and fourteen percent alcohol. They tend to be a bit broader-shouldered and plusher in personality than a typical vintage of a given wine, but still with the aforementioned bounce and vibrancy out of the blocks that generally pegs them a notch higher than their counterparts from the last really warm vintage of 2015. They are quite classical wines in their larger than customary profiles, and look to be great, long-distance runners for the cellar and will age long and gracefully. Though this camp possesses beautiful fruit tones, they are not short of soil signatures either and are beautifully balanced wines that are very, very good and may even appeal to those who often do not gravitate to Gamay in more classical vintages from the region. As I mentioned above, some of these wines have a bit more tannin than we are accustomed to from certain communes, so even the Brouilly and Juliéna bottlings in this camp may want at least a few years in the cellar to soften up completely on the backend.

I should take a moment to mention the quality of the 2018s from Fleurie that I tasted for this report, as they often stood out as truly beautiful this year and were perhaps the most favored Cru in this vintage. One can surmise that after the back to back hail battles of 2016 and 2017 in Fleurie, there was some pent up energy in the vines here that had not been fully utilized and was available to add just a bit more sappy purity to the fruit of 2018. Whatever the reason, after a few stellar examples of 2018 Fleurie having crossed my desk early on in the preparation for this article, I started to look forward to the next round of Fleurie samples from this vintage, just to see if the first outstanding bottles had been exceptions or the commune really was blessed in 2018. Two months further on, it is hard not to come to the conclusion that the 2018 vintage is particularly successful in Fleurie and this will be a legendary vintage for the top wines from this

commune and likely to be a very strong vintage to cellar the best examples of Fleurie. There is a sappy depth at the core of the 2018s here that is simply stunning, as the wines are very, very pure, but also plush with perfectly ripe fruit, and often coupled to better structural chassis than one normally associates with Fleurie. Beyond the bit of added success in Fleurie (and well-deserved after Mother Nature's tough love here in 2016 and 2017), the other top Crus of Beaujolais have generally produced a lot of superb wines as well in 2018, though as I mentioned above, the wines can vary quite a bit stylistically. So, read the notes below carefully to get a feel for the particular style of a given wine in 2018, as there are a lot of absolutely superb young 2018s to choose from this year, and given that they have realized this success in a myriad of successful interpretations of the growing season, it will behoove one to pay attention to the style of a given 2018, rather than just look at their score.

I should also discuss a new *vigneronne* whose wines I was introduced to for this report, Pauline Passot in Chiroubles. Pauline hails from a well-established winegrowing family in the commune, but she did not immediately embrace a career as a *vigneronne*, having first taken a degree at the university in marketing and then working as a sommelier at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Lyon before getting bitten by the winemaking bug and returning to Chiroubles. Her first vintage was 2016 at her own estate, Domaine la Grosse Pierre, which takes its name from the *lieu à dit* in Chiroubles where she has her largest parcel of vines. She has rented vines from her parents to get started, and after weathering the severe hail damage of 2016 in Chiroubles, she has really hit the ground running and her entire range of 2018s that I tasted were amongst the very finest wines of the vintage that have crossed my desk! She produces four distinct bottlings from her vines in the village of Chiroubles: La Grosse Pierre, Claudius, aux Craz and Grillé-Midi, as well as bottlings of Fleurie "Bel Air" and Morgon "Douby". She has lots of old vines (her vineyard parcels range from forty years for her youngest vines to one hundred years of age for her very oldest parcels) and made absolutely stellar wines in 2018. Her Fleurie and Morgon bottlings are absolute classics, and she is making the most serious examples of Chiroubles that I have ever tasted, with the depth and structure of young Morgon, but with more of the playful personalities of Chiroubles. They are all very special wines and will be well worth adding to the Beaujolais corner of the cellar for extended aging!

The following notes are organized in their customary format, with Jean-Paul Brun's pinot noir bottling first, and then Beaujolais Blanc, Beaujolais rouge and Beaujolais-Villages bottlings, followed by the Crus listed geographically from north to south. Within each subsection the wines are listed chronologically by vintage and then alphabetically by name. As you will see as you start to wade into the tasting notes, I have tasted many examples of more mature Beaujolais for inclusion in this report, as my eighty-eight year-old father is now out of the hospital and back at his home and I have had a lot of dinners with him. Given that his favorite region has become Beaujolais at this stage of his life, I have opened plenty of bottles out of my cellar to share with him when I have been visiting, so this report has benefitted from his love of Beaujolais.

Pinot Noir

2018 Bourgogne Pinot Noir- Domaine Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2018 Pinot Noir bottling from Monsieur Brun is a lovely middleweight in the making, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up promising complexity in its bouquet of cherries,

red berries, raw cocoa, gamebird, a fine base of soil, a touch of oak, woodsmoke and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tightly-knit out of the blocks, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the tangy and promising finish. This will need a bit of bottle age, but it will be very good when it is ready to drink. 2024-2045. **90.**



Beaujolais Blanc

2018 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaine Daniel Bouland

This is the first time I have ever tasted the Beaujolais Blanc from Daniel Bouland and I was quite impressed. The wine is beautifully expressive on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, lemon zest, chalky soil tones, fruit blossoms and a touch of upper register muskiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and succulent on the attack, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, sound acids and good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Good juice. 2020-2025. **89.**

2018 Beaujolais Blanc “Collonge”- Domaine Pierre-Marie Chermette

Pierre-Marie Chermette’s 2018 Beaujolais Blanc is a really lovely bottle of chardonnay. The wine offers up a bright and classy nose of apple, pear, spring flowers, chalky soil tones, a dollop of beeswax and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and generous on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, good focus and balance and a long, complex finish. This is very good Beaujolais Blanc! 2020-2025. **89.**

2018 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2018 Beaujolais Blanc from Domaine des Terres Dorées is a very pretty example of the vintage, coming in listed at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a bright and bouncy bouquet of apple, peach, salty soil tones, white flowers and just a hint of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and really has a fine core of fruit, with good soil signature, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This is really good Beaujolais Blanc! 2020-2027. **89.**

2016 Beaujolais Blanc- Georges Descombes

The 2016 Beaujolais Blanc from Georges Descombes is a fine example, offering up lovely ripeness intermingled with soil tones in its bouquet of apple, white peach, spring flowers, chalky soil tones and a touch of lemon zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and long, with a good core, fine bounce and grip and a classy and fairly complex finish. Good juice. 2020-2025. **90.**

Beaujolais, Beaujolais-Villages and Vin de France**2018 Beaujolais “Coeur de Vendanges” Vignes Centenaires- Pierre Marie-Chermette**

The 2018 Beaujolais “Coeur de Vendanges” from Pierre Marie-Chermette, made from vines now over one hundred years of age, is excellent in this vintage. As I noted in the introduction, the vintage has given this wine a bit more mid-palate stuffing than in most years, as the wine offers up a ripe and classy bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, violets, a touch of espresso, a superb base of soil tones, a touch of vinesmoke and a topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a great core of fruit, superb backend mineral drive and a bit of backend tannin on the long, well-balanced and classy finish. This comes in at fourteen percent and has fine musculature this year, but all of its customary freshness and precision. Fine, fine juice. 2022-2045. **91.**

2018 Beaujolais “l’Ancien” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine des Terres Dorées

The 2018 cuvée l’Ancien from Jean-Paul Brun comes in listed at 12.5 percent octane, but I assume that there is a bit of poetic license involved there. The wine is ripe, complex and loaded with personality this year, offering up scents of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebird, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme and a topnote of peonies. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a bit of backend tannin, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This has a bit more tannin and is a bit broader-shouldered than other recent vintages of this superb bottling, but it has its customary transparency, complexity and breed. I should mention that my sample was closed with a plastic cork, which was new to me, and this may affect the wine’s ability to age as long as I predict. 2020-2035. **90.**

2018 Beaujolais-Villages- Georges Descombes

The 2018 Beaujolais-Villages from Georges Descombes is nicely low octane and transparent in style, which is a relative rarity for this vintage. The wine comes in listed at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, bonfire, a nice touch of soil and a dollop of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with lovey intensity of flavor, good soil signature and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a lovely middleweight example that is loaded with personality, yet does not show the plumpness of the 2018 vintage and is like a breath of fresh air. Good juice, but atypical of the vintage (in a good way!). 2020-2027. **88.**

2018 Beaujolais “Cuvée Kéké”- Kewin Descombes

The 2018 Beaujolais “Cuvée Kéké” from Kewin Descombes is a beautifully fragrant and bouncy example of the vintage. The bouquet is very floral, wafting from the glass in a perfumed blend of cherries, violets, pomegranate, peonies, a lovely base of soil and just a whisper of spice elements to go along with all the flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, just a bit of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is a beautiful, middleweight example of Beaujolais and it is like a breath of fresh air in 2018! 2020-2025. **90.**

2018 Beaujolais-Villages- Maison Joseph Drouhin

While I write often about the various, first rate Cru Beaujolais produced by the Drouhin family, I do not mention often enough just how good their straight Beaujolais-Villages is year in and year out. The 2018 is yet another very serious example of this appellation, offering up a deep and precise bouquet of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil tones and a nice touch of fresh thyme in the upper register from some whole clusters. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and tangy finish. Serious juice! 2020-2028. **90+.**

2018 Eau Forte- Jean-Claude Lapalu

The Eau Forte bottling from Jean-Claude Lapalu is a younger vine cuvée from vineyards in Brouilly and Beaujolais-Villages. It is bottled unfined, unfiltered and without added SO₂. The 2018 version is nicely ripe, coming in at a full thirteen percent (high octane for *Vin de France*!) and offers up a good, solid nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, soil, gamebird and hints of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite solid at the core, with tangy acids, just a bit of tannin and good length and grip on the complex finish. This has a bit of natural wine wildness to it on the backend, and though the wine has excellent stuffing, it is not particularly focused on either the nose and palate at the moment. It is a perfectly respectable wine for early consumption, but the method seems to have robbed the wine of a bit. 2020-2024. **87.**

2018 Beaujolais “Beau!”- Jean Loron et Fils (screwcap)

I have loved the quality of this Beaujolais bottling from the Loron family since I first tasted the 2014 version, and the only potential problem I see with this wine is that it continues to be sealed under screwcap. The 2018 version of “Beau!” is a touch riper than past iterations, coming in at thirteen percent octane, but it offers up lovely vibrancy on the nose in its mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, a hint of chocolate, a good base of soil and a topnote of currant leaf that vaguely reminds me of Volnay. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely ripe, with a good core, fine soil signature, just a bit of backend tannin and really good stuffing for a straight Beaujolais bottling. I wish this was under natural cork, as it has the structure and stuffing to age nicely in the bottle, but I do understand that I am a dinosaur in this regard and probably most of the wine market for this cuvée prefers it under screwcap! As has been the case for several years, this is serious Beaujolais and a very good value! 2020-2025+? **88.**

2018 Beaujolais “Wild Soul”- Julien Sunier

The 2018 Wild Soul from Julien Sunier is not officially a Beaujolais, but *Vin de France*, as he started this label in 2016 to compensate for the huge losses due to frost and hail damage and made his first one outside the AOC strictures. However, the 2018 is a blend of fruit from Beaujolais level vineyards and Régnié, so I believe this could have been bottled as Beaujolais

AOC if Julien has wished it to be. In any case, the wine is lovely in 2018, offering up a vibrant nose of cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, a nice touch of soil, violets and a gentle topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, full and tangy, with a good core of fruit, just a bit of backend tannin and lovely length and grip on the very energetic finish. This wine really has backend lift and is excellent, no matter what appellation it carries on the label! 2020-2026. **90.**

2017 Beaujolais “Villages”- Kewin Descombes

The 2017 Beaujolais “Villages” from Kewin Descombes is a lovely wine, with plenty of sappy red fruity, gorgeous spice tones and just a hint of volatility that lifts everything on the nose and palate. The bouquet is bright and complex, jumping from the glass in a mix of cherries, strawberries, fresh nutmeg, a touch of cinnamon, good soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and a tad more marked by volatile acidity on the backend than the nose suggests, but with lovely intensity of flavor and complexity, melted tannins and fine length and grip. I am pretty tolerant of volatile acidity, so my score may be a bit higher than those who cannot tolerate this characteristic. There is certainly a lot of personality here for those who are less bothered by VA. 2020-2025. **89.**



Old vines in Sant-Amour, goblet-trained as is the traditional Beaujolais custom.

Saint-Amour

2018 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards

The 2018 vintage of Domaine des Billards is the ripest I have ever encountered from this outstanding property, as it comes in at a full 14.5 percent alcohol this year. Like some of the higher octane red Burgundies from 2018 that I have tasted, the Domaine des Billards does a nice job of retaining its balance at this higher alcohol level, offering up a bright bouquet of black cherries, roasted meats, dark chocolate, a bit of coffee grounds, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full, broad-shouldered and complex, with a rock solid core, a good base of soil and a bit of chewy tannins perking up the long and well-balanced finish. This is a big boy by Beaujolais standards and it will need some time in the cellar to blossom, but, my gut feeling is that it will age long and gracefully and deliver plenty of enjoyment over its long life. It will never be a classic vintage of Domaine des Billards, but it will be a very good one in the fullness of time. 2025-2045. **92.**

2018 Saint-Amour “Les Champs-Grillés”- Pierre Marie-Chermette

The 2018 Saint-Amour “Les Champs-Grillés” from Pierre Marie-Chermette is actually a touch lower in octane than his Coeur de Vendanges, as the wine comes in this year at 13.5 percent and is outstanding on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is deep, pure and very precise, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, violets, dark soil tones, gamebird and a discreet topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with superb focus and grip, a bit of ripe backend tannin and a very long, very classy and complex finish. This is one of those 2018s that has a bit of tannin to resolve and will want a few years in the cellar to blossom properly, but will be truly stunning for many decades to come! 2023-2050. **93+.**

2017 Saint-Amour- Domaine de la Pirolette

The 2017 vintage from Virginie and Grégory Barbet’s Domaine de la Pirolette is a superb young wine in the making. Readers may recall that Saint-Amour was spared any hail damage in 2017 and it is an utterly classical vintage in this commune. The Domaine de la Pirolette offers up a deep and nascently complex nose of black cherries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, gamebird, a complex base of soil tones, a bit of youthful whole cluster elements and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured out of the blocks, with an excellent core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, lovely balance and a long, moderately tannic and very promising finish. The Domaine de la Pirolette wines are built for the long haul and this 2017 will want at least a few years in the cellar to start to blossom, but it should age beautifully and prove to be outstanding, once it has really begun to open up. 2023-2050. **91+.**

2013 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards

The 2013 Saint-Amour from Domaine des Billards is quite a black fruity vintage for this lovely bottling, and at seven years of age, it is really starting to drink very well indeed. The bouquet is wide open and complex, offering up scents of sweet dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, dark soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, melted tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. Fine juice in its prime. 2020-2040. **92+.**

Juliéna

2018 Juliéna “les Capitans”- Domaine des Bruyeres (Nicolas Durand)

The Juliéna “les Capitans” from Domaine des Bruyeres is produced from one hundred year-old vines! The wine is fermented in the traditional, semi-carbonic style of the region, with indigenous yeasts and raised in cement vats prior to bottling. The 2018 les Capitans from Monsieur Durand is pretty ripe at fourteen percent octane, but also offers up fine purity in its aromatic blend of black cherries, sweet cranberries, bonfire, lovely spice tones, gamebird and a superb base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and succulent, with good soil signature, a fine core and a long, vibrant and complex finish. There is just a touch of dried fruit elements on the backend of the palate, which is the only sign that it hails from the warm summer of 2018, as the wine impressively transparent and light on its feet. Good juice. 2020-2025+. **90.**

Moulin-à-Vent

2018 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes”- Louis Boillot

Louis Boillot has made some of the finest 2018s that I have yet tasted and the 2018 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes” was really showing beautifully during my November visit, despite having been racked only ten days previous. The bouquet is deep, precise and very elegant for the vintage, offering up a complex blend of dark berries, black cherries, gamebird, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a lovely topnote of currant leaf (that reminds me a bit of a young Volnay!). On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and very well-defined, with a good core of ripe fruit, a good chassis of suave tannin and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is just lovely! 2020-2050+. **92+.**

2018 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Rouchaux”- Louis Boillot

Monsieur Boillot’s Les Rouchaux is another very strong example of the 2018 vintage, eschewing any signs of overripeness and offering up impressive depth and structural promise. The clean and vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blend of cassis, blackberry, espresso, a bit of venison, dark soil tones, gentle notes of fresh thyme and a beautifully smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, and has an excellent core of fruit, with fine mineral drive, suave tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This has just a touch more mid-palate stuffing than the Vieilles Vignes bottling, but it shares the same sensibilities and long-term cellaring potential. I would opt to give the 2018 Les Rouchaux a couple of years’ worth of bottle age before having at it, as the Vieilles Vignes bottling will offer more generosity right out of the blocks. 2023-2060. **93.**

2018 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Brussellions”- Louis Boillot

The 2018 Les Brussellions from Louis Boillot is also an outstanding example of the vintage, with a bit more inherent power than either the Les Rouchaux or the V.V. bottling. The bouquet offers up a fine and more primary black fruit blend of dark berries, cassis, bonfire, roasted *pigeon*, espresso, a complex base of dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is very pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe, seamless tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. Though this wine is more powerful in personality, it shares the exquisite balance of the other 2018s *chez* Boillot. 2024-2065. **94.**

2018 Moulin-à-Vent “Plantier de Favre”- Louis Boillot

The Plantier de Favre was a new cuvée of Moulin-à-Vent from Monsieur Boillot starting in 2016, with these sixty-plus year-old vines hailing from a *lieu à dit* next to Château des Jacques’ “Clos Carquelin”. The 2018 version is superb, offering up a deep, black fruity and primary

aromatic blend of black cherries, blackberries, *pigeon*, a complex base of soil tones, French roast, woodsmoke and a touch of balsam bough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, nascently complex and full-bodied, with excellent mid-palate depth, ripe, well-measured tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, pure and very promising finish. This will be a long-distance runner of excellent potential. 2024-2065. **94.**

2018 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Trois Roches”- Pierre Marie-Chermette

The 2018 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Trois Roches” from Pierre Marie-Chermette is one of the lower octane Crus of the vintage, coming in listed at thirteen percent alcohol and offering up a pure, complex and youthful bouquet of cassis, dark berries, French roast, gamebird, bonfire, a complex base of dark soil tones and a lovely topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a stellar core of fruit, great soil signature and grip, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a very, very long, very promising finish. This is going to be a cellar treasure for many decades, but is so beautifully balanced, that one can already drink it today with great enjoyment. 2020-2055+. **94.**



2017 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2017 Moulin-à-Vent from Jean-Paul Brun is a beautiful and very classical example of this fine Cru. The bouquet is deep, complex and still youthful, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, black cherries, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, a gorgeous base of soil tones, a touch of chocolate and a very discreet foundation of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a bit of ripe backend tannins, a fine core of fruit and a long, complex and very promising finish. I would opt to tuck this away in the cellar for another

three or four years minimum, before having at the wine in earnest. It will age very long and gracefully. 2023-2055. **93.**

2013 Moulin-à-Vent- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2013 Moulin-à-Vent from Maison Joseph Drouhin is a gorgeous and quite classic expression of this superb Cru, offering up a blossoming bouquet of cassis, sweet dark berries, chicory, dark soil tones, a hint of black licorice, bonfire, gamebird, brown spices and a topnote of coffee bean. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit structured on the backend, with a fine core, excellent transparency, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, complex and gently peppery finish. At age seven, this wine is starting to drink very nicely, with impressive secondary layering to its complexity, but it has the structure to cruise along still for decades and the journey is really only beginning. This is an excellent example of Moulin-à-Vent that has another thirty or forty years of evolution in it, but which is a very fine drink today! I cannot believe this is still available in the New York market! 2020-2050+. **93+.**

2008 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Moriers (François de Nicolay)

The 2008 Moulin-à-Vent from Domaine des Moriers has aged beautifully and has exceeded my expectations since I first tasted it at Domaine Chandon de Briailles back in November of 2011. At the time, I thought it was a touch on the lean side to really blossom, but I underestimated it, and though it is not really deep wine, there is a lot to like here today. The bouquet today is complex and beautifully into its apogee, offering up a refined blend of sweet cassis, black plums, spit-roasted *pigeon*, dark and gently autumnal soil tones, chicory, a touch of thyme and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and soil-driven, with a respectable core, still just a whisper of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the long, tangy and gently peppery finish. It is only on the backend that the moderate ripeness of the vintage is felt here- with just a bit of peppery herbaceousness, but this has aged into a very complex middleweight example of Moulin-à-Vent that is quite satisfying. 2020-2030. **90.**

Fleurie

2018 Fleurie- Domaines des Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

The Drouhin family's wines from the beautiful parcels owned by the Hospices de Belleville are getting better and better with each passing vintage, as the vineyard husbandry overseen by the Drouhins begins to take root and the quality of fruit emerging here continues to increase. The 2018 Fleurie is excellent, offering up a deep, sappy and quite black fruity nose of black cherries, a hint of pomegranate, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird and a lovely topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and shows a bit of backend tannin (in the proper 2018 style), with a superb core of fruit, good soil signature and plenty of grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. First class juice. 2020-2035. **92.**

2018 Fleurie "Grillé Midi"- Louis Boillot

The 2018 Fleurie "Grillé Midi" from Louis Boillot is another exceptional bottle in the making, and to my mind, the first real vintage of this wine from Monsieur Boillot, as the 2017 was hailed upon. The 2018 is absolutely stellar, offering up a ripe and quite pure bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, hung game, bonfire, dark soil tones and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and modestly tannic, with a plush core of fruit, fine soil signature and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Grillé Midi is one of the finest

climats in the commune of Fleurie and it is marvelous to see Louis Boillot now producing a bottling here! 2020-2045. **94.**

2018 Fleurie “Les Garants”- Pierre-Marie Chermette

Like Clos de la Roilette, the *lieu à dit* of les Garants in Fleurie used to be part of Moulin-à-Vent. The Chermette family has thirty-five year-old vines in this pink granite *terroir* and the 2018 version comes in at an even thirteen percent and offers up a stellar bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, gorgeous, stony soil tones, baking spices, woodsmoke and a floral topnote redolent of peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and utterly classic in profile, with a sappy core, superb transparency and grip, just a whisper of tannin and a very long, complex and utterly seamless finish. This is not one of the blockbuster 2018 Crus, but it is one of the finest young examples of Fleurie I have ever had the pleasure to taste (though the commune has produced many of the best wines of the vintage)! 2020-2040. **94.**

2018 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The 2018 Fleurie from Château de Fleurie is pretty ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent in this vintage, but it is also very fresh and shows no signs of *sur maturité* on either the nose and palate and is just a slightly larger-scaled version of this excellent bottling. The bouquet is pure, complex and sappy, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of chocolate, *pigeon*, dark soil tones, violets and a Chambolle-like touch of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered for young Fleurie, with fine soil signature, a good core of fruit and a bit of backend tannin perking up the long and nascently complex finish. This is a Fleurie with Morgon structural sensibilities this year and it will want a few years in the cellar to start to blossom properly. Fine juice in the making. 2023-2040. **91+.**

2018 Fleurie “Bel Air”- Domaine La Grosse Pierre (Pauline Passot)

Pauline Passot farms just under a half hectare of fifty year-old vines in the fine *lieu à dit* of Bel Air in Fleurie. The lion’s share of her vineyard parcels lie in the neighboring village of Chiroubles. Her 2018 Bel Air is fermented with whole clusters in an open tank carbonic style and raised in cement tanks. The wine is outstanding aromatically, jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate a bit of chocolate, roasted gamebird, a touch of fresh herb tones, a hint of violet and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, plush on the attack and bouncy, with a fine core of fruit, excellent balance and grip and a long, focused and gently tannic finish of enormous backend energy. This is a stellar young bottle of Fleurie! 2020-2035+. **92+.**

2018 Fleurie- Domaine Lafarge-Vial

Chantal and Frédéric Lafarge began harvesting their Beaujolais Crus on August 31st in 2018 and have crafted superb wines across the board in this vintage. The wines include twenty-five percent whole clusters and were bottled in early November of 2019. Their 2018 Fleurie is excellent, offering up a pure and nicely sappy bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, vinesmoke, a lovely base of soil and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a lovely sense of granitic soil signature, just a touch of backend tannin and a long, tangy and very well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2020-2035+. **92.**

2018 Fleurie “Joie du Palais” - Domaine Lafarge-Vial

The 2018 Joie du Palais from the Lafarge family also includes twenty-five percent whole clusters, with all of the destemming that was done of the remaining bunches having been done by hand! The bouquet is very pure and expressive out of the blocks, jumping from the glass in a mix

of red plums, cherries, sweet cranberries, a fine base of soil, gamebird and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and beautifully sappy at the core, with lovely mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is a gorgeous bottle in the making. 2022-2045. **93+**.



A nice range of the Lafarge-Vial 2018 Cru Beaujolais bottlings, cradled by casks of Clos des Chênes in the cellars.

2018 Fleurie “Clos Vernay”- Domaine Lafarge-Vial

The 2018 Clos Vernay from Domaine Lafarge-Vial shows beautiful mineral drive this year. The soils here are a combination of granite and quartzite and these give the wine a beautiful structural tension in 2018. The bouquet is bright and very precise, offering up scents of pomegranate, black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, great minerality and a gentle topnote of violet. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off outstanding mid-palate depth, with a sappy core, fine-grained tannins and superb backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. This is dynamite Fleurie! 2020-2045. **94**.

2018 Fleurie- Julien Sunier

Julien Fleurie’s parcel in Fleurie sits high up on the hillside above the town center, with the vines closing in on fifty years of age and with a southerly exposition. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement vats and then aged entirely in old Burgundy casks for eleven months prior to bottling. The 2018 is another fine, cool example from Monsieur Sunier, coming in listed at 12.5 percent octane and jumping from the glass in a beautiful aromatic constellation

of sappy black cherries, sweet dark berries, fresh sage, gamebird, violets, dark soil tones, a smoky topnote and a lovely note of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely structured for a young Fleurie, with a fine core of fruit, very good soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex and classy finish. This is built for the cellar and will need just a couple of years to relax structurally and drink with generosity. First class Fleurie. 2022-2040. **91+**.

2016 Fleurie- Domaines des Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

Fleurie was the epicenter of the heavy hail damage of 2016, and the Fleurie from the Domaines des Hospices de Belleville has always shown a bit of imperfect ripening on the backend as a result of the midsummer hail. Today, the wine is starting to really show beautifully on the nose, offering up a complex and gently sappy blend of red and black cherries, thyme, green peppercorn, woodsmoke, incipient *sous bois*, a hint of curry and spit-roasted gamebird. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature and still a bit of tannin on the long, complex and gently peppery finish. I am sure this would be a wine that those who have a low threshold to pyrazines would not enjoy, as the struggle to ripen up the grapes fully in the aftermath of the hail is evident still here. However, at the same time the wine has fine depth at the core, really fine focus and complexity and if you do not mind a touch (and I do mean just a touch!) of *herbacité* on the backend, this is really good wine. My score reflects my relative tolerance of slightly green elements from less than perfect ripening. 2020-2035. **89**.

2015 Fleurie- Domaines des Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

The Drouhin family's 2015 Hospices de Belleville version of Fleurie is absolutely superb, and looking back through my notes, I cannot believe that I had never tasted this previously (as one knows what a big fan I am of the Drouhins' examples of Beaujolais!). The bouquet here is deep, black fruity and just starting to really blossom, wafting from the glass in a very complex blend of black cherries, black plums, just a whisper of Barolo-like road tar, spit-roasted *pigeon*, dark soil tones (that are just starting to hint at that fallen leaf quality), bonfire, espresso and a lovely mix of fresh marjoram and curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, black fruity and soil-driven, with more of an autumnal personality than the nose suggests, an excellent core, still a bit of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the complex and tangy finish. This is a fairly powerful example of Fleurie, but it is excellent. 2020-2035. **92**.

2010 Fleurie- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The Joseph Drouhin 2010 Fleurie is aging very gracefully and has now reached a fine point in its evolution, where it still retains plenty of youthful sappiness at the core, but the aromatics and flavors are starting to segue nicely into secondary layers. The bouquet is complex and now starting to get a bit autumnal in profile, offering up scents of dark berries, espresso, forest floor, roasted *pigeon*, woodsmoke and a bit of acorn in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and nicely balanced, with impressive complexity and bounce, melted tannins and fine intensity of flavor on the vibrant and long finish. Good juice. 2020-2030. **91**.

2009 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Coudert Père et Fils)

I last drank a bottle of the 2009 Clos de la Roilette about eighteen months ago, where I was happy to see it returning nicely to form, after a patch in the 2014-2015 range where it was showing much more overripe in personality than it had out of the blocks. This most recent bottle

was once again, right on form, with the broad shoulders of the 2009 vintage on display, but coupled to the sappy purity and floral aspects of Clos de la Roilette. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely and complex blend of black cherries, plums, violets, dark chocolate, fresh bay leaf, thyme and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely *à point*, with a good core, fine soil signature, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, well-balanced finish. Fine juice that is drinking very nicely at age eleven, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2020-2035+. **93.**

Chiroubles

2018 Chiroubles Chatenay “Cuve No. 11”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

This is the first time I have seen a bottling of Chiroubles from Daniel Bouland designated as “Cuve No. 11” in the fine print, and I am not sure if this differs from his customary bottling of this Cru. The 2018 Cuve No. 11 is nicely ripe at fourteen percent octane and offers up a complex and sappy bouquet of plums, black cherries, a touch of chicory, a superb base of soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird, gentle spice tones and a hint of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, complex and full-bodied, with great transparency and mid-palate intensity, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and soil-driven finish. This is a lovely wine that is drinking with great style out of the blocks, but will have no difficulties aging as well. 2020-2035+. **92.**

2018 Chiroubles- Domaine Lafarge-Vail

The 2018 Chiroubles from the Lafarge family is a beautiful example of the vintage. The wine was raised in 3,000 liter *foudres* and included twenty-five percent whole clusters in this year. It was harvested on August 31st and was bottled at the start of November of 2019, so the wine was showing very nicely when I tasted it in the cellars in Volnay. The bouquet is bright and sappy, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, sweet cranberries, gamebird, a really fine base of minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and succulent on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This is really lovely. 2020-2030+. **92.**

2018 Chiroubles “la Grosse Pierre”- Domaine La Grosse Pierre (Pauline Passot)

Domaine La Grosse Pierre is a relative newcomer in the firmament of Beaujolais, though winemaker Pauline Passot’s family has been *vignerons* in Chiroubles for generations. However, Pauline came to winemaking by a circuitous professional route and only started her own domaine in the 2016 vintage. She now produces four distinct bottlings of Chiroubles (as well as a bit of Fleurie and Morgon), with her la Grosse Pierre bottling taking its name from her primary vineyard parcel, which is planted with forty-five year-old vines. Her cellar regimen is classic Beaujolais, with whole cluster carbonic fermentation and aging in cement vats. Her 2018 la Grosse Pierre is a lovely wine, offering up a deep and black fruity nose of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebird, fresh thyme and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, tangy acids, a bit of backend tannin and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This comes in listed at 12.5 percent octane, but seems a bit riper than this, though still impressively bright and bouncy on the backend. 2020-2030. **92.**

2018 Chiroubles “Claudius”- Domaine La Grosse Pierre (Pauline Passot)

Madame Passot’s Claudius bottling hails from the same *lieu à dit* of la Grosse Pierre in Chiroubles, but this is from ninety year-old vines that lie higher up the slope in the vineyard. Fermentation and *elevage* are the same as for the above wine. The 2018 Claudius is excellent,

delivering a superb bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, lovely, granitic minerality, a bit of espresso, a touch of youthful sweet stems and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really shows old vine concentration in the mid-palate, with tangy acids, impeccable focus and balance, ripe, buried tannins and lovely grip on the long, complex and very promising finish. These old vines have produced a more structured wine out of the blocks than the straight la Grosse Pierre, and this wine will deserve some bottle age to really blossom. It is structured more like a young Morgon than most examples of Chiroubles that I have tasted! Fine juice in the making. 2024-2050. **93.**

2018 Chiroubles “aux Craz”- Domaine La Grosse Pierre (Pauline Passot)

The domaine’s aux Craz bottling is also from the vineyard of la Grosse Pierre, but these vines are from the summit of the vineyard and are seventy years of age. Due to its elevation at four hundred and twenty meters above sea level, the wine is more transparently mineral in personality on both the nose and palate. The beautiful aromatic constellation offers up a blend of black cherries, pomegranate, very pronounced granite soil tones, *pigeon*, peonies, a touch of blood orange and a gentle topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core, excellent intensity of flavor and bounce, moderate, perfectly-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and ethereal finish. This bottling is so much more defined by its underlying minerality than the other two bottlings from la Grosse Pierre that it seems to almost hail from a different vineyard! I am very happy that Pauline Passot decided to bottle it on its own, as its personality is dramatically different from her other two cuvées from this vineyard. 2023-2045+. **93.**

2018 Chiroubles “Grillé Midi”- Pauline Passot

Until this bottle arrived on my desk, I had no idea that the superb *lieu à dit* of Grillé Midi straddled the border between Fleurie and Chiroubles, as this is the very first example of the vineyard I have seen from the Chiroubles side of the vineyard. This is the only bottling that Madame Passot treats slightly differently in the cellar, as the *elevage* here is done in older *demi-muids*, rather than cement tanks. The vines here range from forty to sixty years of age and the 2018 Grillé Midi offers up a stunning bouquet of sappy red and black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of blood orange, lovely spice tones, a complex base of soil, gamebird, a hint of oak and a refined floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with lovely soil signature, suave, moderate tannins and excellent balance and grip on the long and very complex finish. The *elevage* of the Grillé Midi in *demi-muids* gives this wine a different textural complexion than Madame Passot’s other three bottlings in Chiroubles, but which works really well with this *terroir*. 2023-2050. **93+.**

2017 Chiroubles- Damien Coquelet

The 2017 Chiroubles from Damien Coquelet has a bit of volatile acidity on the nose, but this acts primarily to elevate the other aromatic elements in the bouquet right now, rather than detract from the overall impression of the wine. Today, the nose jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of cherries, blood orange, sandalwood, a fine base of soil that is starting to shade in an autumnal direction and a topnote of clove. On the palate the wine is medium-full, intensely flavored and tangy, with a fine complexity and grip, acids that are gently volatile, but presently still integrated in the body of the wine and just a bit of backend tannin perking up the long finish. This is a very tasty wine right now, but I worry that the volatile acidity will get more strident with extended bottle age, so I would be inclined to drink this wine now while everything is still

in place and one can enjoy its tangy complexity and low octane (twelve percent alcohol) profile. 2020-2022+? 89.

2016 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes”- Damien Coquelet

The 2016 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes” from Damien Coquelet is aged in cask and released a year and a half after the vintage so the 2016 is the current release of this wine in the market today. Given how much hail damage was sustained in Chiroubles in 2016, it is a small miracle that Monsieur Coquelet was able to produce this bottling! The wine has turned out very well, offering up impressive depth and a quite black fruity personality this year, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, dark berries, a good base of soil, a bit of espresso, spice tones and a nice framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, youthful and intensely flavored finish. This is quite concentrated, due to the hail damage in the vines, but it is still low in octane at twelve percent alcohol and quite soil-driven in personality. I really like this wine. 2020-2025+. 91.



Régnié

2018 Régnié- Antoine Sunier

The Régnié from Antoine Sunier comes in listed at 12.5 percent in 2018, which is quite refreshing. It is made from three different parcels of vines that average forty-five years of age, with the wine raised in mostly used Burgundy casks, with only about ten percent of the cuvée seeing its *elevage* done in concrete. The wine offers up a beautifully fresh and vibrant bouquet of

sappy black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, a fine base of soil, lovely spice tones and a hint of cedar from its older casks. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with lovely focus and balance, a fine core and a long, relatively low acid, but precise and succulent finish. This is quite light on its feet for a 2018, with no rough edges and an utterly charming personality right out of the blocks. Good juice. 2020-2027. **91.**

2018 Régnié- Julien Sunier

The Régnié from Julien Sunier hails from a *lieu à dit* called En Oeillat, which lies on the Morgon border and, as it happens, right at the base of the Côte de Py hill. Monsieur Sunier farms 1.1 hectares of sixty year-old vines here. Twenty percent of this cuvée is raised in cement tanks and the remaining eighty percent in older Burgundy casks. The 2018 version comes in listed at a svelte 12.5 percent octane and offers up an outstanding bouquet of vibrant red and black cherries, pomegranate, a fine base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh thyme and a lovely topnote of spice. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely backend mineral drive, a nice bit of backend tannin and outstanding focus and grip on the long, beautifully-balanced and complex finish. This behaves like a fine example of Morgon in 2018 and will age long and gracefully- but, good luck keeping your hands off of it in its first blush of youth! 2020-2045. **92+.**

Morgon

2018 Morgon “Pré Jourdan”- Daniel Bouland

Pré Jourdan is a brand new *lieu à dit* bottling from Monsieur Bouland. This plot lies near the Morgon-Fleurie border and is planted with seventy year-old vines, and there was only a single *foudre* produced in the debut vintage of 2018, with all of the wine coming to the US market. It comes in at 13.5 percent and delivers a superb aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, a hint of cedar, granitic soil tones, a touch of lavender and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with superb transparency and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is a properly structured 2018 Morgon and will want a bit of time in the cellar to soften up, but should age very long and gracefully. What a marvelous addition to the lineup *chez* Bouland! 2025-2055+. **93.**

2018 Morgon “Bellevue”- Daniel Bouland

The 2018 Bellevue bottling from Daniel Bouland is also a ripe, but not overly ripe example of the vintage, coming in again at a perfectly civilized 13.5 percent and delivering a beautifully complex bouquet of red and black cherries, a bit of sweet cranberry, vinesmoke, complex soil tones, fresh thyme, a touch of orange peel and overt notes of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and gorgeously sappy at the core, with excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. Great juice. 2025-2055+. **93.**

2018 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes- Daniel Bouland

The cuvée of Corcelette Vieilles Vignes from Monsieur Bouland is always one of the finest examples of Morgon made each year and the 2018 is again stellar. These vines are sixty-five to seventy-five years of age, with most of the bottling raised in two thousand liter *foudres*, but with a small percentage also raised in stainless steel tank. The 2018 again comes in at 13.5 percent octane and is a bit more black fruity out of the blocks than the Pré Jourdan and Bellevue bottlings, wafting from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gamebird, a touch of coffee bean, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a hint of fresh thyme and

the vintage's signature topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, soil-driven and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, ripe tannins and excellent grip and focus on the long, promising and minerally finish. This is a true *vin de garde* from the 2018 vintage and will be absolutely stunning when it is fully ready to drink! 2026-2060. **94.**

2018 Morgon “les Delys”- Daniel Bouland

These very, very old vines, planted back in 1926, are responsible for the only Morgon from Daniel Bouland that has landed a bit higher in octane than customary in the 2018 vintage, as this wine comes in at an even fourteen percent. However, the wine is very precise and vibrant on the nose and seems just a tad lower in octane than this, as it offers up a deep and black fruity nose of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, gorgeously complex, dark soil tones, currant leaf, lavender and exotic spice tones of cumin and clove. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with marvelous focus and grip, ripe, suave tannins and a long, plush and very complex finish. The slightly higher octane level here is only apparent in the more easy-going and plush texture of the wine out of the blocks, as there is more ripe, puppy fat fruit here to cover the structural elements. Great juice in a very slightly riper style. 2024-2055. **93+.**

2018 Morgon- Georges Descombes

The 2018 Morgon from Georges Descombes is nicely ripe in the vintage, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and delivering a bright and sappy aromatic constellation of cherries, red plums, pomegranate, violets, a hint of fresh thyme, gamebird, dark soil tones and a topnote of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, good soil signature, modest tannins and just a touch of carbon dioxide still dissolved in the wine and adding a bit of extra bounce on the long and complex finish. This is lovely juice. 2020-2035+. **92.**

2018 Morgon “La Voûte de Saint-Vincent”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2018 Morgon “La Voûte de Saint-Vincent” from sister-brother team of Claude-Emmanuelle and Louis-Benoît Desvignes is a lovely example of the vintage, coming in listed at thirteen percent alcohol and offering up a deep, ripe and classy nose of black cherries, pomegranate, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of bitter chocolate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and impressively soil-driven on the backend (particularly for the vintage), with a superb core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a bit of ripe tannin perking up the long and complex finish. This is a fine bottle of Morgon in the making. 2020-2050. **92.**

2018 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2018 Côte du Py from the Desvignes family comes in listed a full point higher in alcohol than the La Voûte de Saint-Vincent bottling, as this is fourteen percent octane. The wine carries its ripeness very well indeed, showing no signs of *sur maturité* on the nose in its mix of sweet dark berries, black cherries, roasted *pigeon*, dark soil tones, a bit of French Roast and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered in this vintage, with an excellent core, firm, chewy tannins and excellent backend mineral drive on the long, nascently complex and promising finish. This is big boy and built for the long haul and it will take plenty of time to really blossom, but it should prove to be a fine bottle of Morgon once it has come out from behind its structural chassis. 2028-2060+. **92.**

2018 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2018 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Sarah and James Wilding's Grange Cochard is a lovely wine in the making, coming in at fourteen percent octane and delivering a deep and sappy nose of cassis, black cherries, espresso, bonfire, grilled gamebird, dark soil tones and a topnote

of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe, full-bodied and powerful in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb soil signature, firm tannins and great length and grip on the nascently complex, tangy and broad-shouldered finish. This is vibrant and precise, despite plenty of muscle, and should age brilliantly. 2027-2065. **93+**.

2018 Morgon “Douby”- Domaine La Grosse Pierre (Pauline Passot)

Madame Passot’s parcel of vines in the vineyard of Douby in Morgon are planted with seventy year-old vines and she farms eighty *ares* here. It is fermented and raised exactly the same as all of her wines, other than her Grillé Midi bottling (which is raised in *demi-muids* instead of cement vats). Her 2018 Morgon “Douby” is simply outstanding, soaring from the glass in a complex and very precise blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, bonfire, spit-roasted *pigeon*, chicory, gentle spice tones and a gorgeous base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and sappy at the core, with superb soil signature, still a bit of youthful stems perking up on the backend and a very, very long, balanced and complex finish. Interestingly, Pauline’s Morgon is a touch less structured out of the blocks than a couple of her Chiroubles cuvées, though this is so seamlessly balanced that it will age for a very long time. All of Madame Passot’s 2018s are on the lower octane side of the vintage and strikingly pure and soil-driven. Great juice. 2022-2050. **93**.

2018 Morgon “Canon”- Domaine Michel Guignier

The 2018 Morgon “Canon” from Michel Guignier is a blended cuvée of old vine fruit that hails from Côte du Py, les Grands Cras and la Roche Pilée. The wine is gorgeous in this vintage, offering up a ripe and wide open bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, chocolate, woodsmoke, spit-roasted gamebird, dark soil tones and just a whisper of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pure on the attack, with a ripe chassis of tannin, a fine core of fruit and a long, soil-driven, gently chewy and extremely promising finish. This comes in listed at thirteen percent and is not overly ripe by any means, but it has the vintage’s broad shoulders and, consequently, will do very well with extended cellaring. 2024-2055. **93**.

2018 Morgon- Domaine Antoine Sunier

Antoine Sunier’s Morgon hails from a parcel of sixty year-old vines in les Grands Cras. Eighty percent of the cuvée is raised in older Burgundy casks and twenty percent in epoxy tanks. The 2018 version comes in nicely low in octane for the vintage, listed at twelve percent alcohol, and offers up a bright, complex nose of red and black cherries, pretty spice tones, roasted meats, dark, stony soil tones, chicory and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, tangy and transparent, with good intensity of flavor, just a whisper of backend volatility and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This wine is bottled with very low SO2 and I suspect it will not make old bones, but it is flat out delicious today, with a sense of backend tension on the palate that is quite rare in 2018. 2020-2025+? **92**.

2018 Morgon- Domaine Julien Sunier

The Morgon from Julien Sunier hails from two parcels of more than fifty year-old vines, with one being the well-known *lieu à dit* of la Corcelette and the other lying on the Régnié-Morgon border and called En Oeillat. Like all of Monsieur Sunier’s wines, the Morgon is aged in older Burgundy casks sourced from Domaine Roumier in Chambolle-Musigny. The 2018 version is outstanding, offering up a really lovely bouquet of red and black cherries, gamebird, woodsmoke, complex soil tones, a fine array of spices and just a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, just a bit of

tannin and lovely bounce and grip on the long and complex finish. This comes in listed at 12.5 percent and is one of the most classically-proportioned 2018s that I tasted for this report. First class juice! 2020-2055. **93.**

2018 Morgon- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2018 vintage is Jean-Paul Brun's fortieth at Domaine des Terres Dorées. Monsieur Brun's back label lists this wine at 12.5 percent, but perhaps he is entitled to a bit of understatement on his fortieth harvest, as the wine seems a bit riper than that to my palate. The very complex bouquet is deep, black fruity and sappy, offering up notes of sweet dark berries, black cherries, chocolate, hung game, woodsmoke, a bit of coffee grounds, currant leaf and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. There is a generous serving of puppy fat fruit here today, but I sense good soil signature underneath and this will become more minerally as the years go by. This is really a superb 2018- very much a child of its vintage, but a wine that will age very long and gracefully as well. 2023-2055+. **92.**



2017 Morgon “Côte du Py- Javernières”- Jean-Paul Brun

The 2017 Morgon “Côte du Py- Javernières” from Jean-Paul Brun is a great classic in the making, with excellent precision and depth of fruit coupled to the firm structure of young Morgon. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex, black fruity blend of cassis, black cherries, espresso, spit-roasted *pigeon*, dark soil tones, a lovely touch of fresh thyme, bonfire and an exotic dollop of eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and solid at the core, with superb focus and grip, excellent backend mineral drive and a long,

complex and moderately tannic finish. Fine, fine juice in the making, this bottling from Monsieur Brun will demand a bit of cellaring before it really starts to drink with generosity and should prove to be very long-lived. 2023-2060. **93+**.

2017 Morgon- Kewin Descombes

I do not know where Kewin Descombes' vines are located for his "regular bottling" of Morgon, but it seems likely that he was able to miss the brunt of the hail damage in this commune in 2017. The wine comes in nicely low octane this year at 12.5 percent and offers up a youthful nose of black cherries, pomegranate, fresh thyme, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nicely soil-driven, with a solid core, a good touch of backend tannin and a bit of youthful pepperiness on the focused and nascently complex finish. At its lower octane, there is not quite the buffering puppy fat fruit for the tannins here, so giving the wine a few years in the cellar is probably the best course of action, just to let the tannins soften up a bit more on the backend. Good juice. 2023-2050. **91.**

2017 Morgon "Vieilles Vignes"- Kewin Descombes

Kewin Descombes' old vine bottling of Morgon hails from a 1.6 hectare parcel of eighty-five year-old vines that he purchased in 2013. The 2017 version is lovely and like the regular Morgon from this vintage, it has a bit of backend tannin to resolve before it will hit primetime drinkability. The bouquet is a bit more black fruity than the above, offering up notes of black cherries, sweet dark berries, dark soil tones, gamebird, bonfire and just a whisper of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent in personality, with a good core, a bit of backend tannin and a long, tangy and complex finish. The acidity here seems a bit more fragile in its integration into the base of the wine, which might prove problematic over long-term cellaring, so I would be inclined to keep a fairly close eye on the wine in the cellar and try to catch it at the point where the tannins have started to fall away a bit, but before the acids get volatile, which they may with extended bottle age. 2023-2050? **92.**

2017 Morgon "Montpelain"- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2017 Morgon "Montpelain" from Claude-Emmanuelle and Louis-Benoît Desvignes is produced from the family's parcel of eighty year-old vines in this *lieu à dit* that the family first bottled on its own in this vintage. I last tasted this wine six months ago, when it was still pretty youthfully tight, so was very happy to see it cross my threshold again for this report. The wine is starting to blossom a bit and is showing fine promise today. The bouquet is youthfully complex and very promising, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, coffee bean, dark soil tones, a bit of roasted meats, woodsmoke and a topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a good core, fine soil signature, a bit of chewy tannin and a long, well-balanced and promising finish. Montpelain was hailed on pretty seriously in 2017, so the Claude-Emmanuelle and Louis-Benoît chose to de-stem this wine completely, rather than utilize some of the stems in their traditional semi-carbonic methodology. Consequently, future iterations of Montpelain are likely to be a bit different stylistically. This wine is developing beautiful aromatic and flavor complexity, and though it is not quite as ample in the mid-palate as some Morgons, it has a fine future ahead of it. 2023-2055. **92.**

2017 Morgon- Domaines des Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2017 Hospices de Belleville Morgon in a bit more than a year and was happy to see it continue to show lovely potential, albeit still a puppy. The bouquet is beautifully expressive today, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, pomegranate, fresh thyme, bonfire, a complex base of dark soil tones, gamebird and a touch of

pepper. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a good core, fine intensity of flavor, modest tannins and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. Tasting this in the context of so many other samples from the 2018 vintage, this seems almost light in comparison to some of those wines, but it is a classically-styled bottle of Morgon that should age long and gracefully. It seems even a bit more closed on the palate than it was a year ago and I clearly underestimated how long it will take to start to blossom, so give it a few more years. 2023-2050+. **92+**.

2017 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Château Grange Cochard

Château Grange Cochard’s 2017 Morgon Vieilles Vignes is a promising and utterly classical expression of Morgon. However, as most of this bottling hails from the vineyard of les Charmes, the mid-summer hail in this village (which centered on the two vineyards of la Corcelette and les Charmes) had to be dealt with in these parcels. The wine is a bit more structured out of the blocks, probably from the hail, but it is also pure, black fruity and sappy on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, gamebird, dark soil tones and a discreet topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tightly-knit out of the blocks, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and youthfully complex finish. This needs some bottle age to blossom, as it is a bit bound up in its structural elements at the present time, but it is very nicely balanced and should be lovely with sufficient bottle age. I do not have a sense that the hail will adversely affect this wine long-term, but it has provided a chewy layer of tannin that will need to soften up a bit before the wine starts to drink with generosity. 2025-2045+. **90+**.

2017 Morgon “les Charmes”- Château Grange Cochard

The Wilding family’s 2017 bottling of les Charmes is made from the one hundred year-old vines that the Wildings own here, which are separated out from the remainder of the vineyard’s production, which are earmarked for the Vieilles Vignes cuvée. The 2017 les Charmes is more red fruity in personality than the V.V. bottling, offering up a fine bouquet of sappy red and black cherries, pomegranate, raw cocoa, *pigeon*, a gorgeous base of soil, smoke, peonies and just a hint of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a good chassis of tannin, tangy acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, complex finish. This too is a chewy 2017 Morgon, but the tannins seem more buried in the old vine fruit here and this is going to land at a higher energy level than the Vieilles Vignes this year. 2025-2055+. **93**.

2017 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard

The Château Grange Cochard 2017 Côte du Py was not affected by the hail in midsummer and the wine is absolutely stellar this year, though again, properly structured for the long haul and in need of some patience while it gathers itself to pounce with time in the cellar. The gorgeous bouquet is very precise and pure, delivering a blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of cigar wrapper, fresh thyme, dark soil tones, gamebird, a beautiful blend of spice tones (which for some reason makes me think of Indian spice combinations) and a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great backend mineral drive, ripe, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. 2024-2055+. **93+**.



2016 Morgon “Côte du Py” Vieilles Vignes- Damien Coquelet

Like his vines in Chiroubles, Damien Coquelet’s parcel in the Côte du Py was also pummeled by hail in 2016, but as the storms were in May and late June, it affected quantity more than quality, as long as the vines themselves could recover from the twin poundings and mature their remaining grapes. This was the case with Damien Coquelet’s old vines here, as the wine has turned out very well indeed. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows a nice touch of its barrel-aging in its aromatic constellation of black cherries, cassis, espresso, bonfire, a bit of spit-roasted game, a bit of cedar and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, a bit of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This has good stuffing, but is only twelve percent octane and is nicely light on its feet. It could do with a couple of years in the cellar to soften up a bit more on the backend, but it is good juice and a very impressive result in this difficult vintage in the Côte du Py. 2020-2035+. 91+.

2011 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

In contrast to the quite closed and fairly sullen 2009 version, the 2011 Morgon from Joseph Drouhin is really starting to drink beautifully at nine years of age and is a stellar young bottle of Morgon. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very precise blend of cassis, black cherries, espresso, gamebird, fresh thyme and a complex base of dark soil tones, With air, notes of dark chocolate and black truffle start to add to the aromatic panoply. On the palate the wine is

deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent transparency and grip, still some suave backend tannins and lovely length on the precise and vibrant finish. 2020-2050+. **94.**

2009 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2009 Morgon from Maison Drouhin has closed down a bit since the last time I tasted it and appears to be in one of those cyclical periods where it is fairly reserved and takes some coaxing to get it to open up a bit. However, it does budge with some extended time in decanter, and eventually offers up a complex and black fruity nose of cassis, pomegranate, hung game, dark soil tones, a bit of coffee grounds, fresh thyme and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and slightly roasted in personality when first opened (though this gets buried as the wine blossoms), with a rock solid core, surprisingly good mineral drive and a long, moderately tannic and complex finish. It is interesting to watch this wine emerge from its brooding persona with about thirty minutes in decanter to actually get more precise and expressive, so it is not unapproachable in its current phase, just needs some understanding. It remains a potentially long-lived wine and there is no need to rush to drink it now, during its closed phase, but it is certainly possible with aeration. 2020-2050. **91+**.

Brouilly

2018 Brouilly “Pierreux”- Pierre Marie-Chermette

Pierre Marie-Chermette’s 2018 Brouilly “Pierreux” is utterly classical in size and shape, coming in at an even thirteen percent octane, but just loaded with pure fruit at the core. The gorgeously complex nose wafts from the glass in a lovely mix of black cherries, a bit of sweet dark berry, woodsmoke, a hint of raw cocoa, gorgeous soil tones, *pigeon* and a topnote of violet and lavender interspersed with currant leaf. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with stunning mineral drive (particularly for Brouilly), lovely complexity, impeccable balance and a long, suavely tannic finish of poise and lovely grip. The wine is so seamlessly balanced that it is today, almost understated in personality, but the depth and complexity here is enormous and this wine will blossom in a very short time into a stunning bottle of Cru Beaujolais. This is one of the finest young examples of Brouilly I have ever tasted! 2022-2045+. **93+**.

2018 Brouilly- Domaines des Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

The Hospices de Belleville Brouilly is one of the more red fruity examples of the 2018 vintage that I have tasted from any of the Cru villages in this year. The wine offers up a ripe, pure and classy bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil and just a hint of pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely think at the core for Brouilly, with excellent focus and grip, fine balance and a long, tangy and complex finish. Fine juice. 2020-2030. **92.**

2018 Brouilly “Cuvée des Fous”- Jean-Claude Lapalu

The 2018 Brouilly “Cuvée des Fous” from Jean-Claude Lapalu comes bottled in a Bordeaux-shaped bottle, which caught me a bit by surprise. The wine is nicely ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent octane, but the old vines for this bottling (averaging eighty years of age and one parcel having been planted in 1900) are in some of the warmer microclimates of Brouilly. The wine is bottled without fining, filtration or added SO₂ and was raised in older casks for six months prior to bottling. The 2018 Cuvée des Fous offers up a deep, ripe and classy nose of red and black cherries, *pigeon*, lovely soil tones, sweet cranberries, fresh thyme and a lovely base of

soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and pretty structured for young Brouilly, with a fine core of fruit, some firm backend tannins and a long, soil-driven and very well-balanced finish. This will need a few years in the cellar for the backend tannins to soften up a bit, but there is good *matière* here and the wine should age quite well. 2023-2035. **90+**.

2016 Brouilly- Domaines des Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

The commune of Brouilly was far enough south to avoid any of the midsummer issues with hail in 2016, which was a blessing after the frost issues in the early spring. The 2016 Hospices de Belleville Brouilly is aging very nicely and is now drinking with generosity, after a fairly tight-knit start to its life in bottle. The precise bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, lovely spice tones, gamebird, woodsmoke, incipient autumn soil tones and a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and complex, with solid depth at the core, a lovey base of soil and a long, tangy and slightly green-edged finish. The backend here seems to suggest these grapes did not quite get a chance to ripen the tannins perfectly, which gives just a bit of tail-end *herbacité* to the wine, but which vanishes at table. This is a very tasty bottle, with plenty of complexity, but it was very early on in the stewardship of the Drouhin family with these vineyards and I have the impression that recent vintages have benefited from their vineyard husbandry. 2020-2030. **89**.

2015 Brouilly- Domaines des Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

The 2015 vintage of Brouilly from the Drouhin family's Hospices de Belleville is drinking very well at age five and presents a completely different expression from this ripe and black fruity vintage than the delicate and classically red fruity 2016. It is not often that I encounter an example of Brouilly with broad shoulders, but that is certainly the case with this 2015, which offers up a deep and very complex bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, coffee bean, a bit of roasted venison, fresh thyme, curry, dark soil tones, chicory and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and really has an impressive core for Brouilly, with fine focus and grip, a bit of ripe tannin still perking up the backend and a long, complex and black fruity finish. This is an excellent 2015 that is a bit more reflective of its vintage character than it is of Brouilly, but for those who do not mind a bit of Morgon stuffing in their Brouilly, this is a wine worth searching out. I should note that this is still available in the New York market at a bargain price! 2020-2035. **91**.

Côte de Brouilly

2018 Côte de Brouilly "Cuvée Mélanie"- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2018 Côte de Brouilly "Cuvée Mélanie" from Daniel Bouland comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, bonfire, gamebird, a touch of fresh herbs, a lovely base of stony soil tones and a fine note of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with excellent focus and balance, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish that closes with excellent grip and lift. This is certainly approachable today, but this is a wine that is going to age very long and gracefully and I would be tempted to tuck it away in the cellar and really let it blossom with five to ten years of bottle age! 2020-2050. **92+**.

2018 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine Lafarge-Vial

The Lafarge family's parcel of sixty-six year-old vines in Côte de Brouilly faces due south and sits next door to one of the vineyards owned by Château Thivin. This wine included one-third whole clusters in 2018 and has turned out beautifully, offering up a nascently complex and vibrant bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, a tangy touch of cranberry, gamebird, woodsmoke and a superb base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with fine focus and grip, seamless tannins and excellent mineral drive on the long and beautifully balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2050. **94.**

2018 Côte de Brouilly- Jean-Claude Lapalu

Monsieur Lapalu's bottling of Côte de Brouilly hails from a parcel of fifty year-old vines in a north-facing vineyard, so he is on the north side of the extinct volcano where Nicole Chanrion also has her vines. He ferments this bottling as he does his other wines, in a semi-carbonic style and then ages the wine for six months in used barrels, prior to *assemblage* and bottling without fining and filtration. However, he does use a bit of sulfur at bottling for this cuvée (which I applaud, as I like aging my Côte de Brouilly for decades.) The 2018 is really a lovely example of the vintage, coming in listed at 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up lovely precision in its bouquet of cherries, cranberries, a touch of blood orange, complex minerality, woodsmoke, fresh thyme and spit-roasted gamebird. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with great transparency, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and promising finish. This is built nicely to age and I would opt to tuck it away for three to five years before starting on it in earnest, but it is so well-balanced that it is certainly very drinkable today! 2023-2050. **92+.**

2018 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2018 Côte de Brouilly from Domaine Terres Dorées is a ripe and fairly black fruity vintage for this bottling, which is often very red fruity in personality out of the blocks. The wine comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a sappy nose of black cherries, pomegranate, complex soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh sage, gamebird and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, great mineral drive and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is going to age brilliantly, and though it is already approachable, this is probably a thirty year wine and it would seem a shame to not let at least a few bottles in the cellar develop into a fine old age! 2025-2055. **93.**

2017 Côte de Brouilly "Cuvée Ambassades"- Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes

I had not tasted a bottle of the fine 2017 Côte de Brouilly "Cuvée Ambassades" from Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes in about ten months and was very happy to see a bottle in my lineup of samples for this article. This remains one of my absolutely favorite examples of Côte de Brouilly in the appellation and the wine deserves to be even better-known. The 2017 has blossomed beautifully over the course of the last year and offers up a vibrant bouquet of black cherries, sweet cranberries, a lovely base of minerality, fresh thyme, a nice touch of *pigeon* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full and classy, with good mineral drive, a solid core of fruit and just a bit of tannin on the long, complex and bouncy finish. This is first class Côte de Brouilly that is starting to really drink with some generosity, but has the potential to age long and gracefully. 2020-2040+. **92+.**



2014 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

Nicole Chanrion's 2014 Côte de Brouilly has entered a fine stage of its evolution as its sixth year commences, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of cranberries, black cherries, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, gamebird, fresh thyme and a refined base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and in a transitional phase to full maturity, with a good core of fruit, tangy acids, melted tannin and lovely length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. This will show more black truffle and chocolaty tones with further bottle age, but right now, those elements are just starting to hint around the edges. A fine vintage for Madame Chanrion. 2020-2030+. 92.

2012 Côte de Brouilly "Cuvée Mélanie"- Daniel Bouland

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2012 Côte de Brouilly "Cuvée Mélanie" from Daniel Bouland since the autumn of 2013, and back then, I thought this would be a wine for near-term consumption. However, I tucked a bottle away just to see how it would do with some extended cellaring and was delighted to see it cruising along beautifully. This was never a particularly structured wine, but it was always nicely balanced, and this has allowed it to age quite gracefully- today offering up scents of red and black cherries, gamebird, a lovely base of autumnal soil tones, just a hint of black truffle, pretty spice tones and a topnote of acorn. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and complex, with a good dollop of mid-palate sappiness, fine soil signature, still bright acids and a long, complex finish that shows just a hint of bitterness that

is quite attractive and almost Italianate in its sensibilities. This was never a particularly ripe vintage for this bottling *chez* Bouland, which may put off those sensitive to pyrazines, but it has aged in a very attractive direction and is a lovely middleweight today. 2020-2025+. **89.**

2008 Côte de Brouilly- Château Thivin

It had been more than a decade since I last drank a bottle of the 2008 Côte de Brouilly from Château Thivin and the wine is aging very nicely indeed. The bouquet is a bit more black fruity than it was out of the blocks, today offering up notes of red and black cherries, a touch of sweet dark berry, *sous bois*, gamebird, a hint of curry, stony soil tones, nutskin, bay leaf and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and intensely flavored, with lovely focus and balance, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and classy finish. This is a leaner vintage of Château Thivin, but very transparent in personality and with all of the polish, soil signature and complexity that has made this one of the region's most popular estates in the US since the day that Richard Olney first introduced Kermit Lynch to the wines. 2020-2030+. **91.**

RECENTLY-TASTED WHITE BURGUNDY IN BOTTLE WINTER OF 2020



The golden autumn beauty of the vineyard of Les Clos in Chablis.

This most recent report on white Burgundy in the bottle is far from comprehensive, and does not delve as far back as the article I wrote on these wines last year, where I had the good fortune to participate in a few mature white Burgundy tastings. However, as I have tasted a fairly sizable number of wines in the last few months that have not been written up in the newsletter (or only appeared as notes out of cask in a previous Burgundy vintage report), it made sense to put these together in an article and include them in this issue of the newsletter. I would have probably held off a bit longer in publishing this piece, but the US importer for Samuel Billaud's fine Chablis lineup had written me to ask how come I was not finding time to visit that domaine during my tasting stays in Chablis. I noted that I had not tasted his wines and did not have any idea what I was missing. He promptly loaded up the better part of a case with Monsieur Billaud's 2017s and I understood immediately why I should have been trying to find a slot to visit the domaine! Having been dutifully impressed by his 2017s, I then went back through my notes from my November Burgundy trip and the last few months before the trip and found I had a fair number of tasting notes piled up and decided I would put this article together now, rather than wait for a bit more depth and breadth. So, this report contains recently-tasted white Burgundies

in bottle from Chablis and the Côte de Beaune; I have withheld my notes on wines from both the Mâconnais and the Côte Chalonnaise for the next coming issue, as I plan to start working a proper, broad report on those lovely wines in the spring (once I get back from Burgundy and Germany in late March).

Having been pleasantly introduced to the fine wines from Samuel Billaud in Chablis, I decided I would cast my net a bit wider with a couple of other top flight importers here on the East Coast of the US and see if they too might be willing to send samples of a few of their producers of white Burgundy that I was not familiar with, as I was well aware that there are plenty more top flight producers of white Burgundy than I have time to visit during my five to six weeks in the region each year. Happily, I was sent another nice selection of wines, primarily from the 2017 vintage (one of my favorite recent vintages for white Burgundy) and was introduced to several more domaines producing top flight white wines and who I had never visited during my stays in the region. Two of these whose wines really stood out for me were the fine domaine in Santenay, Domaine Bachey-Legros. The Bachey family have been *vignerons* in Santenay for several generations, and the current proprietors of the family estate of the brothers, Lénaïc and Samuel Legros. The family's nine hectares of vines are located primarily in Santenay, though they also have parcels in both Chassagne-Montrachet and Maranges as well. There are lots of old vines here (many having been planted back to the mid-1930s), and have recently also contracted to buy fruit in both Meursault and Puligny-Montrachet. As I have not yet visited the Legros brothers, I am not familiar with their winemaking techniques, but they tend to use little new oak for their white wines, and the maximum used is thirty percent for their premier crus in Chassagne. They are very suave, refined and chalky examples of white Burgundy and I am very much looking forward in the near future to visiting and tasting *sur place* at the domaine.

The other producer whose wines really stood out to me when tasting through samples for this article was Raymond Dupont-Fahn in the village of Tailly, near Meursault, who farms five hectares of vines, primarily in Auxey-Duresses, Meursault and Puligny-Montrachet. The family domaine is not old by Meursault standards, having only been started by Raymond's grandfather in 1975, but they have some lovely parcels of vines and the wines I tasted for this report were excellent: racy, precise and transparent, with lovely mineral undertow and just a touch of vanillin oak. Monsieur Dupont-Fahn never uses more than twenty percent new oak for any of his bottlings and prefers to harvest on the earlier side, so as to keep the cut and grip in his wines. Raymond's most famous wine is actually his Bourgogne Blanc "Chaumes de Perrières", which lies immediately above the premier cru of Perrières, and was once ranked as a Meursault *villages* parcel. However, as the story goes, Raymond's grandfather, having purchased a parcel here that was unplanted, petitioned the INAO to add a bit of topsoil to his parcel before putting in the young vines, which was granted by the authorities. Not long after, some of the neighbors took exception to this moving around of soil (perhaps threatening to change the *terroir* of the vineyard) and petitioned the INAO to have the parcel declassified down to Bourgogne from Meursault AC. This also the INAO granted! So, despite Raymond producing some really lovely Meursault and Puligny bottlings, he is most famous for his Bourgogne "Chaumes de Perrières", which also happens to be stellar, despite it having been moved down a notch in the hierarchy of vineyards back in his grandfather's day!

The following notes are arranged a bit differently than in past reports of this sort. The wines are first grouped chronologically from the 2017 vintage back to 2000. Within each vintage section (this is particularly true for the 2017s and 2016s, where I have more notes), I have created subsections for Villages level wines, premier crus and grand crus. The idea here is to facilitate comparing wines of a similar level of appellation across various producers and communes. Within each subsection, the wines are listed geographically from north to south, so that for instance, in a premier cru section, Chablis premier crus will appear first, followed by Meursault, Puligny and then Chassagne and Saint Aubin. Within each regional section, the premier crus are listed alphabetically. As always, I have not included any notes on premoxed bottles that I have tasted in the notes that follow, understanding that a lone bottle of a premoxed wine is not an indication of anything at all for other bottles of the same wine, but rather, just a statistically insignificant example of bad luck.

2018 Petit Chablis and Bourgogne Blanc

2018 Bourgogne Tonnerre- Domaine Sonia et Marc Cameron

The 2018 Bourgogne Tonnerre from Sonia and Marc Cameron is a very pretty and stylish wine, offering up a bright bouquet of lemon, pear, beeswax, chalky soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, sound acids and fine focus and grip on the long finish. This is quite serious for Bourgogne and will age well over the mid-term. 2020-2028. **88.**

2018 Chablis

2018 Chablis “Côte de Bréchain”- Domaine Testut

Cyril Testut is a new grower to me in Chablis, but I was very impressed with the few examples of his wines that I was able to taste for this article. His 2018 *villages* level wines of Côte de Bréchain hails from fifty year-old vines. This *lieu à dit* is beautifully-situated, lying on the same ridge as Montée de Tonnerre, just to the east of and looking across the very narrow valley at Blanchot. The wine is excellent, with lovely tension on the palate for the 2018 vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, wet stone minerality, straw, citrus peel and a touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with fine mineral undertow, a good core of fruit and excellent balance and grip on the long and zesty finish. This is still a puppy and could use a few more years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity emerge. First class AC! 2020-2035. **90.**

2017 Petit Chablis and Bourgogne Blanc

2017 Bourgogne Blanc- Domaine Philippe Chavy

Philippe Chavy's Bourgogne Blanc hails from vines in both Puligny-Montrachet and Meursault, but ninety percent of these are in the first village. His 2017 version is a fine example, offering up a ripe and pure nose of apple, white peach, spring flowers, a nice touch of chalkiness and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with an excellent core for Bourgogne, good balance and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is very drinkable today, but more complexity will emerge if one tucks this bottle away in the cellar for another year or two. Good juice. 2020-2030. **88+.**

2017 Bourgogne “Chaumes des Perrières”- Domaine Raymond Dupont-Fahn

As I mentioned above, Bourgogne “Chaumes des Perrières” has an interesting history, as up until the late-1970s, this *lieu à dit* above the premier cru of Perrières in Meursault was entitled to

Meursault *villages* status. Raymond Dupont-Fahn's grandfather, Michel, had bought a parcel here in 1975 and petitioned the INAO to add twenty centimeters of top soil to his unplanted parcel, as the topsoil was so thin that he feared new plantings here would wither and die. The INAO agreed, but the other growers in Meursault were upset and petitioned to have the parcel declassified to Bourgogne from Meursault AC, which they were also successful in doing. So these vines, which sit fifty meters above the Perrières vines of Domaine Coche-Dury are only ranked as Bourgogne! In any event, the 2017 version from Raymond Dupont-Fahn is a lovely wine, offering up a complex nose of pear, apple, almond, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, a whisper of vanillin oak and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with lovely balance and grip, nascent complexity and a long, zesty finish. No matter its official appellation today, this tastes like top flight Meursault to me! 2020-2035. **90+**.

2017 Bourgogne Blanc- Domaine Rapet Père et Fils

The 2017 Bourgogne Blanc from Domaine Rapet is a very strong example of its level, with superb mineral drive that is not always part of the equation at this level. The complex and vibrant bouquet offers up scents of lemon, apple, chalky minerality, a touch of paraffin, dried flowers and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with an excellent core, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and impressive length and grip on the finish. Fine juice. 2020-2030+. **89**.

2017 Petit Chablis- Domaine Samuel Billaud

The 2017 Petit Chablis from Samuel Billaud is really a quite lovely example of its appellation, offering up excellent purity in its bouquet of apple, pear, a hint of oyster shell, chalk and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and really has excellent depth at the core for Petit Chablis, with very good balance and grip and a long, zesty and surprisingly complex finish. This is serious juice and a lovely value! 2020-2030. **89**.

2017 Petit Chablis- Domaine Patrick Piuze

The 2017 Petit Chablis from Patrick Piuze is drinking very nicely today, having broadened and deepened a bit with the year or so since I last drank it. The bouquet is starting to show some secondary layers in its blend of tart orange, apple, chalky soil tones, straw, citrus peel and a topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and beautifully defined by its underlying minerality, with a very respectable core for Petit Chablis, good focus and grip and a long, wide open and complex finish. This is aging quite nicely and is now drinking with generosity, but still has the cut to age further with grace and style. 2020-2033. **89**.

2017 Villages Wines

2017 Chablis- Domaine Samuel Billaud

Samuel Billaud was the winemaker at his family's Domaine Billaud-Simon until 2009, when he organized his own domaine. Since that time, he has grown to own four hectares of vines, as well as sourcing grapes from several other top premier and grand crus in the region. His Chablis AC includes mostly fruit from the *lieu à dit* of les Pargues (which Patrick Piuze uses for his superb la Grande Vallée bottling) and is raised entirely in stainless steel. The 2017 version is a lovely example, offering up a bright and classic bouquet of pear, lemon, oyster shell minerality, beeswax and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, zesty acids and lovely balance on the complex and wide open finish. This is very good *villages*! 2020-2035+. **90**.

2017 Pernand-Vergelesses “les Combottes”- Domaine Rapet Père et Fils

The 2017 les Combottes from Vincent Rapet is a really stylish example of the vintage, offering up a precise and beautifully floral bouquet of apple, pear, fruit blossoms, chalky soil tones, a discreet foundation of vanillin oak, beeswax and a hint of acacia blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully soil-driven, with a lovely core of pure fruit, bright, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a very good bottle in the making, that today, is just a touch reserved (though very easy to drink with a bit of decanting), but which should be hitting on all cylinders with just a year or two in the cellar. 2022-2040. **90.**



2017 Meursault “Narvaux”- Domaine Philippe Chavy

Monsieur Chavy’s vines in Narvaux (his parcel is forty *ares* in size) celebrated their sixtieth birthdays in the 2017 vintage. The resulting wine is very good on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a classic blend of apple, hazelnut, a touch of iodine, a fine base of minerality and a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good mineral drive, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the youthfully racy finish. This is quite tasty out of the blocks, but will be even better once it relaxes a bit structurally with further bottle age. 2020-2040. **90+.**

2017 Meursault “les Clous”- Domaine Raymond Dupont-Fahn

The 2017 Meursault “les Clous” from Raymond Dupont-Fahn is one of his old vine cuvées (though he does not put this on the label), as these vines are fully eighty-five years of age. The wine is superb in 2017, offering up a complex and minerally bouquet of pear, hazelnut, chalky minerality, a touch of honeysuckle and a beautifully discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegant in profile, with a good core of fruit, a fine girdle of acidity and lovely focus and grip on the long, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. This is first rate Meursault *villages*! 2023-2045+. **91.**

2017 Puligny-Montrachet- Domaine Louis Carillon

The 2017 Puligny *villages* from Monsieur Carillon is a lovely example of the vintage. It has nicely firmed up after bottling and offers up a youthful bouquet of apple, lemon, beeswax, a nice base of chalky soil tones and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and classically-constructed, with a good core, bright, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Fine juice. 2022-2045. **91.**

2017 Puligny-Montrachet “les Corvées des Vignes”- Domaine Philippe Chavy

The Puligny *villages* bottling of les Corvées des Vignes from Philippe Chavy hails from two different parcels of old vines (both planted in the 1950s) that lie in the northern end of the commune of Puligny-Montrachet, near the Meursault border. Like all of Monsieur Chavy’s vines, they have been farmed biodynamically since 2010. The 2017 les Corvées des Vignes is a lovely example of Puligny, offering up a quite floral bouquet of apple, pear, fresh almond, chalky soil, fruit blossoms and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with bright acids, good balance and a long, elegant finish. Good juice. 2020-2040. **90.**

2017 Puligny-Montrachet “Rue Rousseau”- Domaine Philippe Chavy

The 2017 Puligny-Montrachet “Rue Rousseau” from Philippe Chavy is made from a tiny parcel of vines planted in 1955, which lie just below Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet. The 2017 Rue Rousseau is a lovely wine, with its complex bouquet wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, delicious apple, a touch of *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones, almond and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still nicely youthful in personality, with a fine core of old vine fruit, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This could do with a few years to allow its complexity to fully blossom, but it may not be all that easy to keep one’s hands off while waiting for it to properly open up with bottle age! 2022-2040+. **90+.**

2017 Chassagne-Montrachet- Domaine Bachey-Legros

The 2017 Chassagne-Montrachet AC from Domaine Bachey-Legros is a seriously fine wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, delivering a mix of apple, pear, deep soil tones, white flowers, a hint of hazelnut and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, bouncy, complex and full-bodied, with great shape and cut, a lovely core and a long, soil-driven and utterly classical finish. The Legros brothers are new producers to me and I am very, very impressed by what I have tasted for this report! You can be sure a visit to their cellars in Santenay will be part of my next trip’s itinerary! 2020-2035+. **90+.**

2017 Chassagne-Montrachet- Domaine Louis Carillon

The 2017 Chassagne AC from Domaine Carillon is a very pretty wine, but this is younger vines than in his Puligny *villages* bottling and this can be sensed a bit in the mid-palate. The very pretty nose offers up scents of apple, pear, chalky soils, orange blossoms, vanillin oak and a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite

wide open in personality, with good, but not great depth at the core, zesty acids and good cut and grip on the long finish. Good juice- just a touch young viney. 2020-2035. **89.**

2017 Santenay “Sous la Roche”- Domaine Bachey-Legros

The 2017 Santenay “Sous la Roche” from the Legros brothers is a lovely wine that has been bottled slightly reductive and needs a little aeration if it is to be drunk now, With some coaxing, the wine offers up a really lovely bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of almond, chalky soil tones, white lilies and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, poised and complex, with lovely soil signature, very pure fruit tones and a long, zesty and classy finish. I would have loved to have seen this wine go into bottle a bit less reductively, but if one has the patience to let it blossom in decanter for thirty minutes, this is a really, really good *villages*! 2020-2030. **90.**

2017 Premier Crus

2017 Chablis “Montmains”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

All of Samuel Billaud’s premier cru bottlings see about fifteen percent new oak during their *élevage*, in 450 and 600 liter casks, rather than the traditional small barrels. The 2017 Montmains is a fine example of its *terroir*, offering up a complex bouquet of fresh lime, apple, straw, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and a very discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, bright acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. A lovely Montmains. 2020-2045. **91+.**

2017 Chablis “Mont de Milieu”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

The 2017 Mont de Milieu from Samuel Billaud is a lovely example of the vintage, with just a hint of vanillin oak and classic mineral undertow. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, fresh pineapple, chalky minerality, spring flowers, just a hint of beeswax and a lovely foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely structured and zesty, with an excellent core, fine soil signature and grip, good acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2020-2045. **92.**

2017 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

The domaine’s parcels in Montée de Tonnerre are not quite as venerable as those in Séchet of Vaillons, but these vines range from forty to fifty years of age, so they are emphatically not young vines. Twenty-five percent of this cuvée is barrel-fermented in 600 liter casks. The 2017 Domaine Billaud Montée de Tonnerre is outstanding, offering up a bright and complex nose of fresh lime, pear, a refined base of chalky minerality, citrus blossoms and a gentle touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, outstanding backend intensity of flavor, snappy acids and lovely focus and grip on the vibrant finish. I love the backend lift in this wine. 2022-2045+. **93.**

2017 Chablis “Séchet” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Samuel Billaud

Samuel Billaud’s parcel of seventy year-old vines in Séchet were part of the four hectares he purchased from Domaine Billaud-Simon in 2014. This is an outstanding bottle in the making, offering up a deep and classic nose of apple, pear, beeswax, chalky soil tones, just a whisper of vanillin oak and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and really shows its old vine pedigree in its rock solid core, with lovely soil signature, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. Fine juice. 2022-2045+. **92.**

2017 Chablis “Vaillons” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Samuel Billaud

Monsieur Billaud’s parcel in Vaillons also hails from his 2014 purchase of some of his family’s former plots, and these vines are also seventy years of age. I often think of Vaillons as one of the *terroirs* that marries the most seamlessly with a touch of oak and this is indeed the

case with the Billaud 2017 version, which offers up a superb bouquet of apple, sweet grapefruit, paraffin, chalky soil tones that show a hint of oyster shell, a touch of citrus peel, spring flowers and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature, vibrant acids and a long, poised and complex finish. This is very impressive! 2020-2045+. **92+**.

2017 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Testut

Cyril Testut’s 2018 Montée de Tonnerre is made from vines now over sixty years of age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful mix of green apple, pear, lemon peel, chalky minerality, dried flowers and just a hint of paraffin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright, zesty acids and lovely balance and grip on the long, focused and classy finish. This is a proper 2017 premier cru and will definitely benefit from some additional bottle age, but it is already quite easy to drink! 2002-2045. **91+**.

2017 Pernand-Vergelesses “Sous Frétille”- Domaine Rapet Père et Fils

Readers know that I love the *terroir* of Sous Frétille in Pernand, as this is as close as one can get to Corton-Charlemagne without paying the price tag for the grand cru! Vincent Rapet’s 2017 version is a first class example, offering up lovely precision and complexity in its aromatic constellation of pear, golden delicious apple, limestone minerality, a bit of paraffin, white flowers and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full and deep at the core, with zesty acids, lovely mineral drive and excellent focus and grip on the poised, balanced and very promising finish. It is no crime to drink this lovely wine today, but more complexity will unfold with a bit of bottle age. 2023-2045+. **92**.

2017 Beaune “les Bressandes” Blanc- Domaine Rapet Père et Fils

The 2017 Beaune “les Bressandes” Blanc from Domaine Rapet is very pretty, offering up a generous bouquet of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with a perfectly respectable core of fruit, good focus and grip and a long, bright and bouncy finish. I do not know how old these vines are, but this has the laid back personality of a wine that is made from younger vine fruit, so my gut instinct is that it will probably drink at its best in its relative youth. 2020-2030. **89**.

2017 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaine Philippe Chavy

Monsieur Chavy’s parcel in Meursault “Charmes” are in the lower, *Dessous* section of the vineyard and total forty-one *ares*. These are some of his oldest vines, having been planted in 1940! The wine is quite pretty and a classic example of the more generous style of Charmes from *Dessous*, with the nose wafting from the glass in a wide open blend of apple, pear, hazelnut, a nice touch of soil, dried flowers and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full and already very tasty, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2020-2040. **91**.

2017 Puligny-Montrachet “Champs Canet”- Domaine Louis Carillon

The 2017 Champs Canet from Louis Carillon is becoming very refined as it starts to settle in after bottling. The youthful bouquet delivers a lovely blend of white peach, lemon, chalky soil tones, a hint of paraffin, vanillin oak and a gentle topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure on the attack and nascently complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good mineral drive and a long, zesty and promising finish. This still needs a bit of time to blossom. 2023-2050+. **92**.



2017 Puligny-Montrachet “les Perrières”- Domaine Louis Carillon

Monsieur Carillon’s 2017 Perrières is an excellent bottle in the making. The wine offers up an aromatic constellation of lemon, apple, chalky minerality, white flowers, a hint of beeswax and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with fine cut and grip and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. First class Puligny! 2024-2055. **93.**

2017 Puligny-Montrachet “les Referts”- Domaine Louis Carillon

The 2017 Referts from Domaine Carillon possesses both the inherent elegance of the Champs Canet and the mineral drive of the Perrières, which is a very exciting combination! The wine offers up a lovely, youthfully complex nose of white peach, apple, lemon, spring flowers, a gorgeous base of limestone minerality, vanillin oak and a bit of youthful citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and nicely reserved at the present time, with a lovely core of fruit, fine transparency and grip and a long, vibrant and very mineral finish. Fine juice. 2024-2055. **94.**

2017 Puligny-Montrachet “les Folatières”- Domaine Philippe Chavy

The 2017 Folatières from Monsieur Chavy is a nicely ripe and generous example of this fine premier cru, offering up a complex bouquet of peach, apple, a touch of almond, chalky soil tones, gently musky floral tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full, with a lovely core of fruit, good focus and grip, fine backend soil signature and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This will be one of those examples of Folatières

that develops a sheen of honey with only a few years' worth of bottle age and is already drinking very nicely. 2020-2035+. **91.**

2017 Puligny-Montrachet “les Pucelles”- Domaine Philippe Chavy

Philippe Chavy only has a very small parcel in les Pucelles- enough to produce three barrels per year, so this is his most limited premier cru bottling. Like all of his plots, these are old vines, having been planted in 1947. This is an excellent example of Pucelles in the making, but it was bottled in a slightly reductive state and will need some bottle age to blossom properly. The bouquet, with a bit of coaxing, offers up a refined blend of white peach, apple, spring flowers, a touch of iodine, *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit today, with a good core, fine soil signature, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is a very stylish bottle of Pucelles in the making, but in its reductive youth, it either needs to be decanted for a good thirty minutes to drink now, or just tucked away in the cellar for a handful of years to let it blossom. Fine juice. 2024-2050+. **93.**

2017 Puligny-Montrachet “les Folatières”- Domaine Raymond Dupont-Fahn

Raymond Dupont-Fahn's 2017 Folatières is a fine example of this vineyard, with a fine sense of elegance and restraint that is not always self-evident in every version of young Folatières. The very refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, lovely limestone soil elements, spring flowers, a hint of almond and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with fine complexity and bounce, good, but not great depth at the core (these are still only twelve year-old vines), lovely balance and a long, classy finish. This does not quite have the mid-palate stuffing that it will have down the road, once the vines are older, but in every other aspect, it is a first class example of Folatières. 2020-2035+. **91.**

2017 Chassagne-Montrachet “les Macherelles”- Domaine Louis Carillon

This was the last vintage that Louis Carillon produced a bottling of les Macherelles, as the vines reverted to his brother after 2017. It is a very nice vintage to go out with, as the wine is very pretty and nicely structured on the palate. The bouquet offers up scents of apple, pear, a nice touch of beeswax, candied lemon, apple blossoms and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and long, with plenty of soil signature, a good core, bright acids and good length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. Good juice. 2022-2050. **91.**

2017 Chassagne-Montrachet “les Champs-Gain” V.V.- Vincent & François Jouard

The Jouard brothers, Vincent and François, have very old vines in all of their parcels, though I do not know the exact age of their Champs-Gain holdings. The wine is very good, offering up a deep and youthfully complex bouquet of apple, a touch of tangerine, a good base of soil, dried flowers, citrus zest and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good soil signature, bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, promising finish. This is a proper young Champs-Gain and needs some time in the cellar to unfurl, but it will be very tasty when it is ready to drink. 2024-2045. **91.**

2017 Chassagne-Montrachet “Morgeot les Fairendes” V.V.- Vincent & François Jouard

The Morgeot les Fairendes bottling from the Jouard brothers is truly an old vine cuvée, as these vines are eighty-five years of age! This sector of Morgeot has deep soils, with clay and limestone interspersed with plenty of *terres rouges* and this produces a structured white wine built for aging. The 2017 version from the Jouards is an excellent young wine, offering up fine purity and precision in its youthful blend of apple, pear, complex soils tones, spring flowers and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core,

with fine soil signature, bright, buried acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. There are more layers of complexity waiting in the wings here, but the wine will need some bottle age to unlock them. It is tasty now, but will be exceptional with further cellaring. 2024-2045+. **92.**

2017 Chassagne-Montrachet “Morgeot les Petits Clos” V.V.- Domaine Bachey-Legros

The 2017 Chassagne-Montrachet “Morgeot les Petits Clos” from Domaine Bachey-Legros is crafted from vines planted in 1950. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of pear, apple, fruit blossoms, a hint of the pastry cream to come, chalky soil tones and a suave base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, promising and elegant finish. This is a very good drink out of the blocks, but it is also still emphatically a young wine and it seems crazy to be drinking bottles now, when there is so much more here to unfold with bottle age! Fine, fine juice. 2023-2045+. **92+.**

2017 Saint-Aubin “les Murgers des Dents de Chien”- Domaine Philippe Chavy

The 2017 les Murgers from Philippe Chavy is fairly reductive in personality, but it works very nicely here and marries seamlessly with the fine base of soil and lovely fruit of the vintage. The noticeably reductive bouquet offers up scents of apple, pear, chalk, iodine and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, good mineral undertow and a long, youthful and gently reductive finish. Stylistically, this reminds me a bit of the Domaine Leflaive wines from the decade of the 1990s, when Anne-Claude was bottling them in a pretty reductive state to help ward off premoxy. Some of those Leflaive wines aged very well indeed and some got stuck in their reductive state, so it will be interesting to follow Monsieur Chavy’s Murgers and see how it evolves with extended bottle age. 2024-2040+? **90.**

2017 Santenay “Clos des Gravières”- Domaine Bachey-Legros

The 2017 Santenay “Clos des Gravières” from Domaine Bachey-Legros is a really lovely example of this fine vintage. Clos des Gravières has a very high limestone content in its soil and this is readily apparent in the bouquet of this fine version, as the wine offers up a pure and complex blend of pear, a hint of pastry cream, beautifully complex, chalky soil tones, apple blossoms, a touch of fresh almond and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely cut and grip and impeccable balance on the long, zesty and very classy finish. This is a superb wine and a great bargain! 2020-2040. **92.**

2017 Grand Crus

2017 Chablis ‘Bougros’- Domaine Samuel Billaud

Samuel Billaud’s example of Bougros is entirely barrel-fermented and then aged for one year in three year old casks, prior to racking into stainless steel tanks for six more months of *elevage* prior to bottling. The 2017 version is excellent, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, sweet grapefruit, citrus zest, chalky soil tones, paraffin, dried flowers and a gentle foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright acids and superb length and grip on the very well-balanced and classy finish. Fine juice. 2023-2050. **93.**

2017 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Rapet Père et Fils

The 2017 Corton-Charlemagne from Domaine Rapet Père et Fils is a very fine example of this outstanding vineyard, and properly structured and youthful at this stage in its development.

The bouquet wafts from the glass in a promising blend of pear, apple, a touch of iodine, chalky minerality, white flowers, a whisper of the *crème patissière* to come with bottle age and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthful, with an excellent core of fruit, good mineral drive, a snappy girdle of acidity and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. It is still very early days for this fine bottle, so give it some time alone in a cool corner of the cellar. 2015-2040+. **93.**

2017 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 2017 Corton-Charlemagne from Christophe Roumier is an outstanding young wine and one of his best recent vintages of this bottling. The bouquet is pure, youthfully complex and very classy, offering up scents of lime, pear, white flowers, a superb base of chalky minerality, beeswax and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and tightly-knit today, with a fine core, good mineral drive and a long, focused and very promising finish. This reminds me of the 1993 version of this wine when it was young, but with even better mid-palate stuffing! 2023-2050. **94.**

2017 Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet- Domaine Louis Carillon

The 2017 Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet from Domaine Louis Carillon is a great wine by any measure. The bouquet is still quite adolescent, but shows enormous potential in its mix of apple, pear, lemon, kaleidoscopic limestone minerality, citrus peel, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and racy, with a rock solid core, great purity and backend lift and a very long, snappy and potentially magical finish. Just add time in the cellar! 2027-2065+. **97.**



2016 Premier Crus

2016 Chassagne-Montrachet “Ruchottes”- Domaine Ramonet

I do not get to taste anywhere near as much Domaine Ramonet wines as I used to once upon a time, but still love them when they cross my path. The 2016 Ruchottes is still a very young wine, but it is quite shapely and it is already very tasty in its youthful phase of complexity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of signature mintiness and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully balanced out of the blocks, with a fine core, good focus and grip and a long, zesty and nascently complex finish. It is still too young to really be drinking this wine, but when offered a glass, who was I to refuse on those grounds? 2020-2040+. **94.**

2015 Premier Crus

2015 Chablis “Mont de Milieu”- Domaine Drouhin-Vaudon

The 2015 Chablis “Mont de Milieu” from Domaine Drouhin-Vaudon is really drinking beautifully today. The bouquet is wide open and nicely complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, lemon, straw, flinty minerality, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full, with a lovey core of ripe fruit, good mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, complex finish. This has the broader shoulders and mid-palate volume of the 2015 vintage, but it also has classic *Chablisienne* balance and stylistic sensibilities. Good juice that is drinking very well today, but has the spine to cruise along beautifully for many years to come. 2019-2035+. **92.**

2015 Chablis “Roncières”- Domaine Patrick Piuze

The 2015 Chablis “Roncières” from Patrick Piuze is another very strong and vibrant example of the vintage, with the depth of fruit of 2015, coupled to the classic bounce and mineral drive of Chablis. The nose offers up a complex constellation of pear, tart orange, chalky minerality, white flowers and a topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and beautifully defined by its underlying minerality, with excellent focus and grip, good acids and grip and a long, classy finish. 2019-2035. **92.**

2015 Meursault “Chevaliers”- Domaine Yvon Clerget (magnum)

This was the first wine I had tasted from Thibault Clerget, whose family domaine is situated in Volnay. The wine was bottled quite reductively, as is the style these days, which has kept it nicely youthful a few years out for its bottling. The nose offers up a classic blend of apple, tangerine, iodine, chalky minerality, hazelnuts and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core and impressive backend cut and grip on the long and complex finish. This is quite racy for a 2015 white Burgundy and should continue to age very well indeed, particularly in magnum. 2018-2030+. **90+.**

2015 Chassagne-Montrachet “les Baudines”- Domaine Thomas Morey

The 2015 les Baudines from Thomas Morey is very pretty on both the nose and palate and drinking very well today. The nose offers up scents of apple, a touch of tangerine, a good base of soil, musky floral tones and a discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a good core, bouncy acids and good length and grip on the focused finish. Good, solid juice. 2019-2028. **90.**

2014 Premier and Grand Crus

2014 Chablis “la Forêt”- Domaine Patrick Piuze (magnum)

Out of magnum, the 2014 la Forêt from Patrick Piuze is still quite a youthful wine, but with some extended aeration, the wine really starts to stir nicely. Eventually, it offers up a bright and complex bouquet of lemon, grapefruit, a complex base of chalky soil tones, beeswax and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and rock solid still at the core, with fine focus and grip, vibrant acids and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. In due course, this will be lovely, but out of magnum, it is still several years away. 2024-2050+. **93.**

2014 Montrachet- Domaine Fontaine-Gagnard

The 2014 Montrachet from Domaine Fontaine-Gagnard is a beautiful young wine. The wine already offers up lovely complexity in its bouquet of apple, pear, candied lemon, chalky soil tones, beeswax, citrus peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful soil signature and grip, bright, zesty acids and very good length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This still needs at least a few more years in the cellar to really start hitting on all cylinders, but it is an excellent wine in the making. 2023-2050. **96.**

2013 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Coche-Dury

The 2013 vintage of Corton-Charlemagne from the Coche family is still a puppy, but even in its presently quite reserved state, it is easy to appreciate how good this is going to be once it starts to stir. The youthfully reticent nose still shows lovely complexity to come in its blend of apple, pear, iodine, white flowers, a beautiful base of chalky minerality and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine mineral drive, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long, promising and energetic finish. All this needs is time in the cellar. 2025-2065. **95+.**

2009 Meursault- Domaine Arnaud Ente

Monsieur Ente had this bottle open at the time of my visit last November, as I assume he was curious to see how it might be aging in light of its possible structural similarities with the 2018 vintage. The wine is aging beautifully and at age ten, it is drinking very well indeed, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, passion fruit, lemon blossoms, salty soil tones, hazelnuts, orange oil and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied *à point* and still quite racy, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. Lovely juice with still plenty of life in it. 2020-2040. **91.**

2009 Chablis “les Clos”- Domaine Raveneau

The 2009 Clos from the Raveneau family is really in a good place for current drinking. The wine has evolved very nicely, but remains, fresh, vibrant and at the peak of its powers, as it offers up a complex bouquet of pear, candied lemon, sweet grapefruit, complex, chalky minerality, beeswax and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very deep at the core, with excellent cut and grip, beautiful balance and a long, focused and complex finish that closes with a still youthful note of citrus peel. There is nothing blowsy about this 2009 Chablis! 2020-2045+. **95.**



2004 Puligny-Montrachet “les Caillerets”- Domaine Henri Boillot

The 2004 Caillerets from Henri Boillot was bottled fairly reductively and still shows a bit of this quality on both the nose and palate, despite it now being fifteen years of age. The bouquet is deep and bright, offering up notes of iodine, pear, apple, a bit of nutskin, a good base of chalky minerality and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, still lovely acids and a long, well-balanced and zesty finish. Other than the slightly reductive style here, which seems to have blocked just a bit of developmental complexity, the wine is quite good. 2020-2030+. **91+**.

2004 Chablis “les Clos”- Domaine Vincent Dauvissat

The 2004 les Clos from Vincent Dauvissat is now fully into its apogee of peak maturity, but still has several decades of prime drinking ahead of it. The bouquet is pure, complex and utterly classical in its composition of pear, lime, flinty minerality, candied citrus tones, dried flowers, a touch of vanillin oak, beeswax and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with lovely mid-palate depth, great cut and grip, impeccable balance and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. Great juice. 2020-2045+. **95**.

2000 Chevalier-Montrachet “Clos des Chevaliers”- Domaine Jean Chartron

The 2000 Clos des Chevaliers from Jean-Michel Chartron is a very good bottle for current drinking, but the wine has been in its plateau of maturity for several years already and may be inching its way towards the far side of the plateau. The bouquet is complex and shows a nice

dollop of tertiary complexity in its blend of pear, tangerine, apple, chalky minerality, almond paste, beeswax, a touch of citrus peel and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and nicely ripe on the attack, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is starting to show the aromatics and flavors of a fully mature wine and is probably best drunk up over the coming decade. 2020-2030. **92+**.

IN MEMORY OF MICHEL LAFARGE
THE HEART AND SOUL OF VOLNAY



Frédéric and Michel Lafarge outside of their domaine in the center of Volnay a couple of years ago.

Michel Lafarge, the most senior and influential *vigneron* in the commune of Volnay, passed away on January 16th of this year at the age of ninety-one. Monsieur Lafarge was one of the kindest and most gracious people I have ever met, and his absence from the firmament of Burgundy will be felt keenly for many years to come. The Lafarges can trace their history as winegrowers in Volnay all the way back to 1855, with the family first adding the Lafarge name to the family estate in 1926, when Michel's father, Henri Lafarge married a *Mademoiselle* Gillotte, whose family farmed vines in Volnay, including their *monopole* of the Clos du Château des Ducs. Michel would join his father working full-time in the vineyards and cellars of the domaine as a very young man in 1946, and he was still a fixture here all the way up to my last visit in November of last year. Like his father and his grandfather before him, Michel Lafarge was for a long period of time the Mayor of Volnay, in addition to his full-time responsibilities at the domaine. The Lafarge family has a history of father and son working together, side by side, for many years, so though Michel began working with his father in 1946, it was not until 1966 that he formally took over the direction of the family estate. Similarly, Michel's son, Frédéric Lafarge's first vintage alongside of his father was the fabled 1978, but the baton was not passed on here officially until 1995. And though Frédéric and his wife, Chantal, have been formally in charge of the domaine now for a quarter century, Michel Lafarge was still an integral part of the

decision-making team at Domaine Lafarge right up until his passing, and served as an astonishing reservoir of memory and knowledge for the family and many other *vignerons* in the region.

Michel Lafarge was one of the great gentlemen of Burgundy, as well as very much a man of the soil, and his style harkened back to the days when the region was almost solely defined by its deep farming roots and the vast, vast majority of its proprietors were individual farmers tending their vines the year round and making their wines in the traditions of their families' previous generations. It was a life tied directly to the earth that they tilled, with a *vigneron's* intimate knowledge of his or her rows of vines often far exceeding their geographic knowledge of the neighboring village (unless they happened to own some vines there). The Lafarge family was one of the very first domaines to start estate-bottling some of their production to sell directly to clients and importers, as they began bottling in 1934, though they continued to sell at least a percentage of their crop as well each year in cask to *négociants* up until Michel took over official control of the domaine in the mid-1960s. From that point forward, the estate has sold all of their wines in bottle. While Michel Lafarge was a man of great tradition, with the true spirit of Burgundy running through his veins, he was hardly a man who eschewed change and spent much time reflecting upon his *métier* and his place in the world. Though he took over the family domaine at the peak of the petro-chemical companies' influence in the region, Michel Lafarge never used industrial fertilizers, herbicides or the like in his vineyards and he and his son Frédéric were amongst the very earliest practitioners of *biodynamique* farming methods, having begun in the mid-1990s and having been certified by Ecocert as early as 2000. *Biodynamics* is very important to place the domaine and its vineyard husbandry in complete harmony with its natural surroundings, but it did not represent a huge viticultural swing for the estate when it was adopted, as the Lafarges have always practiced a very traditional approach in the vineyards, and the move to *biodynamique* farming was more of a logical continuation of the Lafarge style in the vineyards, rather than a drastic change of direction.

Michel Lafarge was also very sage during his career to avoid planting modern clones of pinot noir in his family vineyards, preferring to utilize *selection massale* cutting taken from their best plant material in the vines, in the tradition that had been established by his father Henri before him. Consequently, the Domaine Lafarge vineyards are all planted with excellent genetic material that has assisted in translating the great signature of soil into all of their very traditionally-styled, classic Burgundies. The winemaking style here during Michel's tenure never varied far from that of his father Henri, and this has also been true as the helm in the cellar was passed from Michel to Frédéric as the years went by, and the Domaine Lafarge wines have remained some of the most beautifully old school, traditional wines in all of Burgundy. They have always been meant to age long and gracefully, in the classic Burgundian style, and start out life properly structured and take many years to start to really blossom. I have often thought when I tasted here that if Michel Lafarge's father, Henri, were to come back and taste a modern vintage here, he would be completely at home with the familiar style. I remember vividly a conversation about the Lafarge family's wines with neighbors dining next to me at Beaune's well-known *Ma Cuisine* restaurant a decade or so ago, where the two gentlemen mentioned that they were Scandinavian importers of Burgundy and had been offered the chance to represent the Domaine Lafarge wines. They had tasted at the domaine earlier that afternoon (I had been there the day previous) and were not convinced of the style of the wines, based on how they had

shown in cask. I assured them that the wines were amongst the very greatest in all of Burgundy, but typically reticent out of barrel, and they would be extremely happy if they were to take on the family's wines for their market. A year later I received a very, very heartfelt thank you from them, as they had decided to represent the Lafarges' wines and had begun to see them blossom in bottle!

While this piece has spoken mostly of Michel Lafarge's many accomplishments during his very long and illustrious career in Volnay, it is not his magical wines that I will remember most about Monsieur Lafarge, but what a gracious human being he was, full of kindness, generosity and a nobility of spirit that cannot be bought in fancy schools. He was most emphatically a quiet man of the soil, but with an inherent worldliness that comes from a willingness to reflect upon the revolving cycles of our earth and a man's right and proper place in them. I have met a great many people over the years who have known Michel Lafarge over the course of his very long career in Volnay, and never once have I heard anyone say anything unflattering about the man. Like many from his generation in Burgundy, he learned the "right way to live" here in the fertile soils and small villages of the Côte d'Or and never wandered from that path, to the benefit of each and every individual that had the good fortune to make his acquaintance along the way. That Michel Lafarge leaves behind a family much in his mold, full of generosity, humility, kindness and intelligence, speaks volumes of the man himself, and of the ninety-one years he spent here quietly making the world a better place for all. That spirit will live on, long after I have drained the last drop of the last bottle of Michel Lafarge's Clos des Chêne or Clos du Château des Ducs out of my cellar. As beautiful as those wines will be in their full bloom of old age, it is the legacy of the man himself that will outlast and, in the end, outshine them all.