

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF GOOD VALUE IN WHITE BURGUNDY



In the last issue I wrote about how to look for good values in the present day realm of red Burgundy. As promised, here is the follow-up to where the better values can be found in today's white Burgundy market for those who wish to purchase these wines and need to pay at least some attention to the price per bottle. It is somewhat ironic that I am writing this article today, as before Burgundy prices began to soar in the 2008 to 2010 period to their lofty, historical highs of today, I was hardly one who focused a whole lot on "value" when it came to building my white Burgundy corner of the cellar. It was not that I could afford to solely buy the very best cuvées in the market, so for example, I had very few bottles of Chevalier-Montrachet or Marquis de Laguiche Montrachet in the cellar, but I had fully forty cases of white Burgundy from very good producers which was intended to serve as the foundation of my white Burgundy cellaring needs for the remainder of my wine drinking lifetime. My primary white Burgundy collecting era came in the mid to late 1990s and early 2000s, when pricing was quite a bit more reasonable (to say the least) than is the case today. Consequently, I was able to focus primarily on a handful of my favorite domaines and bottlings, and though the budget did not allow for cases of the bluest of the blue chips, it was composed almost exclusively of wines from Domaines Ramonet, Coche-Dury, Guy Roulot, Arnaud Ente, Louis Carillon, Bernard Raveneau, Vincent Dauvissat, William Fèvre and Maison Joseph Drouhin. While I did have a fairly good cache of Grand Crus (mostly from Chablis and the Ramonet family), most of what I purchased at that time was at the premier cru level, with the exception of the wines from Jean-François Coche and Jean-Marc Roulot,

where my purchasing was primarily of the domaines' superb array of different *lieux à dit* bottlings and the Coche family's exceptional Meursault *villages*.

It was not that I would not have wanted to have expanded the number of domaines in my white Burgundy corner of the cellar, as one can see that I was a bit light on the wines from Puligny-Montrachet (other than from the Carillon family) and could have done with a bit broader representation in Chassagne as well back in those days. But, these were the domaines that I had good access to in the Burgundy market of the old days, where prices were lower, but wines were also a bit more difficult to find. Back in the 1990s, the Burgundy market was much more of an "insider's market" and one had to cultivate good ties with importers and merchants to be offered the top bottlings from many of the best-known domaines. This old school approach to the buying and selling of Burgundy required patience, as if one were a relatively new buyer for the wines from a specific domaine, one had to inquire about availability ahead of when the wines would arrive in the market and then be content to take what was offered (which was never the roster of top premier and grand crus you may have asked about!) and wait to move up your place in line when someone who had been buying the domaines' wines longer than you retired or stopped purchasing, so that a bit more wine might become available for those further down the food chain. As different importers had varied portfolios (remember I was a merchant back in this era), one moved up the Burgundy chain a bit faster where it was possible to also sell wines from their portfolio from different regions. This was not always possible, for Importer X might have a good array of Burgundy domaines, but have decidedly less well-selected producers in the Rhône, Bordeaux, Alsace, the Loire or from Italy, so there was just no good way to ingratiate yourself more quickly, due to the limitations of their "book" of estates beyond the realm of Burgundy. So, for example, I was able to move up the distribution ladder fairly quickly for Domaine Ramonet's wines, as their US importer, Château and Estate, was also the largest importer of Classed Growth Bordeaux in the country, and had an array of superb red Burgundy estates as well that I was more than happy to support vintage after vintage to earn a bit more of Ramonet.

But, in these earlier days, the fact that I was working as a wine merchant also meant I had to balance my desire to build up my own white Burgundy collection with the needs of my clientele, which is why some domaines whose wines I would have loved to have cellared for myself never became a significant part of my collection, as I simply could not get enough cases to take care of my customers and also put some in my own cellar. So, estates like Domaine Leflaive or Domaine Sauzet or Comtes Lafon arrived in small enough quantities that I would end up selling all that I got to clients and contented myself with cellaring wines from producers where we were able to get a bit more quantity, or of a particular bottling that was a bit less in demand than others from the same estate. So, for example, going back to Domaine Ramonet, I had a lot more Caillerets in my cellar back then than I did Ruchottes from the estate, as my customers were much more aware of the domaine's Ruchottes bottling and their equally splendid Caillerets was more of a well-kept secret back in this era. It is hard to imagine that today, but twenty-five years ago, Burgundy was much more a "specialist's wine" and there were really plenty of undiscovered gems. However, readers will see from the list I posted above, that it was quite unlikely that I could have gotten reasonable quantities from some of the domaines that I cellared solely through their American importers, as a few of the domaines listed above were represented by US importers who also ran their own retail operations, and reserved most of their

blue chip Burgundies for sale through their own stores, so as to be able to take double mark-ups on their wines and maximize their profits.

It was really the wines of Henri Mayer that indirectly allowed me to start including some of the aforementioned domaines in my own white Burgundy cellar, as I had no access to his wines in the US (having no meaningful business relationship with his official American importer, Martine Saunier). However, I had read so much about Henri Mayer's wines that I dearly wanted to be able to offer them to our Burgundy customers (and also buy some for my own cellar). So I started to hunt outside the US for Monsieur Mayer's wines and was fortunate to find them listed with one of his importers in London, who was more than happy to sell some to me, if I could arrange shipment and spread my purchase a bit wider than just the Mayer wines. This was back in the more "wide open" days of the New York wine market and there was already plenty of wine being shipped from London into the US (up until Brexit, London was the epicenter of the world's "grey market" for wine and trans-shipping wine to other markets was a way of life for most of the city's top merchants) and arranging transit was not difficult at all. Interestingly, the only wine from Domaine Henri Mayer that I was initially able to order was a case of his Echézeaux from the 1987 vintage, as his other bottlings and the more highly reputed vintages were not offered to me (again demonstrating how the Burgundy market worked back in this era). However, I had just spent the last year or two selling a very significant share of the 1987 red Burgundies available in the New York market, as the wines were being discounted by importers here after they had not been particularly successful selling them at their original prices. With vintages like 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991 following close on their heels, many of the 1987s were overlooked in the market. I literally sold hundreds of cases of 1987 red Burgundies- mostly grand crus- for steeply discounted prices (does \$40 a bottle for '87 Rousseau Chambertin or '87 Joseph Drouhin Musigny sound like a pretty good deal?) and knew firsthand just how underrated this vintage was at that time. So, I very happily took my case of 1987 Henri Mayer Echézeaux and started looking through the importer's inventory to see what else I might order to make the cost of shipping sensible. There were lots of very good options on their list, and through the courtesy of this and other London merchants, I was finally able to put some of those other top white Burgundy producers' wines in my own cellar. As I said, the Burgundy market was a very different animal a quarter century ago. I would continue my relationship with some of these London merchants for many years and they greatly enhanced my own white Burgundy collection, not to mention that of my clients.

Of course, attentive readers will have already observed that there was one major problem with that eventual forty case cellar foundation of white Burgundy in my own cellar, and that was that it was composed primarily of vintages from 1995 to 2002- almost all of which were first class white Burgundy vintages- but, also, the first vintages to be affected by the scourge of premature oxidation. Consequently, my forty case cornerstone of white Burgundy is all long gone now, as I had drunk up my small cache of bottles from earlier vintages, once I had been able to lay in better quantities of so many great bottlings from these domaines from those vintages from '95 to '02. One does not hesitate to open that lonely bottle of 1990 Valmur from Domaine Raveneau in the cellar, when looking around and seeing solid cases of the domaine's premier and grand crus from vintages like 1995, 1996, 1999 and 2000. I would still be drinking very, very well indeed in the white Burgundy department if premature oxidation had never come to pass, but I am hardly the only wine collector to have been bitten by that bug! In any event,

when my 1995s and 1996s started to crash and the wine world first learned about premoxy, I sold my 1999s, 2000s and 2002s briskly to a few restaurants in New York (several years ahead of their own inevitable onset of premoxy), and my cornerstone of white Burgundy was gone. My theory at the time was that whatever had been done on the production side for the 1995s and 1996s that were so dramatically oxidizing, the same practices would most certainly have also been used by *vignerons* for the '99s, '00s and '02s, as no one even knew about premature oxidation until after the 2002s had been bottled and shipped. Back then, those of us Burgundy lovers had simply thought we had misread how good the 1995 whites were upon release, once they started to collapse in 2001 and 2002, and it was not until the much higher-acid 1996s started to do the same thing a few years later that we realized something was seriously amiss.

Like many white Burgundy collectors in the first half of the 2000s, I chose to wait a bit before buying caseloads of younger vintages, in the hopes that the cause of premature oxidation would be discovered quickly and I would then be able to safely tuck away cases again for long-term cellaring. Sadly, the early discovery of the cause of premoxy proved elusive, and in the interim, the market for Burgundy simply exploded in price, so that it was going to take an awful lot more capital to put away the same forty cases of white Burgundy from those same estates if I wanted to rebuild my foundation of white Burgundies. Or, I could start to cast my net a bit wider and focus more broadly on producers, villages and bottlings that were a bit less well-known and which, therefore, had remained far better values than the estates I had once salted away for my own cellar that first time around. As I mentioned above, while I certainly was buying blue chip domaines for white Burgundy back in that earlier era, I was still sensitive to relative value, so while I had a fair bit of Bienvenues or Bâtard-Montrachet from Ramonet in my cellar, I had far more Caillerets, Puligny "Champs Canet" and Morgeot from the estate, as well as their excellent Saint-Aubin bottling. Similarly, my Joseph Drouhin white Burgundy purchases were primarily confined to Beaune "Clos des Mouches" Blanc and Chassagne "Morgeot" from the Marquis de Laguiche, and my Louis Carillon cache was entirely of premier crus, as the family's stunning Bienvenues was out of my reach. I also had a ton of Chablis in my cellar that first time around, as even the wines from Domaines Raveneau (out of London) and Dauvissat were excellent values, when compared to the tariffs per bottle for the wines from similarly great estates in the Côte d'Or at that time, such as Comtes Lafon, Domaine Leflaive and the like.

Fast forward a quarter century and pricing for white Burgundy has changed exponentially and one is not likely to be able to emulate my initial strategy for building a white Burgundy cellar without far, far deeper pockets than I had back in the day. However, one thing remains constant from that era, and that is that Chablis remains one of the epicenters of value to be found in the realm of white Burgundy. Though the prices for the wines from the most famous handful of Chablis estates are now pretty lofty, there remains a ton of still very well-priced options in the to be found from the region. Consequently, any well-stocked and value-oriented white Burgundy cellar should still start with a firm foundation of Chablis. While the grand crus from Domaines Raveneau, Vincent Dauvissat and William Fèvre have gotten fairly pricey in recent years, one can still buy most of their premier crus for relatively good value (particularly in comparison to comparable premier crus from the Côte d'Or) and all three also make simply outstanding *villages* level bottlings which will give those shopping for values a good option to taste the magic from these estates at an even more affordable level. Vincent Dauvissat also makes exceptionally fine Petit Chablis. And once moves out from this troika of top estates, Chablis prices across the board

get even better for those with budgets to keep in mind. Domaine Louis Michel et Fils offers a superb lineup from Petit Chablis all the way up to grand crus, with prices extremely attractive for their excellent Chablis *villages* bottling and several of their fine lineup of premier crus (the grand crus also remain quite fairly priced). Patrick Piuze is making stellar Chablis, and though his grand crus are not inexpensive, there are plenty of options at the premier cru level and especially, his various *lieux à dits* bottlings of Chablis which are fine values. Jean-Claude Bessin also makes outstanding wines across the board and is priced quite reasonably (other than his lovely grand cru Valmur). A new domaine to me (which features prominently in the recently-tasted white Burgundy article a bit further on in this issue) is Dampfrères, who has only one grand cru, but an excellent roster of premier crus, very good *villages* level bottlings and also a pair of Bourgogne Blanc cuvées from the village of Tonnerre that are beautifully made and superb values. And Beaune-based Joseph Drouhin also is making really superb Chablis these days from their Domaine Vaudon, and these too are excellent values.



Still plenty of golden leaves out on the vines in Les Clos in Chablis, but with November weather brewing overhead.

As I have mentioned in the past, during my annual November trips to Burgundy, I usually only have time to devote a couple of days to visiting and tasting in the Chablis region, so I only really see the a small handful of the top estates in the region. For this reason, I always look forward very much to the *Les Grands Jours* tastings every other year, as it allows me to taste a much wider array of producers during the Chablis day of that fine week of tastings. From those

tastings, I have very much enjoyed wines I have tasted from Domaines Gérard Duplessis, Gilbert Picq, Daniel-Etienne Defaix, Frédéric and Céline Gueguen, Daniel Dampt, Agnès and Didier Dauvissat, Cyril Testut, Gérard Tremblay and Domaines des Hâtes and Pattes Loup. Samuel Billaud and Christian Moreau also both make absolutely superb Chablis up and down their lineups, and though their prices are a bit loftier than some of these other estates listed above, they are still relatively good values. Domaine Servin is another producer of excellent Chablis. Their quality is on the rise as they have started to harvest more and more of their premier cru vineyards by hand. I am sure that I am overlooking several other very good producers in the Chablis region, but the above listing at least shows just how much good value Chablis there is still in the market, even as Burgundy prices have skyrocketed in the last decade or so. Beyond the borders of Chablis, I also very much love the wines from Elise Villiers in neighboring Vézelay, as she is making gorgeous wines.

Once one heads south from Chablis to the Côte d'Or proper, there are still plenty of excellent options for value in the realm of white Burgundy, though many are a bit below the radar of those most familiar with the excellent wines from the "big three" Côte de Beaune communes of Meursault, Puligny and Chassagne. There are a small handful of white wines produced in the primarily red wine territory of the northern Côte de Nuits, but other than the Morey St. Denis Blanc bottlings from Domaines Dujac and Ponsot (neither of which is particularly value-priced), I find that things tend to get more interesting in the realm of Côte de Nuits white wines after arriving in Nuits St. Georges. The white wines made at Domaines Chevillon, Gouges and Alain Michelot all excellent. In addition, the Bourgogne Blanc bottling from Domaine Gouges is also very, very good and an even better value than the Nuits St. Georges Blanc produced here. Both the Gouges white wines are made from a genetic mutation of pinot noir that the family found in their Clos des Porrets vineyard many decades ago, which gives both wines unique and very compelling stylistic profiles that are not found in white Burgundies made from chardonnay. But, though all of these wines are very lovely bottlings, the real heart of white wine production in the Côte d'Or is just a bit further south in the Côte de Beaune, and this is where the best values are still to be found, scattered in among the most famous vineyards and bottlings that are priced a far cry from value. In the Côte de Beaune, one begins to find still quite fairly-priced wines just a few miles south of Nuits St. Georges, in the vineyards tucked in at the base of the Hill of Corton.

One of my favorite white Burgundy value locations these days is in Pernand-Vergelesses, as this is a commune which has seemed to benefited from global warming to some degree and the wines seem to be getting better and better with each passing vintage in the last few decades. If one has driven around in this part of Burgundy, underneath the broad shoulders of the Hill of Corton, it is easy to understand that the more open vineyards here, which are open to the cool winds coming in from the west, could have been inhibited in their ripening in many vintages of the past. However, with the earth warming dramatically, attaining excellent ripeness in these vineyards is no longer a problem. Leaving aside the obvious excellence of Corton-Charlemagne (again, not really in our scope here, discussing relative values in white Burgundy), there is an absolute crown jewel of a premier cru *terroir* in Pernand that I love and which consistently offers up outstanding value. This is the vineyard of Sous Frétille, which lies just past the village of Pernand, in the shadow of the Hill of Corton. This is an excellent vineyard and my current favorites from here include the superb bottling from Domaine Clos la Chapelle, Domaine Rollin

Père et Fils, Domaine Rapet and Domaine Antonin Guyon. The wine shares a very similar aromatic and flavor profile with Corton-Charlemagne itself (without the same broad shoulders or potential for long-term aging) and is one of the best-kept secrets for top notch white Burgundy at a very fair price. Domaine Rollin's Pernand-Vergelesses "les Cloux" Blanc, a *villages* level wine, is also excellent year in and year out. I should also mention that Maison Jaffelin makes a stellar Pernand-Vergelesses Blanc these days. The wine hails from a *villages* level parcel of vines, but right next door to the premier cru of Sous Frétille, and in my experience, the similarities are striking and the Jaffelin bottling is always of premier cru quality. Jean-Michel Charton of Puligny-Montrachet fame is also now making a very, very good example of Pernand-Vergelesses Blanc that offers fine value.

Similarly close to the foot of the Hill of Corton is the village of Savigny-lès-Beaune, which featured prominently in the last issue's discussion of where to find the very best red Burgundy values in this market. While the village remains primarily red wine territory, this does not mean that there are not some truly exceptional white wines also made here. Like the lower elevation vineyards of Pernand-Vergelesses, the parcels in Savigny that are planted to white varieties have also seemingly benefited dramatically from global warming. Whether or not this will last as the planet continues to warm, at least for the moment, the white wines of Savigny-lès-Beaune are experiencing a golden age and are as good today as they have ever been. My favorite producer of Savigny Blanc is Hugues Pavelot, who makes a very complex, balanced and ageworthy example of this white wine. I have cellared and drunk cases of this wine in several vintages and always been extremely content with the results. Domaine Simon Bize et Fils also makes a pair of beautiful and ageworthy examples of Savigny Blanc, with both the Bize and Pavelot families' examples made entirely out of chardonnay (there is some pinot blanc also planted and allowed in the *cépages* of Savigny-lès-Beaune Blanc). Domaine Bize produces a Savigny Blanc *villages* level wine, as well as another white from the superb premier cru of les Vergelesses. Both are outstanding, with the premier cru of les Vergelesses Blanc the more complex and longer-lived of the two wines. In addition, the Bize family also makes a simply superb example of Bourgogne "Perrières" that is very close in quality to their Savigny Blanc AC and an outstanding value. It will not have quite the weight one finds in a good premier cru, but it is loaded with both complexity and personality and is a very worthy white Burgundy in a more middleweight format. Another really excellent producer of Savigny-lès-Beaune Blanc is Domaine Serrigny. Maison Louis Jadot also makes a first rate Savigny-lès-Beaune Blanc from their holdings in the Clos des Guettes (one of the best premier crus in the entire commune). Additionally, Domaine Chandon de Briailles has just again started to produce an example of Savigny-lès-Beaune Blanc, beginning in the 2018 vintage (which was excellent). I have also had a very good Savigny Blanc from Domaine de Bellene in the past.

The commune of Beaune is also now becoming a real hotbed for top flight white Burgundy bottlings. A generation ago, it was really only the iconic Clos des Mouches Blanc bottling from Maison Joseph Drouhin that caught the attention of Burgundy lovers in the market, but its long-running success has inspired more producers to plant chardonnay in some of the vineyards of Beaune in more recent times. One of my first favorite Beaune Blanc bottlings beyond those of Joseph Drouhin was the stunning Beaune "Sur les Grèves" Blanc bottling that was produced for many years by the Germain family at the Château de Chorey-lès-Beaune. These vines were eventually sold to Maison Louis Jadot, who has taken over the trusteeship of this beautiful parcel

of vines, located right at the very top of the Grèves premier cru vineyard in Beaune, and Louis Jadot is now also making an excellent wine from these vines. The *maison* also makes a very good bottling of Beaune “Bressandes” Blanc, which is made from younger vines than their Beaune “Grèves” Blanc cuvée, but also is very good. Maison Bouchard Père et Fils also makes a pair of excellent examples of Beaune Blanc, with one called “Beaune du Château” Blanc. This is consistently very good, but the even better Bouchard bottling of white wine from Beaune is their premier cru “Clos St. Landry” Blanc, which hails from one of the very finest *terroirs* for white wine within the *vignobles* of Beaune’s hillside vineyards.

Beyond these “big three” *négociants* in the town, there is also a truly stellar bottling of Beaune “Clos des Aigrots” Blanc now produced at Domaine Michel Lafarge in Volnay. Like all of the Lafarge family’s wines, the Clos des Aigrots Blanc is utterly classical in style, defined by its beautiful underlying *terroir* and built to age long and gracefully. Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is also making an outstanding Beaune Blanc bottling these days, from the premier cru vineyard of les Reversées. It is always the most forward of the Clos de la Chapelle’s three white wine bottlings (though it is clearly built to age a decade or so in the cellar), so it is the one I look for most often on wine lists when a top flight white Burgundy will be perfect with the menu, but relative value is still also a consideration. I should also take a moment to mention that the wine that started all of the plantings of chardonnay in Beaune, the Drouhin family’s gorgeous Clos des Mouches Blanc remains an utterly stunning bottle of white Burgundy. While its price has moved steadily upwards over the course of this past decade or so, it still is a relatively good value in the context of other white Burgundy prices, as I have always found that the Drouhin Clos des Mouches Blanc is really a wine of grand cru quality and is a step up from many of the second division examples one finds out in the market from Bâtard or Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet. It is not a “value” *per se*, but at least merits mention in this article, given that it paved the way for so many other first class white Burgundy bottlings from the commune of Beaune and remains one of my very favorite white Burgundy cuvées produced in the region. I should also mention that one can get a nice snapshot of the Drouhin Clos des Mouches Blanc from their Côte de Beaune Blanc cuvée, which is often the lucky recipient of the younger vine fruit from the Clos des Mouches. It is obviously not in the same league as the Clos des Mouches Blanc, but it shares many of the same personality traits and is a great value (and another wine to keep a look out for on restaurant wine lists).

Once one arrives at the village of Meursault, it would seem that “value-oriented” white Burgundies might be few and far between these days, but this is not the case. While the era when I was first building up a corner of the cellar with cases of white Burgundy are now long gone, and the wines that represented “good value” then, such as Jean-Marc Roulot’s beautiful *lieux à dits* bottlings such as les Tillets or les Luchets are now fully discovered, or Arnaud Ente’s wines, which were once also to be counted amongst the best *values* of the village, there remain plenty of well-priced options here in the village. To be counted among my favorite relative bargains in the village of Meursault are the *lieux à dits* bottlings from Gilles Lafouge, based in Auxey-Duresses, whose red wines figured prominently in the recent article on red Burgundy values. Monsieur Lafouge makes bottlings of both Meix Chavaux and Casse Têtes that are exceptional wines, and his Meursault *villages* cuvée is also consistently excellent in quality. Fans of Domaine Roulot’s beautiful wines will like the Lafouge Meursault bottlings very much indeed, as they share an aesthetic sensibility. Raymond Dupont-Fahn also makes very good wines that are relative values

from the village of Meursault, and his Bourgogne “Chaumes de Perrières” is a Meursault in all respects, other than official appellation status. Maison Jaffelin also makes an outstanding example of Meursault *villages* that is priced very fairly. Jean-Philippe Fichet is another excellent producer in the commune for those looking for high quality wines at better pricing, and his Auxey-Duresses Blanc is also first class. There were several other domaines whose wines I thought I might include in this section in Meursault, but when I checked on their current pricing, I thought “that is not really what I would call a good value” and so will leave this as it is. Things are decidedly better price-wise over the ridge in Auxey-Duresses, with Gilles Lafouge again being my highest recommendation for exceptional wines at very good prices. Both of his Auxey-Duresses blanc bottlings, “les Hautés” and “les Boutonniers” come very, very highly recommended and are truly not far off the quality of his excellent Meursaults.

Moving further south to the village of Puligny-Montrachet, my impression is that values get even harder to come by than in Meursault these days, though this could be certainly colored by the relatively few domaines I visit in this commune each year. The same can be said for Chassagne-Montrachet. Domaine Fontaine-Gagnard’s wines are quite fairly priced across the board, for both the estate’s Chassagne *villages* and their wide array of excellent premier crus, but this is only when seen within the larger prism of white Burgundy’s rather lofty pricing today. Similarly, Alexandre Moreau’s Chassagne *villages* bottling is of excellent quality and perhaps could be considered a relative value by today’s pricing, but it still routinely sells for more than I used to pay for the Ramonet family’s Caillerets or Ruchottes back at the dawn of the new millennium, so the concept of value is certainly relative. I have also very much liked the Chassagne-Montrachet bottlings I have tasted in the last few years from Domaine Bacheylegros, based in Santenay. They are not inexpensive wines, but in the context of Chassagne pricing these days, they are relative values, and more importantly, truly excellent wines. I have also liked very much in the past the wines from Domaine Marc Morey et Fils in Chassagne; I have had to cancel two visits to the domaine in the past two years (because of the Covid pandemic and my inability to read the fine print on my airplane ticket regarding expiration date on my passport), so I have not tasted the most recent vintages, but they have always made very good wines and have offered relatively good values. Their premier cru bottling of Virondot (which lies up on the limestone hillside high above the village center and also houses Caillerets, la Romanée and Grands Ruchottes) is worth particular mention, as it is one of the greatest premier cru *terroirs* in the commune and the domaine has a virtual *monopole* of its production, as the only other owner of vines here sells off their fruit and it gets blended in with other premier crus.

In terms of value, it is far more interesting is to do one’s shopping in the village of Saint-Aubin, if one is looking for slightly better pricing and still desiring to drink top flight white Burgundy. That said, Saint-Aubin pricing has certainly jumped up in recent years and I was rather surprised at some of the tariffs per bottle for some of these wines today. It was actually Alex Moreau’s stunning Saint-Aubin “en Remilly” that was my introduction to his wines, as I bought all of the 2000 vintage of this wine that I could find in the market before I had even had a chance to taste any of his beautiful Chassagnes or visit the domaine and meet Alex. It is not the bargain it was back then, for Alexandre Moreau is now one of the star winegrowers of the village, but it remains an excellent wine. Similarly priced is the Lamy family’s outstanding and quite extensive lineup of premier crus in the village of Saint-Aubin (not the bargains they once

were, but stellar wines and still relative values). Jean-Michel Chartron also makes superb Saint-Aubin bottlings from the premier crus of “Murgers Dents de Chien” and “les Perrières” that are even a touch less pricey than the premier crus from Domaines Lamy and Moreau. Domaine Henri Prudhon is also a superb source for Saint-Aubin *villages* level and premier cru bottlings. The Prudhon brothers make some of my favorite white Burgundies and their prices tend to run a notch or two below those of the other most famous estates in the commune. Maison Jaffelin also offers an excellent Saint-Aubin premier cru bottling, as do the Bachelet brothers at Domaine Bachelet-Monnot.



Travelling further south, the village of Santenay seems to be another commune that has benefited from global warming to some extent and the quality of the white wines hailing from these vineyards also seems to be on the upswing, mirroring what is happening with the pinot noir here as well. Domaine Hubert Lamy et Fils is now making an excellent bottling of Santenay Blanc that is an even better value than its lineup of Saint-Aubins. Jean-Michel Chartron is also producing a very good Santenay Blanc these days. Marinette Garnier at Maison Jaffelin also has a very, very fine Santenay Blanc bottling. To my palate, one of the stars in Santenay today is Domaine Bacheley-Legros, whose wines I have only become familiar with in the last couple of years. They make a Santenay Blanc *villages* level bottling “en Charron” and a superb premier cru from the “Clos des Gravières” (Olivier Lamy’s Santenay is also from the “Clos des Gravières”). Domaine Bacheley-Legros also makes excellent Chassagne-Montrachet bottlings that I should

have mentioned in the last paragraph! There is even very good Santenay Blanc produced by Maison Pierre Bourée from time to time, depending on what they buy in the market each year. I am sure there are plenty of other excellent Santenay Blanc bottlings produced beyond what I have listed here, as this is a village that has been on my “to do list” for several years now to arrange cellar visits and taste more broadly in, but like so much else, it has been placed on the back burner due to the pandemic.

The Côte Chalonnaise and Mâconnais are two other regions that logically fit into a discussion of relative values in the world of white Burgundy, but as I always write about these two lovely areas later in the spring, I will save my recommendations for that article. But, both of these regions are crafting wines today at the top domaines that are as fine as anything that has ever been produced in the history of the two regions, so they should not be overlooked for those shopping for better values in white Burgundy. Suffice to say that I am drinking more wine from the Côte Chalonnaise and Mâconnais these days than I have ever done in the past, and it is not solely because of price, but the quality of the best wines here has simply skyrocketed in the last decade or so. However, the one issue that should be emphasized in the above discussion is that one is not generally going to get wines at the same exalted level buying the producers I have recommended as alternative sources, in comparison to the “best of the best” in each respective appellation. The most famous white Burgundy *vignerons* are famous for a very good reason (with the possible exception of Lalou Bize-Leroy, whose white wines I have never really understood), as chardonnay simply does not get any better than a Meursault “Perrières” from Coche-Dury or Comtes Lafon, a Chevalier-Montrachet “la Cabotte” from Bouchard or a Ramonet Montrachet. These wines are deservedly expensive for a reason. But, what one has to take into consideration when praising these traditional iconic bottlings of white Burgundy is that they also made their very well-deserved reputations partly based on their ability to age long and gracefully and to reach their true pinnacles of complexity and pleasure with the added factor of a long time in the cellar. With the continuing issue of premature oxidation thrown into the equation, it is still not clear that one can count on salting away a handful of bottles of one of these gems and giving it fifteen or twenty years to attain its vinous apotheosis in bottle. Premox can still get in the way.

And, once the time continuum of white Burgundy is shrunk, due to the necessity of protecting against the possibility of premature oxidation (realizing fully that the class of collectors who can still afford to lay in quantities of the bluest of the blue chip white Burgundies are probably also sufficiently elastic with their wine budgets as to not feel the pinch of dumping premoxed bottles down the sink and just opening up another one), the gap in quality between a Leflaive Chevalier-Montrachet and an Auxey-Duresses “les Boutonniers” from Gilles Lafouge is not quite as dramatic when the wines are three or four years-old, as opposed to at twenty years of age. The most iconic white Burgundy bottlings are decidedly more buttoned up wines out of the blocks and their true glory is only evident when the wines have had sufficient bottle age in which to blossom completely. This is most assuredly the case with the grand crus of the Côte d’Or; perhaps an argument could be made that some of the finest premier crus can still deliver the vast majority of their complexity at relatively youthful stages of development. I could certainly be swayed on this count for the best examples of Meursault “Charmes” or “Genevrières” for example, but never with the top bottlings of Perrières or Poruzots. Among premier crus in Puligny-Montrachet, Folatières can be absolutely delicious in its youth, but Combettes, Pucelles,

Clos des Caillerets, les Demoiselles and Referts all demand some extended bottle age to show more than a snippet of their depth and complexity. Similarly in Chassagne, one can drink top examples of Chenevottes and Vergers with great, great pleasure early on, but Morgeot, Maltroie, la Romanée, Virondot, Caillerets and Grands Ruchottes all need extended cellaring to blossom. The top premier crus in Saint-Aubin also need time to really develop all of their layers of complexity.

In Chablis, things are not quite as difficult to navigate amongst the very finest producers when the wines are young, though this varies from domaine to domaine. The Raveneau family's magnificent wines all demand some serious cellaring before they really start to show their true quality, with the possible exceptions of their la Forêt and Montmains premier crus, as well as their superb *villages* level bottling. But, I have served way too many bottles of closed Montée de Tonnerre and Butteaux over the years from Domaine Raveneau to know that these wines unequivocally demand bottle age to really hit on all cylinders, and forget about all three grand crus until at least a decade has passed from their harvest dates! Conversely, Vincent Dauvissat's wines often all show very well in their relative youths, so this would be one of my exceptions to the rule of the bluest of the blue chips also needing the most bottle aging. This is not to say that the three year-old bottle of les Preuses is going to be as stunning as a twenty-five year-old bottle, but the gap between the two is nowhere near as dramatic as with many other producers, as Vincent's style seems to allow his wines to shine all through their evolutions in bottle. Domaine William Fèvre and Domaine Louis Michel are making wines in the classical manner for the cellar, so again, one should let their top premier cru and grand cru bottlings age a relatively long time prior to opening them and expecting to find all the fireworks available in the glass. I do not have as long an experience with Patrick Piuze's wines, as he has not had his domaine for generations, but my impression is that all of his premier and grand crus also demand plenty of cellaring, and the most enjoyment is to be found here exploring his *villages* level wines in their relative youth.

So, if you happen to be in an economic class that is not going to buy a lot of the most famous cuvées and producers and afterwards, not need to worry if a significant percentage of the bottles end up succumbing to premoxy before they hit their ultimate pinnacles at age ten or fifteen, there remains a great variety of options out there in the world of white Burgundy that can provide immensely enjoyable drinking and which can serve as a very good foundation of this corner of your cellar. Given the fact that one is likely to drink these wines a bit on the younger side, due to not wanting to dump an excessive number of bottles down the sink from premoxy, some of the inherent advantages of the very finest white Burgundy *terroirs* become less of an advantage *vis à vis* less well-known sites, due to the fact that the most famous vineyards were cherished back in the day for their potential longevity, amongst their other attributes. Drinking a top flight example of Pernand-Vergelesses "Sous Frétille" in its prime at three or four years of age is a hell of a lot better than drinking a prematurely oxidized bottle of Corton-Charlemagne at age fifteen or twenty and trying to pretend the wine is "not that badly premoxy." So take heart. White Burgundy pricing is absurdly high these days for the best of the best. That this remains so despite all of the unknowns surrounding aging these chardonnay masterpieces in a continuing era of premoxy is one of the great mysteries of the contemporary wine market. However, there remains a vast ocean of excellent white Burgundy still being produced that will not crush your wine buying budget and many of which, will actually drink closer to their apogees within the

more compressed wine drinking windows that potential premature oxidation now has introduced into the equation of how long to age one's white Burgundies. I should reiterate that I continue to give proposed drinking windows in my tasting notes on white Burgundies that act as if premature oxidation does not exist. As I have stated previously on several occasions, given that some bottles will age in a traditionally long manner and not be affected by premox, it seems most logical to continue to give potential time spans for aging of these wines for the lucky bottles that get through unscathed to true maturity. In this way, it is possible to also give some idea of the relative structural balanced of a given wine, as if it is projected to age in a perfect world for thirty years or more, one can infer that it is not low in acidity! However, I still feel that if one wants to be as safe as possible with their white Burgundies in the cellar, one is well-advised to plan to drink up bottles within the first seven years out from the vintage.



One of the positive developments in the world of top white Burgundy in recent years has been the move of several producers to change over their closures to Diam corks from single punch corks to counteract the threat of premature oxidation. It is widely understood that this allows the wines a wider window of safe maturation before worries about premox need to be considered, and may well block premox development (or de-evolution, to be more accurate) in the bottle completely. At this point in time, it is still too early to know with any certainty that this is the case, as this will be a study that takes at least a generation of bottle aging to discover completely, but early signs are certainly hopeful. That said, one has to understand that these

wines sealed under Diam are also likely to evolve differently than the white Burgundies of the 1970s and 1980s did under single punch corks, as they are different closures with quite different anaerobic characteristics, so the slow and very discreet oxygen exchange that occurs under natural cork is not precisely replicated with Diams. Perhaps there have already been studies done on how these two closures differ in the evolution of the wines sealed under them, but I have not yet seen any, so my observations are purely anecdotal at this time. However, it seems to me that wines sealed under Diam evolve decidedly slower than those sealed under natural cork and I have yet to drink a wine sealed under this closure that has reached the same level of secondary developmental complexity as is the case with a similarly-aged wine under single punch corks. My intuition is that the evolution is simply slower under Diam, rather than that there is a fundamental difference in the evolution of ultimate complexity under the two closures- rather, they simply operate on their own unique timeframes. But, it is possible that white Burgundies sealed under Diam will develop differently than past vintages did under single punch corks and only time will tell definitively if this is the case.

**AGRICOLA QUERCIABELLA
SUPERB CHIANTI CLASSICO AND SO MUCH MORE**



When Querciabella's American importer, Maison Marques and Domaines asked me if I might be interested in writing a feature on this important Tuscan estate, I had to admit that I had never even had the good fortune to taste a single wine from Querciabella! I do not know why this was the case, as back in my wine merchant days, I always offered a wide selection of top Tuscan properties in our Italian wine section and should have already known about the property's excellent wines. But, somehow, I had missed tasting anything from Querciabella. I responded that I did not know the wines but would certainly be open to doing a feature on the estate if I liked the style here, once I had a chance to sample a wine or two. What ensued was the winery and importer working together to ship me a pair of cases of Querciabella's wines from Italy to bring me up to speed with the property and its wines over the last two decades and I was off and running with this estate feature! As soon as the wines arrived, I opened the youngest vintage of their Chianti Classico in the range of samples, as I was extremely curious of what lay ahead, and immediately fell in love with the house style here- very pure, red fruity, soil-driven and tangy-like all of my very fondest memories of Tuscan wines from my formative years in the wine trade. After being thrilled by the style and excellent quality of their 2016 vintage of Chianti Classico, the hardest thing left to do was let the older vintages from the shipment settle in from travel and

not race to open the more mature wines right away, as I was fully smitten with the style here from the very first sip. I only regret that it took me into my sixtieth year on this planet (with an awful lot of good Tuscan wine having passed my lips over forty of those years!) to finally discover the magic of Querciabella!

Agricola Querciabella is not a particularly old estate by Chianti historical standards, having only been founded in 1974 when Milanese businessman Giuseppe Castiglioni followed the dream of so many wine lovers and bought his first hectare of Sangiovese vines in the township of Greve in the rolling hills of this beautiful Tuscan region. Giuseppe was a wine lover and grand collector with a very, very deep cellar and wide range of favorites in the world of wine- as equally familiar with the finest wines of Burgundy and Bordeaux as he was with the great classic wines of Italy. It was the rise of the early Super Tuscan bottlings in the decade of the 1970s, led by Tignanello in its first vintage release of 1971, that really inspired *Signor* Castiglioni to take the plunge and start his own vineyard and winery in the hopes that he might be able to add Querciabella to the region's renaissance and the growing firmament of Tuscany's finest producers. This was not the most famous of times for the Chianti region, as general quality of the wines produced here was really rather pedestrian, and though there were still some very high quality Chianti bottlings produced by estates like Monsanto, Antinori and Ruffino in this era, there was also an ocean of plonk. It was primarily in reaction to the indifferent average quality of Chianti in the late '60s and early '70s that inspired the first Super Tuscans such as Tignanello and Sassicaia to be produced, to show that the region had potential that reached far above the average quality of a straw-covered flask of Chianti on the market.

So, while Giuseppe Castiglioni was very happy to begin crafting Chianti Classico bottlings, the *raison d'être* for his founding of Querciabella was always to produce wines of world class pedigree that would compete with the finest wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy, and consequently, it was to the new phenomena of the Super Tuscans that he looked to for inspiration. Querciabella released its first wine in the 1974 vintage, producing a Chianti Classico bottling that was made from purchased fruit. For the first several vintages, only Chianti was produced at the estate, with the winery crafting its first Chianti *Riserva* in the fine 1979 vintage, but Giuseppe's dream of also producing a "Super Tuscan" bottling to join the ranks of Tignanello and Sassicaia was simply still in the developmental stages. Finally, in the 1981 vintage, Querciabella produced its first bottling of Camartina, its original Super Tuscan cuvée, which was composed of a blend of eighty-eight percent Sangiovese and twelve percent Cabernet Sauvignon in its inaugural vintage. As the years went by, the IGT roster at Querciabella would grow to include a second "Super Tuscan" bottling of pure Merlot, called Palafreno, as well as several other blended wines. The fine quality of the Chianti bottlings here never lost steam with the introduction of the Super Tuscans to the Querciabella lineup, but it was not really until the 1981 vintage of Camartina was released that one could say that Giuseppe's original vision for Querciabella was realized.

Both Giuseppe Castiglioni and his son Sebastiano were businessmen with a wide variety of interests to oversee, so management at Querciabella has always been shared with a very good team on the ground at the property, led by longtime winemaker, Guido de Santi. Eventually, Giuseppe's son, Sebastiano Castiglioni became more involved in the day to day management of the estate in the second half of the 1980s, which was to change the course of the winery and its

vineyards rather profoundly. One of Sebastiano's first projects after becoming more active in the management of the property was to convert the entirety of Querciabella's vineyards over to organic farming methods. The estate began organic farming in 1988 and finally received official organic certification in the year 2000. However, by the time of the certification, the viticultural team at Querciabella was already moving on to biodynamic farming practices, though, to date, the estate has not been certified officially as biodynamic. Further refinements in farming practices here occurred in 2010, as Sebastiano Castiglioni changed his dietary philosophy to Vegan (he has always been a vegetarian), so that the biodynamic practices at Querciabella shifted to allow all of the preparations for the vineyards to be plant-based from that point forward. Consequently, typical biodynamic practices that may utilize cow horns or animal manure are no longer used at Querciabella and all of the estates wines are Vegan.

The winery is based in the Greve sector, in the northern heart of the Chianti Classico region, with its vineyard holdings within the DOCG including significant parcels in this higher altitude part of Chianti. This gives their wines a lovely, bouncy acidity and a lighter footprint than many produced in the warmer sectors of the Chianti region to the south. The winery itself is located just southeast of the town of Greve, in the direction of the tiny hamlet of Ruffoli. Today Querciabella has grown from that initial one hectare of vines in Greve to farm just over seventy-three hectares of vineyards in the Chianti Classico region, spread amongst the townships of Greve, Radda, Gaiole and Lamole, as well as thirty-two hectares of vines further east along the Etruscan coastline in the DOC of Maremma. This makes the estate one of the biggest biodynamically-farmed vineyard constellations in the entire world, and certainly the largest in Italy. As alluded to above, Querciabella's Chianti vineyards are all in the northern sector of the Classico region, which is generally known for producing more refined, aromatic and higher acid examples of the wine than those that hail from warmer southern half of the Classico sector, where the wines are more robust in character. The vineyards holdings have expanded through a series of purchases and leases over the last four decades, with a bit more vineyard land still scheduled to come on line as their parcels in Lamole will expand from four hectares today to eight hectares beginning in 2025. But, at the moment, Querciabella's Chianti vineyard parcels can be broken down as such:

Greve: 27.50 hectares

Radda: 14.50 hectares

Gaiole: 27.50 hectares

Lamole: 4 hectares (set to expand to 6 *ha* in 2023 and 8 *ha* as of 2025)

Querciabella started out with its vineyards in and around Ruffoli in the Greve sector and this was expanded with planting further parcels of vines here in 1988, 1989 and 1991 to bring them up to their present day levels of twenty-seven and a half hectares of vines in Greve. Their 14.5 hectares of vines in Radda were purchased in 2007. In 2010, the winery added further to its vineyard patrimony by leasing the 27.5 hectares of vines in Gaiole and the leasing of vineyards in Lamole began in 2020. The current winery on the outskirts of the hamlet of Ruffoli, which had previously been the Casaocci estate, was originally purchased in 1980 and was renovated and expanded in 1999. Prior to this Querciabella had worked out of a small winery within the village of Ruffoli, which is now a guest house for the property. In the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, the wines produced here were made from a combination of estate and purchased fruit, but as time

has gone on and the property's newer parcels have come on line, the winery has moved to only make wine from their own biodynamically-farmed vineyards. From their vineyards planted in the Chianti region, Querciabella produces four red wines: Chianti Classico, Chianti Classico *Riserva* (after a twelve vintage hiatus between 1999 and 2011- please see below), Camartina (their first Super Tuscan bottling) and Palafreno (their second Super Tuscan). Additionally, from this region hails the winery's only white wine, which they call Batàr and which is made from a unique (particularly for Tuscany) fifty-fifty blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc.

The estate's vineyards in Maremma are newer than those in the Chianti region, with this property having first been purchased by Querciabella in 1997. The original estate included a few hectares of vines that were already planted, but there was land also planted to foraging crops and these were grubbed up and replanted to vineyards right at the start. In 2002, Sebastiano Castiglioni decided, no doubt based on the success they were already realizing here, to expand the Maremma property further and bought another parcel of fallow land for the planting of new vineyards. Maremma offered a perfect option for Querciabella, as their plant-based biodynamic viticulture was best suited to land that had not had vineyards on it previously, so that there would not be a period of waiting and working any products from chemical-based viticulture out of the soils. As he explains of the initial decision to expand into Maremma, once "the decision was made in order to expand production" we thought about other regions, as "at the time, acquiring good vineyards in Chianti Classico was difficult." As he notes, "we wanted more freedom to experiment with different varieties" and this was possible in Maremma, so that in addition to the Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot that the Querciabella team planted for this new project (and which are now used for their Mongrana cuvée), there is also the Syrah and Cabernet Franc that are utilized for their Turpino bottling, as well as Petit Verdot and Cunoise (the first plantings of this grape variety in Italy)! Sebastiano Castiglioni recalls the enjoyment of watching those vineyards in Maremma come into their own and the first early wines produced here: "I had great fun tasting those varieties" such as the Syrah, Petit Verdot and Cunoise, "unblended and matured in specific, fantastic French oak." As the notes below will attest, the Syrah and Cabernet Franc planted on this property have now found a very good home in the Turpino bottling (blended with Merlot), but the Petit Verdot and Cunoise are yet to be heard from! While I am sure that much of the attention of fans of the estate focus their energies on the roster of bottlings produced from the Querciabella vineyards in Chianti, these cuvées from Maremma are excellent in quality and their Mongrana bottling is a superb value and could well be one of the finest bargains for top flight red wine found anywhere in Italy!

As mentioned above, between their vineyard holdings in the Chianti Classico region and in Maremma, Querciabella currently produces seven different bottlings. These include their Chianti and Chiant *Riserva* cuvées, with both now made entirely from Sangiovese. These two Chianti bottlings have to be ranked amongst the very finest in the DOCG, with their reliance solely on the Sangiovese grape giving the wines a very classical, red fruity and spicy personality, where their underlying soil tones play a central role in the two wines' personalities. Both wines are built for the cellar and demand a bit of bottle age after release before they are ready to drink, with the lovely, tangy acidity of the higher elevations of the Chianti Classico vineyards clearly on display in both bottlings. From their vineyards in the Chianti region also hails their two IGT bottlings, Camartina and Palafreno. Though the *cépages* of the two Super Tuscans produced from these vineyards has changed a bit over the years, today, Querciabella's Camartina *cuvée* is

a blend of seventy percent Cabernet Sauvignon and thirty percent Sangiovese, while Palafreno is now composed entirely of Merlot. Camartina is the more venerable of the two bottlings, having first been produced in the 1981 vintage, while Palafreno was launched in the 2000 vintage. From over on the coast in Maremma, Querciabella's thirty-two hectares of vines are now producing two wines: Mongrana, which is composed from a blend of fifty percent Sangiovese and twenty-five percent each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, and Turpino, crafted from a unique *cépages* of forty percent Cabernet Franc, forty percent Syrah and twenty percent Merlot. The Mongrana is the great, sleeper value in the Querciabella portfolio, as this wine is priced in the same range as their Chianti Classico and is a wine of superb balance, complexity and ability to age. From the examples that I tasted, Mongrana clearly seems to be a wine that will age effortlessly for thirty years out from the vintage, and yet it is crafted in a style that offers fairly early accessibility and most impressive complexity and soil signature. The Turpino bottling is the youngest cuvée in the winery's lineup, as it was first released in the 2007 vintage. The wine starts out life a bit more structured out of the blocks than the Mongrana, but with the depth, inherent complexity and structural integrity to age half a century and it is clearly destined to be one of Querciabella's top bottlings in the years to come.



Some of the beautiful, biodynamically farmed vineyards at Querciabella, teeming with biodiversity.

Their seventh wine is a white wine blend of equal parts chardonnay and pinot blanc called Batàr and is most emphatically not to be overlooked amongst all the red wine fireworks on

display at Querciabella, as it is clearly one of the finest white wines I have ever tasted from Tuscany! Contrary to my expectations prior to tasting the wine, it too is built to age long and gracefully in the bottle and is clearly one of, if not the most, long-lived white wine crafted today in Tuscany. My note on the 1998 Batàr found below should give just some idea of how well this wine evolves with bottle age, and my gut instinct is that the more recent vintages of this wine will age even longer than the first years, as the wine is now raised in less new oak than was the case back in the late 1990s. For younger vintages, to my palate, they are most emphatically not really ready to drink when they are released and should be cellared for at least four or five more years prior to drinking them, just to let their secondary layers of complexity unfold. The higher acidities one finds in the higher elevation vineyards around Greve in the northern half of Chianti no doubt provide the superb structural snap that allows Batàr to age so beautifully.

As I mentioned above, Querciabella has been blessed by a very talented team since its foundation back in 1974, as both Giuseppe and Sebastiano Castiglioni are successful businessmen with a myriad of different ventures to manage, so that the winery has always needed good people on the ground to run the day to day operations of the ever-expanding vineyard patrimony and cellars. Guido de Santi joined Querciabella in 1988 as its head winemaker, and it was with *Signor* de Santi that Sebastiano laid out the conversion of all the estate's vineyards over to organic farming methods in that year. Guido de Santi continues on to this day at the winery, these days more in the role of a consulting winemaker, as he is just now reaching the age of retirement, though he remains a very important member of the extended Querciabella family. Since 2010, the Technical Director at Querciasbella has been Luca Currado, better-known as the longtime owner and winemaker of Vietti in Piemonte (Vietti was sold to an American investor in 2016), who oversees a very able team in the cellars led by Winemaker Manfred Ing. Sebastiano Castiglioni was already friends with *Signor* Currado prior to his taking over as Technical Director at Querciabella, and Sebastiano admired the Baroli that Luca had crafted over his career at Vietti, as well as his equally deep and broad knowledge of other top European wines, particularly those from France. So, he was a perfect fit to take over as Technical Director in 2010. Manfred Ing had worked a year with Luca for a year at Vietti and accompanied him on his first visit to Querciabella in 2009; by 2010, both were at the helm of winemaking for the estate. One of the very first practices established here under the new technical team was to dial back the percentages of new oak used for the various bottlings produced at Querciabella, so that today, wines such as Camartina and Palafreno are probably aged in less new oak than any other of the Super Tuscans. This is a very, very positive development to my palate and the most recent vintages of these two wines are dazzlingly beautiful examples of how using less new oak can produce even more complexity, elegance and breed in the resulting wines! The new technical team also restarted the Chianti Classico *Riserva* program at Querciabella right away, so that after a twelve year hiatus, the wine was again produced beginning the 2011 vintage.

The chief agronomist at Querciabella has been Dales D'Allesandro for many years. Given how central to the estate's success is its biodynamic viticulture, vineyard management is every bit as important here as great winemaking prowess. Even if organic and biodynamic farming methods did not produce superior fruit and hence, better wines, I have little doubt that Querciabella would still have embarked on this farming practice once Sebastiano Castiglioni became far more involved in the day to day management of the estate in the mid-1980s. As a life long vegetarian and now a practicing Vegan, Sebastiano has a profound respect for the other

creatures that co-inhabit this planet, as well as a desire to treat Querciabella's environment with the utmost respect- which every corner of nature so richly deserves (and often is not given) by those who till the earth. Consequently, all of the winery's vineyard lands in both Chianti and Maremma are a beautifully healthy environment rich with life and biodiversity. A quick look at Querciabella's website listings for "Team" quickly show how important this wholistic philosophy is here, as the winery has a "Master Beekeeper" amongst its farming team, as well as photos of the property's dog, cat and vineyard fox ("Freelance Quality Taster") included among the other winery personnel!

The beautiful elegant style so evident in all of the Querciabella wines today has long been a hallmark of the estate, as both Giuseppe and Sebastiano Castiglioni valued refinement in the wines that they drank and cellared from other regions (particularly in their Bordeaux and Burgundy collections, which are extensive) and looked to craft wines in this same vein from the very first vintage of Chianti produced here in 1974. Today, Sebastiano credits Dales D'Allesandro and the rest of vineyard team at Querciabella for keeping this inherent sense of elegance possible in all of the estate's wines in the face of the myriad of challenges posed by global warming. Querciabella has always been drawn to purchasing or leasing higher elevation vineyards, so as to assist in retaining good acidity and the sense of elegance in their wines, and the conversion first to organic farming and now to plant-based biodynamics has helped the estate retain this lightness of step and tangy refinement in all of their wines as the planet has warmed. The winery now is able to get better homogeneity in the ripening of the bunches in their vineyards through biodynamic farming, which Sebastiano notes is crucial to limiting the impact of global warming on their wines and allowing the initial style to continue. Not every top Tuscan estate has been equally successful in this regard, at least based on the wines that I have tasted in recent years.

Batàr

Batàr is Querciabella's sole white wine, composed of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot blanc, with the vines planted in the Greve sector of Chianti. The first vintage of Batàr ever produced at the estate was the 1988. The chardonnay vines are planted on higher elevation, south-facing vineyards on Galestro soils which add lovely minerality to the blend. The pinot blanc vineyards face north, ripening even more slowly and helping to retain lovely acidity for the wine. Batàr is barrel-fermented and like many of the other cuvées at Querciabella, there has been a trend since the arrival of Luca Currado here in 2010 to diminish the percentage of new oak in which Batàr is raised. Today, only twenty percent new oak is used in the *elevage* for this bottling. Since 2010, the amount and style of *battonage* for this bottling has also shifted, with frequent stirrings having now been replaced by gentler rollings of the barrels, so that less oxygen is introduced during the aging of the wine prior to bottling. Based on the three vintages of Batàr that I tasted for this report, this is an impressively long-lived wine that evolves beautifully in the bottle over twenty-five or thirty years. The wine starts out ripe, zesty and beautifully bound up in its girdle of acidity. At around ten years of age the wine really starts to hit cruising altitude, with the 2011 that I tasted starting to truly drink with generosity and additional layers of complexity. However, the wine clearly has no trouble lasting far beyond its tenth birthday, as the 1998 Batàr was still drinking splendidly well, with its color starting to shade golden, but its spine of acidity still strong and prominent in the wine, even as the aromatics and flavors had evolved into a tertiary blend of apricot, orange peel and lovely nutty overtones. The soil signature of this

bottling, from the five year-old 2016 all the way back to the superb 1998 was the defining element in the wine, giving lift, cut and a beautiful foundation for seamless pairings at the table. In an average production year the winery will produce around fifteen thousand bottles of Batàr. This is quite frankly one of the finest white wine bottlings I have ever had the pleasure to drink from Italy.



2016 Batàr- Querciabella

The 2016 Batàr from Querciabella is a fine young wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, peach, salty soil tones, a nice touch of pecan, orange peel and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced and very promising finish. This really does have the palate authority of a top premier cru from Chassagne or Meursault. It is approachable today, but really built to age and will be even better with some further bottle age. 2021-2050+. **93.**

2011 Batàr- Querciabella

At ten years of age, the 2011 Batàr is starting to really enter its peak plateau of maturity and is drinking with an additional layer of complexity and more generosity on the palate than the promising 2016 version. The nose delivers a fine constellation of candied lemon, apple, beeswax, a lovely base of soil tones, hazelnut, dried flowers, a hint of wild fennel and a stylish foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely

core, fine transparency, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. To my palate, the 2011 Batàr tastes like it was raised in a bit higher percentage of new oak than the 2016, and I like the even more downplayed aspect of the oak in the 2016 better than in the 2011. That said, this is still an excellent wine and is at its apogee today, but with plenty of life still ahead of it! 2021-2045. **92.**

1998 Batàr- Querciabella

The 1998 vintage of Batàr from Querciabella is quite a bit more evolved in color than the 2011, with a more golden hue, but still with plenty of vibrancy in the wine. The bouquet offers up a tertiary blend of white cherries, apricot, marinated orange peel, salty soil tones, toasted pecan, dried flowers and a bit of browned butter in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and still fresh and light on its feet, with a fine core, good mineral undertow, sound acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is mature, but shows no signs of fragility or imminent decline and probably will continue to cruise along beautifully for at least another decade and maybe longer! A lovely bottle! 2021-2035+. **93.**

Chianti Classico

Querciabella's first vintage of Chianti was the 1974, with this wine now made entirely from Sangiovese grown in the estate's vineyards in the townships of Greve, Radda, Lamole and Gaiole. Prior to a change in regulations for Chianti in 1996, it was not legal to make this wine solely from Sangiovese, as the maximum allowed in the blend was eighty percent, so the earliest vintages of Chianti from Querciabella included other grapes, including Canaiolo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Happily for fans of Sangiovese, this regulation was changed and since the 2010 vintage, Querciabella has produced their Chianti cuvées solely from Sangiovese. Up through the 1994 vintage, Querciabella's Chianti bottling still continued to include some purchased fruit in the cuvée (from organically-farmed vineyards), but starting with the 1995 vintage, this wine has been made entirely from estate-grown grapes. The wine is fermented in a combination of oak vats and stainless steel tanks, with the malolactic taking place in the fermenting vessels prior to racking into French *barriques* and *tonneaux* for up to fourteen months of barrel aging prior to selection, blending and bottling. Querciabella's Chianti is raised in ten percent new oak. The winery will typically produce about one hundred and ten thousand bottles per year of their Chianti Classico, which is one of the very highest quality bottlings of Chianti that I have ever come across in my career, ranking up there with the very best examples I have tasted recently from Monteraponi or in the past from the likes of Monsanto in their heyday, Selvapiana, Felsina and Castello di Rampolla, but in general, stylistically lighter on its feet, more *terroir*-driven and bursting with red fruit character and spice. In fact, more like my theoretical ideal of Chianti Classico.

2016 Chianti Classico- Querciabella

Sebastiano Castiglioni's 2016 Chianti Classico is lovely, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a bright and classy nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, a touch of orange peel, cigar wrapper, cedar and a lively blend of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, tangy and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, impressive soil signature and grip, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is certainly approachable out of the blocks, but really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to blossom more fully and let a bit of its backend tannin soften up completely. It is an outstanding bottle of Chianti. 2023-2045. **92.**

2015 Chianti Classico- Querciabella

2015 is a warmer year in Chianti, so the Querciabella Chianti Classico comes in listed at fourteen percent in this vintage. The wine is more black fruity in personality, delivering a bouquet of dark berries, bitter chocolate, balsam bough, roasted venison, Tuscan herb tones, dark soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely tangy, with a good core, fine focus and grip, respectable complexity and a long, well-balanced moderately chewy finish. This is a very good result from such a hot summer, but it does not possess quite the breed and complexity of the classical 2016 version. Though it does have some backend tannin, it is already quite tasty if paired with the right culinary match to cover up a bit of the youthful tannin. The wine still has many years to go of fine drinking pleasure. 2021-2045. **89.**

1998 Chianti Classico- Querciabella

In my early years in the wine trade, one of the great treats was to drink examples of aged Chianti Classico from the most serious producers in the region, as back in the 1980s, it was not considered surprising for a wine such as Monsanto's Il Poggio bottling to be at its best at twenty-plus years of age. This 1998 Querciabella Chianti harkens back to that time, though I suspect this has some cabernet sauvignon in the blend, rather than solely the traditional grape varieties of the region, as it is more black fruity than more recent vintages of this bottling (which are crafted only from sangiovese). However, the wine is stunning on the nose, offering up a pure, complex and vibrant bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of dried eucalyptus, fresh bay, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and drinking superbly, with a rock solid core of fruit, still some buried backend tannins, good acids and grip and a long, laser-like and beautifully balanced finish. This is excellent and still has plenty of life ahead of it! 2021-2040. **92.**

Chianti Classico Riserva

Querciabella also makes a truly stunning Chianti Classico *Riserva* bottling, now also made entirely from Sangiovese and built to age long and gracefully. As mentioned above, the first vintage of *Riserva* produced here was in 1979. Interestingly, the winery chose not to produce a Chianti *Riserva* cuvée between the 1999 and 2011 vintages. When I inquired about why the winery had decided to forego producing a Chianti Classico *Riserva* bottling for fully a dozen years, Sebastiano commented that at the time the Camartina bottling was produced from a very similar blend to the Chianti *Riserva*, as Camartina in this era was predominantly Sangiovese, so there was quite a bit of similarity between the two wines. However, over the first decade of the twenty-first century, the blend of Camartina gradually shifted to a *cépages* where Cabernet Sauvignon became the dominant component, eventually increasing to seventy percent, with Sangiovese moving into a supporting role, so that by the time the 2011 vintage rolled around, it once again made sense to start producing a Chianti *Riserva* at Querciabella, as the Camartina had acquired quite a different personality by that time. The *Riserva* bottling is made from a vineyard selection across the prime parcels the winery owns in the townships of Greve, Radda and Gaiole. All of these are higher altitude parcels, planted between three hundred and fifty and five hundred and fifty meters above sea level. The stony soils of Galestro in the parcels in Radda and the limestone-rich soils of Gaiole help contribute a superb foundation of minerality to this bottling. The *Riserva* is handled similarly to the *Normale* in the cellars, but generally given a slightly longer *elevage* in oak prior to bottling, with cask aging generally running fourteen to sixteen months. The percentage of new oak used for the *Riserva* is twenty percent, which is slightly higher than used for the regular bottling. Only twenty thousand bottles of

Chianti Classico *Riserva* are crafted in vintages where this bottling is produced. It is another long distance runner in the Querciabella stables and to my palate, it starts to be approachable around its sixth or seventh birthday, but probably does not hit its true plateau of maturity until it is ten to twelve years of age and clearly seems capable of forty to fifty years of life in bottle in a top flight vintage.

2015 Chianti Classico “Riserva”- Querciabella

Sebastiano Castiglioni’s *Riserva* bottling of Chianti is produced from a careful selection of the best lots of a given vintage, and then aged in the same combination of two-hundred twenty-five and five hundred liter casks as the *normale*, but with twenty percent new oak for the *Riserva*. The 2015 *Riserva* is pretty ripe, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol, but also impressively precise, pure and balanced. The bouquet is excellent, with the slightly higher percentage of new oak quite seamlessly integrated in the constellation of black cherries, smoked meats, a fine base of soil tones, a lovely blend of spice tones, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and a suave foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, impressive soil signature, ripe, buried tannins, good acids and a long, very well balanced and quite classy finish. This is a very impressive 2015! 2021-2060. **92.**

1999 Chianti Classico “Riserva”- Querciabella

The 1999 Chianti Classico “*Riserva*” from Querciabella was the last vintage produced of this bottling up until the 2011. The winery kindly included this wine in my two cases of samples, but alas, this particular bottle ended up being corked. That said, it was clearly a great bottle of Chianti underneath the TCA and I hope to have a chance one day to taste another bottle and really enjoy this fine vintage of *Riserva* from Querciabella.

Mongrana

Mongrana is the name of one of the two cuvées that Querciabella now produces from their vineyards in the Maremma DOC over on the Tuscan coastline. As I mentioned above, the wine is composed of a blend of fifty percent Sangiovese and twenty-five percent each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Sebastiano Castiglioni and his technical team chooses to not raise this wine in oak, so the *elevage* is done in a combination of stainless steel tanks and cement vats. *Mongrana* was first produced in the 2005 vintage and is an outstanding wine and a great value, as this bottling tends to be priced in around the same range as the Chianti Classico cuvée from Querciabella. While the wine shares a *cépages* with several other “Super Tuscan” bottlings one sees on the market these days, the wine is quite different in personality from the vast majority of these IGTs, as no one would ever accuse the beautiful *Mongrana* bottling of an “international style” and the wine simply basks in its Tuscan heritage. The three varietals are fermented and aged separately for ten months prior to blending. As the wine does not see any aging in French oak, *Mongrana* is a wine that is accessible fairly early on in its evolution (not needing time to integrate any tannins it might have picked up in barrels), beautifully light on its feet and intensely flavored and yet still, full-bodied and structured to age long and gracefully. I had not been familiar at all with *Mongrana* prior to starting to work on this feature on Querciabella and I was very, very impressed by the quality of this cuvée, which clearly has to be one of the best red wine values to be found in all of Italy! This is now the largest production wine in the Querciabella portfolio, with one hundred and fifteen thousand bottles produced on average each year. Given that the vineyards used for *Mongrana* are still relatively youthful, having only been planted in 2000, one has to imagine that this excellent wine is only going to

become incrementally better as the vineyards get older- a very exciting prospect! In the course of my research on this article, Mongrana has quickly become one of my absolute favorite wines from Tuscany!

2018 Mongrana- Querciabella (Maremma)

The 2018 vintage is the new release of Mongrana in the market from Querciabella. The wine is lovely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a vibrant young blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil elements, a dollop of Tuscan fresh herb tones and a hint of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, ripe and full-bodied, with lovely focus and grip, a fine sappy core, lovely soil undertow and a long, suavely tannic, tangy and complex finish. This vintage of Mongrana comes in listed at fourteen percent and is one of the riper examples I tasted for this report, but still retains the lightness of step that is the hallmark of this lovely bottling. 2021-2040. **90.**

2017 Mongrana- Querciabella (Maremma)

The 2017 Mongrana from Querciabella is a superb bottle. This was a drought year in Tuscany, but excellent *fin de saison* weather allowed the berries to ripen up fully in the autumn sunshine and the wine has turned out beautifully. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones and a gentle topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and beautifully balanced, with a good core, impressive lightness of step and backend bounce, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. I really like the backend lift here. This is not as concentrated as the Chianti Classico *normale* bottling from 2016, but it is an excellent wine of breed and complexity and it really excels at the table. 2021-2045+. **92.**

2016 Mongrana- Querciabella (Maremma)

The 2016 vintage of Mongrana is starting to become beautifully expressive aromatically at five years of age and is just entering its real “sweet spot” of bouquet complexity. The pure and refined nose wafts from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, pomegranate, a gorgeous base of soil, a hint of road tar, woodsmoke, gentle herb tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe in personality, with a plush core of fruit, still some chewy tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and tasty finish. Though the nose has blossomed beautifully, the palate could still do with a bit more bottle age, just to let those remaining backend tannins soften up a bit more. Fine juice in the making, that is approachable today, but will be even better with a few more years’ worth of bottle age. 2023-2045. **90.**

2015 Mongrana- Querciabella (Maremma)

Sebastiano Castiglioni’s 2015 Mongrana comes in at the same octane level as the beautiful 2017 (13.5 percent), but is a touch deeper-pitched aromatically from the differences in the two growing seasons. The bouquet of the 2015 offers up scents of black cherries, pipe tobacco, lavender, a lovely base of soil, pretty spices and just a hint of aged balsamico in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, chewy tannins and good length and grip on the complex finish. This has a bit more muscle than the 2017 version, but is not showing quite the same backend lift at the present time. Still, this is a fine bottle that is just beginning to reach its plateau of primetime drinking and has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2021-2040+. **90.**

2013 Mongrana- Querciabella (Maremma)

The 2013 vintage of Mongrana from Querciabella is starting to really drink beautifully at eight years of age. The nose delivers a complex and refined blend of dark berries, black cherries, incipient notes of forest floor, cigar ash, gravel, espresso and a really lovely selection of Tuscan herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and effortlessly balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, still a good foundation of suave tannin and a long, well-balanced and tangy finish. This is a lovely bottle that is just entering its apogee of peak maturity, but still has decades ahead of it. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2040. 92.



Turpino

Turpino is another bottling from Querciabella that hails from their Etruscan coast vineyards of Maremma. It is produced from a blend of Cabernet Franc, Syrah and Merlot. These vineyards were also planted in 2000 and the very first Turpino bottling was crafted in the 2007 vintage, but this was retained for the winery's own cellar needs. Turpino's first commercially-released vintage was the 2010. The typical *cépages* for Turpino is forty percent each of Cabernet Franc and Syrah, combined with twenty percent of Merlot. The grapes are destemmed, given a short "cold soak" and fermented in oak fermenters with indigenous yeasts. The wine is raised in fine-grained French oak barrels for sixteen to eighteen months, depending on the vintage, and then racked to cement tanks for another six to eight months of finishing *elevage* prior to bottling.

The percentage of new oak used for this bottling is twenty percent. Based on the three fine vintages that I tasted, Turpino is a very elegant example of these three grapes, with lovely soil signature, excellent complexity and the capacity to easily age thirty years or more in bottle. As these vines are still relatively youthful, I have to think that future vintages here could be even better, as the vines dig deeper into the soils with further age. Querciabella currently produces fifteen thousand bottles of Turpino each year. This rather eclectic mix of grapes turns out a wine of great breed, distinction and capacity for a long and graceful evolution in bottle and is a fabulous success.

2015 Turpino- Querciabella (Tuscan IGT)

The 2015 vintage of Turpino comes in at fourteen percent octane and was aged for sixteen months in *barrique* in this vintage, prior to racking to cement vats to complete its *elevage*. The wine delivers fine aromatic complexity in its constellation of black cherries, black raspberries, pepper, smoked meats, a good base of soil, a deft framing of cedary oak, fresh oregano and a lovely topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, potentially generous and complex finish. This is an excellent bottle of wine! 2025-2050+. **93.**

2013 Turpino- Querciabella (Tuscan IGT)

The Turpino 2013 is starting to develop some lovely secondary aromatics and flavors as it reaches eight years of age. The wine is a tad less ripe than the 2015, coming in listed at 13.5 percent alcohol and delivering a superb, smoky bouquet of cassis, black cherries, fresh oregano, a good foundation of soil, espresso, pepper, a nice touch of meatiness, bonfire and cedar. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and beautifully precise, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2050. **93.**

2011 Turpino- Querciabella (Tuscan IGT)

The 2011 Turpino from Querciabella is another very refined wine. It is a touch riper than the 2013, so perhaps the 2015 (which shares its fourteen percent octane level) will evolve along very similar lines as this lovely bottle. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, roasted meats, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil tones, a hint of pepper, cigar wrapper, cedar and a gentle mix of spices and savory elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, a nice touch of backend pepperiness, ripe tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. The 2011 Turpino is drinking very nicely, but still has a fair bit of backend tannin that will continue to carry the wine for several more decades in bottle. Another fine, fine vintage of Turpino! 2021-2045+. **93.**

Camartina

Camartina was Querciabella's first "Super Tuscan" bottling, with the inaugural vintage produced being the 1981, which was made from a blend of eighty-eight percent Sangiovese and twelve percent Cabernet Sauvignon. One can imagine just how much painstaking detail was involved in that first vintage, as it was the advent of the first Super Tuscans in the early 1970s that originally inspired Giuseppe Castiglioni to found Querciabella. Over the years, the *cépages* has shifted for Camartina, as the most recent vintages of this bottling have been composed of seventy percent Cabernet Sauvignon and thirty percent Sangiovese. As alluded to above in the discussion of Querciabella's Chianti *Riserva*, the shift in the *cépages* of Camartina began at the

dawn of the twenty-first century, with tasting trials in the cellars slowly shifting the balance of the blend from Sangiovese to Cabernet Sauvignon. The change here occurred over several vintages, with the Cabernet Sauvignon climbing incrementally. Back in the earliest vintages of Camartina in the first half of the 1980s, there were a few vintages with a very small percentage of Cabernet Franc also included in the *cépages* of this bottling, but this only lasted for a few years before the wine returned to a cuvée composed solely from Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon. Since its first vintage of 1981, Camartina has always been produced from estate-grown fruit, so there was never a period in this bottling's history when purchased fruit was included in the cuvée. The 1988 vintage of Camartina was the first produced solely from organically-farmed vineyards, and the first completely biodynamically-farmed vintage of this wine was the 2000.

The Cabernet Sauvignon and Sangiovese vineyards used for Camartina are planted in Ruffoli, right close to the winery, in the Greve sector of the Chianti region. The two varietals are fermented and aged separately for eighteen months in cask, with only the top lots eventually being blended to create Camartina. The cuvée is aged in French *barriques*, with the percentage of new oak for the *elevage* of the wine now down to twenty percent in each vintage. Each vintage of Camartina spends a year and a half in barrel prior to blending and bottling, and then is given an additional eighteen months of bottle aging in the cellars prior to release. The percentage of new oak used for Camartina has shifted a bit over the years, as it went through a period in the late 1990s and early 2000s when it was raised entirely in new oak, but the percentage of new casks have been dialed back in more recent vintages and since the arrival of Luca Currado as Technical Director at Querciabella in 2010, Camartina has been raised in no more than twenty percent new oak in any vintage in which it has been produced. The winery will typically produce about ten thousand bottles of Camartina in a top vintage. Though Camartina is now a wine based predominantly on Cabernet Sauvignon, I find its character is still firmly based in its home of Tuscany, with its soil signature, lively acidity, fine-grained tannins and beautiful blending of red and black fruit firmly emblematic of its region. It is a true *vin de garde*, with an aging potential of sixty years or more, and must be ranked among the small handful of "Super Tuscans" still very much worthy of that moniker. What I admire most about this outstanding bottling is that it remains very much a wine defined by its underlying *terroir* and the regional character of Tuscany, rather than having been tempted away to become an "internationally-styled" wine that just happens to be crafted in the region. To my palate, it is clearly one of Tuscany's greatest red wines.

2015 Camartina- Querciabella (Tuscan IGT)

The 2015 vintage of Camartina is truly a beautiful wine in the making. The wine comes in this year at fourteen percent and delivers a very precise and promising nose of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, lovely spice tones, a touch of nutskin, a complex base of soil and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine core of fruit, firm, well-integrated tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, beautifully balanced and nascently complex finish. This is a long-distance runner and is still at least a decade away from really hitting its plateau of peak drinkability, but all of the constituent components are in place for future greatness. All that is required is some patience! I get the same impression tasting this gorgeous young wine as I used to do back in the day tasting the new

vintages of the First Growths, when they used to be intended for drinking, rather than as commodity trading wines. 2030-2075+. **95.**

2013 Camartina- Querciabella (Tuscan IGT)

The 2013 Camartina is made from the now settled *cépages* of seventy percent cabernet sauvignon and thirty percent sangiovese, with the wine having been raised in twenty percent new oak. The 2013 vintage comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up today a pure, complex and blossoming bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of orange zest, cigar wrapper, Tuscan herb tones, a beautiful foundation of soil, cedar and a whiff of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a gorgeous core of fruit, great transparency and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, vibrant and very complex finish. This is a stunning vintage for Camartina! It is approachable today, but clearly still in climbing mode and I would try to keep my hands off of bottles of the 2013 for at least another handful of years and really let it reach its plateau of peak maturity. 2027-2075. **95.**

2008 Camartina- Querciabella (Tuscan IGT)

The 2008 vintage of Camartina predates the arrival of Luca Currado as Technical Director at Querciabella, and consequently, the wine was raised in more new oak than more recent vintages of this cuvée. The wine is aging beautifully at thirteen years of age it is just starting to really blossom and drink with generosity. The nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, Tuscan herb tones, a lovely base of dark soil tones, sweet balsamic elements, lavender and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with a velvety attack, a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, modest tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. The 2008 Camartina is drinking very well indeed, but still has decades of life in it. Though the new oak here is nicely integrated, I have the sense that the wine is not quite as refined on the backend as more recent vintages and this is probably due in part to the younger wines having seen less new wood during their *élevage*. This is an excellent wine that only underscores just how good the more recent vintages are going to be when they too are fully ready to drink, as they are another step up in elegance from this very, very good 2008 version. 2021-2060. **93.**

1999 Camartina- Querciabella (Tuscan IGT)

The 1999 vintage of Camartina has a very different personality from more recent vintages of this great bottling, as back in this era the wine was aged entirely in new oak barrels. Also, this particular vintage has a rather unique *cépages* for the cuvée, as the blend included ten percent Syrah to augment the sixty percent Sangiovese and thirty percent Cabernet Sauvignon. It was actually made in this year by Sebastiano Castiglioni. Not surprisingly, given the addition of Syrah in the blend, the wine is quite a bit more black fruity than recent vintages, offering up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, bay leaf, a bit of roasted meats, cloves and plenty of spicy new French oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely resolved on the attack, with a good core of fruit, fine complexity and grip and still a bit of firm, backend tannin perking up the long finish. This is an excellent wine, but the one hundred percent new oak has left some oak tannins in the wine that seem like they may never perfectly resolve and which give the wine a slightly rigid palate impression, compared to the more recent vintages raised in only twenty percent new casks. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to taste the 1999 Camartina, but there is little doubt (with all due respect to Sebastiano) that the more recent vintages are a step up in quality from this very good wine! 2021-2045+. **91.**



Palafreno

Palafreno is Querciabella's second Super Tuscan cuvée, which is composed now entirely from the Merlot grape. Like Camartina, the *cépages* of Palafreno has shifted a bit over the years. This bottling was first produced in the 2000 vintage, at which time it was a fifty-fifty blend of Merlot and Sangiovese. This was also true of the 2001, but with the 2004 vintage (Palafreno was not produced in either 2002 or 2003), the decision was taken to dedicate this cuvée entirely to the Merlot grape and it has been a mono-varietal bottling since that vintage. It is only produced in top vintages in the region, so since its inaugural vintage of 2000, there have only been nine years deemed worthy of crafting a Palafreno at Querciabella. The two Merlot vineyards used for Palafreno are planted in the township of Ruffoli, right near the winery (as is the case for the Cabernet Sauvignon parcels used for Camartina). The elevation of these vineyards are in the three hundred and fifty to four hundred meters above sea level; the soils for the Merlot vineyards are both clay and galestro schist, in which this variety clearly thrives, with the higher percentage of clay found in the lower sections of the slopes. Palafreno is given eighteen months of *elevage* in barrel, prior to bottling, with thirty percent of the casks new for each vintage. Like Camartina, there was a period early on in this cuvée's history where it was raised in a bit higher percentage of new oak casks than is the case today. Only twenty-five hundred bottles are crafted of Palafreno in the vintages in which it is produced, making this superb Merlot Querciabella's most limited release. Like Camartina (and all the Querciabella wines, for that matter), Palafreno is clearly a wine made for long and graceful aging in the cellar. To my palate, it seems that the

wine really demands at least a decade's worth of bottle age to start to soften up and properly blossom, with the wine truly starting to hit its apogee of peak drinkability at age twenty and likely to continue to cruise along at its peak for at least the next quarter century. As Palafreno was only first crafted in the 2000 vintage, it is still too early on in the bottling's history to have a firm sense of its ultimate life expectancy, but it seems very likely that fifty to seventy-five years out from the vintage is its probable range of fine drinking. Like Camartina, it is one of Tuscany's most exceptional bottlings.

2015 Palafreno- Querciabella

The 2015 Palafreno from Querciabella is an outstanding wine in the making. It comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol in this vintage and offers up a superb bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, coffee bean, cigar smoke, fresh herb tones, dark soil elements, a touch of balsam bough and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and already quite suave on the attack, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, perfectly balanced and complex finish. This is still a young wine and deserves at least another five or six years in the cellar, but it really is already a very enjoyable glass to drink right now! Most impressive! 2026-2060+. **94.**

2013 Palafreno- Querciabella

The 2013 vintage of Palafreno is a touch lower in octane than the 2015 version, tipping the scales at a very civilized 13.5 percent octane and delivering a lovely and very vibrant aromatic constellation of dark berries, espresso, cigar ash, a lovely array of sweet and savory herbs and spices, a touch of resinous tones redolent of conifers, a good base of soil and just a whisper of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a superb core and soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and beautifully taut and seamless finish. The slightly lower ripeness of the 2013 *vis à vis* the 2015 Palafreno gives the 2013 a more energetic personality on the palate and a simply gorgeous array of spice and herb tones that marry brilliantly with the pristine black fruit. This is stunning! 2025-2065+. **95.**

2008 Palafreno- Querciabella

Querciabella's 2008 Palafreno is a superb wine that is now drinking very well indeed, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, plums, a fine base of soil, cigar smoke, sweet Tuscan herb tones, woodsmoke, a hint of spice and a lovely framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegant in profile, with a good core, lovely balance and complexity, suave, modest tannins and a long, poised and very refined finish. This wine is impressively light on its feet, with plenty of intensity of flavor, refined complexity and backend lift. Fine juice. 2021-2055+. **93.**

2006 Palafreno- Querciabella

The 2006 vintage of Palafreno is drinking beautifully at fifteen years of age. This is one of the riper vintages for this beautiful Merlot bottling, as the wine came in listed at fourteen percent in this year. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black plums, dark berries, cigar wrapper, a lovely foundation of dark soil tones, a touch of new leather, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, a dollop of fresh oregano and a fair bit of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and plump at the core, with good grip, melting tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. The backend still seems to have just a whisper of oak tannin to it, even though the skin tannins are falling away, which makes me wonder if it was raised in a higher percentage of new oak back in this era than is the case with more recent

vintages. This is a very good wine that is just entering its plateau of peak maturity, but it does not quite possess the refinement found in the Palafrenos from slightly cooler growing seasons. 2021-2045. **90.**

2004 Palafreno- Querciabella

The 2004 was the first vintage of Palafreno that was produced from one hundred percent Merlot. Back in this era, the wine was raised in a bit more new oak than the thirty percent that is customary today for this cuvée. The wine is aging very gracefully and at age fifteen is really entering its plateau of peak maturity, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, plums, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a lovely array of fresh herb tones, menthol, cedary new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very complex, with a plush core of fruit, still a good structural chassis, excellent balance and grip and a long, still moderately tannic finish. This is an outstanding wine that is starting to drink very nicely, but is still in climbing mode and may be even better with another five years in the cellar! Superb juice. 2021-2050+. **94.**

2000 Palafreno- Querciabella

The inaugural vintage of Palafreno, the 2000, still included fifty percent Sangiovese in the blend with the Merlot. Consequently, the bouquet offers up quite a different aromatic profile than the one hundred percent Merlot bottlings from the 2004 vintage forwards, but it is equally impressive to more recent offerings. The excellent bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, fresh oregano, a superb base of dark soil elements, hints of nutmeg and mint, and a refined framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and still quite tangy, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil undertow, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. It is very interesting to compare this to the 2004 Palafreno, for this vintage, with the Sangiovese included in the *cépages*, is not as elegant (particularly on the palate) as the pure Merlot bottlings produced from 2004 forwards. That said, the two-grape combination still works marvelously well and I really like this 2000 bottling of Palafreno! 2021-2050. **93.**

**THE BEAUTIFUL 2019 GERMAN VINTAGE REPRISÉ
WEINGUT JOH. JOS. PRÜM AND WEINGUT KELLER**



I had initially intended to write a much longer second report on the 2019 vintage in Germany for Issue 91 of the newsletter, but the continued delays on refrigerated shipping containers coming out of Europe during year two of the global pandemic put most of the samples intended for that article on the “running late” list and that larger feature will now have to appear in Issue 92. However, as my second round of 2019ers from Weingut Keller had arrived prior to Christmas and the 2019ers from Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm arrived on time for Issue 91, I simply could not find the self-control to look at those wines in the cellar for another month or two and decided to do a little early reporting on these wines for the current issue. The second round of 2019er samples from Klaus-Peter Keller includes all of the Grosses Gewächs bottlings from the estate in this vintage, as well as the two Kabinetten he has produced from his parcels of vines in the beautiful Nierstein vineyards of Hipping and Pettenthal. As I mentioned in my first report on the 2019 vintage in Germany, Klaus-Peter had opined that the vintage presented such breathtakingly perfect conditions for Kabinetten in certain vineyards that it would have bordered on a crime to produce anything else from those parcels in this year. So, he eschewed crafting Grosses Gewächs bottlings from Hipping and Pettenthal in 2019 and solely produced these two magical Kabinetten reported on below.

A complete report on the 2019 vintage in Germany can be found back in Issue 88, but I provide here a brief description of this great year in German wine country. As readers may recall, the summer of 2019 was another drought year (as was the hot summer of 2018 before it), so the advantage in the steep slopes found in so many of the very best vineyards in Germany's wine regions was given to those who had old vines, whose root systems could seek out subterranean water sources during the peak periods of summer drought. Fortunately, many, many growers have very old vines in their parcels and so a great many estates' vineyards were able to handle the dry conditions quite well and have ended up producing truly stunning wines as a result. The growing season of 2019 had started out with a warm and very sunny April, getting things going early in the vineyards and budbreak was quite precocious across all of Germany's wine-producing region, as had also been the case with the previous summer of 2018. However, May of 2019 was unseasonably cold, with frost damage on the evening of May 5th, which most keenly affected vineyards in the Saar and Ruwer river valleys, though its ill effects were felt all the way to the Nahe. But, in general, most winegrowers outside of the Saar and Ruwer felt very lucky to have escaped serious frost damage on the night of May 5th, though they certainly did not sleep well that evening! The remainder of May stayed quite cool, so the early start to the growing season of 2019, brought on by the warm and beautiful weather of April was quickly given back to Mother Nature in the cold of May.

Summer did not really return to German wine country until June of 2019, but the next two months were generally warm, sunny, but not extremely hot, and so flowering took place under very good conditions and producers started to hope for a great vintage. The drought conditions were alleviated from time to time with a bit of gentle rain in the evenings starting in July, which kept the older vines from shutting down and assisted younger vines in escaping from any period of dormancy that they might have experienced from the drought. After lovely weather in June and July, August saw the arrival of a short, but brutal heat spike that sent temperatures soaring well over one hundred degrees Fahrenheit for a handful of days, which caused sunburn to many bunches and would make careful sorting out in the vines critical in the wake of the heatwave. However, once the spike in temperatures had passed, the season settled into a beautiful pattern of sunny days, cool nights and simply idyllic conditions for the *fin de saison* in German wine country. Wine growers generally were out in the vines by mid-September pruning away sunburnt bunches and prepping to harvest, though a few earlier pickers such as Julian Haart in Piesport began bringing in grapes for their Kabinetten on the 16th of September! There was about a week and a half of drizzly conditions from mid-September on, which meant that things were often a bit difficult early on in the harvest, as spot showers had to be worked around for the earliest bunches collected. However, most producers started around the 25th of the month or so and after a few days of drizzle, had beautiful, Indian Summer conditions in which to bring in the remainder of their bunches in a leisurely and quite optimal fashion.

Once the short period of mist and light showers had come and gone, October unfolded with a fortnight of absolutely perfect weather for finishing up excellent bunch maturity in the vines, with warmer temperatures than had been the case for the second half of September, plenty of sunshine during the days, crisp evenings, and the spreading of very clean and pure botrytis in many of the parcels of vines that still had their crop hanging. So, in the end, the growing season of 2019 had provided a beautiful harvesting period, where early grapes could make stunning and classically-styled Kabinetten, very good dry wines, and early October produced glorious

Spätlesen, Auslesen and higher Prädikat dessert wines. Throughout September and the first half of October, the cool, crisp evenings allowed acidity levels to stay nice and high, as the sugars mounted or fine botrytis spread in certain bunches, so that the ensuing wines have a lively, vibrant and very precise sense of balance that is only found in the greatest of vintages in Germany. All in all, the vintage of 2019 is one of the greatest in recent memory across all of the major regions of Germany and so many of these wines are destined to be cellar treasures and the stuff of legend thirty or forty years from now!

As readers may recall from my coverage of the vintage in Issue 88, Klaus-Peter Keller sent along a superb set of his earlier bottled 2019ers which I was able to sample and review over the summer of 2020. His second “care package” of 2019ers arrived at the start of November of 2020, comprised of his Grosses Gewächs bottlings (as well as his “young vine” bottling from the Morstein vineyard, which he labels as Westhofen Riesling Trocken), the two magical Kabinetten from the Hipping and Pettenthal vineyards and the utterly magical Abtserde Auslese from this vintage. With this range, a much fuller view into the glories of the 2019 vintage at Weingut Keller emerged and, as all of us would have supposed prior to tasting the wines, this may well be one of the greatest vintages (thus far) in the star-filled career of Klaus-Peter! He additionally sent his three superb cuvées of pinot noir from the 2018 vintage, as I am always one vintage behind in reviewing these wines in comparison to Weingut Keller’s white wines. Do not let all of the well-deserved excitement surrounding Klaus-Peter’s 2019 white wines distract you from keeping an eye out for any of his 2018 pinots, as they are truly stunning wines in their own right! As for the wines from Katarina Prüm from the 2019 vintage, I normally would be tasting these around this time of the year in any case, as she much prefers me to wait until the wines have had some recovery time after their bottling before tasting the wines from the “new” vintage, so I am generally always one year behind reviewing her lovely wines than I am from most other estates in Germany that I visit frequently during my spring trips to the country’s beautiful wine regions. If Covid had relented a bit earlier across the globe, I would have been treated to the Prüm family’s stunning 2019ers during the month of March of this year, tasted in the gracious comfort of the family estate in Wehlen.

A quick note on AP numbers. In the tasting notes that follow, I have included the AP numbers for the wines, where I have them. Some of the Weingut Keller wines, though bottled, were not yet released and so arrived with “tasting labels” affixed to them and no AP number. However, for most of these, there is only a single example of vineyard and style produced, as for example, there are not two different Grosses Gewächs bottlings produced from the Hubacker, so this is not all that important with the Weingut Keller wines. However, at Weingut Prüm, there has sometimes been a range of different bottlings produced from a single vineyard and with the same Prädikat level, so that it has not been an infrequent occurrence to witness two or three different Auslesen produced from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr for example, and consequently AP numbers can be very useful in identifying different bottlings with similar labels. As most readers will already be aware, the AP numbers are a series that each wine uniquely carries, such as for the Prüm family’s 2019 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett: 2 576 511 07 20. In this case, the two most important sets of numbers for identifying the cuvée are the last two- 07 20. The “07” refers to the identifying number of the cuvée and the “20” references the year that the identifying number has been requested, which in this case is 2020. In my tasting notes, I will generally only refer to the “07” and list it as “AP #7” to identify the wine, though others might

refer to the wine as AP number “07 20”. The only time I will include the year in which the number was applied for is when it is unexpected, which can happen sometimes (particularly at Weingut Prüm!), as for example where a 1993 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese might carry an AP number with the last four digits being “27 97”, indicating that the estate did not apply for a number for this wine until the fourth year after the vintage, rather than the year immediately following harvest. Sometimes, such an example may indicate a wine that was given an extended elevage prior to bottling- maybe a year or two longer in tank- or it may simply mean that the wine was bottled at its more or less customary time in the spring following the harvest and just was not commercialized until three years later, so the application for an AP number for the wine was not needed until 1997. In such circumstances, I will list the wine as having “AP #27 97” so that readers can be alerted that this wine was a later release. But, in all other cases, where the AP number was applied for in the year following the harvest, I will simply use the lot number for the wine (the first of these two sets of digits) to make things as simple as possible.



Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm (Wehlen)

2019 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett AP #7- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2019 Bernkasteler Badstube Kabinett from Katarina Prüm is a gorgeous wine that just basks in Bernkastel’s gorgeous apple purity, spread evenly over a world of slate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of apple, a hint of pear, wild yeasts,

gorgeous slate minerality, violets, white lilies, bee pollen and just a snapshot of the yellow plum that will come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and light on its feet, with lovely filigree and focus, ripe, zesty acids and a long, complex and dancing finish. Effortless beauty! 2021-2060+. **94+**.

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #9- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The AP #9 Kabinett from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard is quite a bit more reserved out of the blocks than the Badstube Kabinett, but this is the inherent beauty of the slow to unfold, but timeless Sonnenuhr. With some nurturing, the wine blossoms nicely to show its immense promise, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, white cherry, vanilla bean, slate, lilacs, fruit blossoms, a touch of wild yeasts and just a hint of lime zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-bodied and beautifully structured, with zesty acidity, laser-like focus and grip, a lovely core of fruit and endless mineral drive on the long, perfectly balanced and still very youthful finish. There is amazing complexity waiting here to blossom, but it is going to take some time before this wine truly starts drinking with generosity. Just be patient! 2027-2075+. **97.**

2019 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese AP #10- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2019 Badstube Spätlese from Katarina Prüm is just gorgeous right out of the blocks. The bouquet is bright, complex, gently exotic and has a sense of salinity I associate with good dry extract. It delivers a beautiful *mélange* of comice pear, lemon, casaba melon, salty slate minerality, bee pollen, orange blossoms and a lovely touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-full and gorgeously defined by its underlying slate, with a pretty core, a lovely girdle of acidity, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and weightless finish. This is stunning! 2021-2065+. **95.**

2019 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #11- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2019 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Spätlese is marvelous on both the nose and palate, but with a personality that is just a touch more reserved out of the blocks than the Badstube version. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very pure, precise and promising blend of apple, pear, fresh pineapple, incipient notes of mossiness, a lovely base of slate, fresh mint, gentle smokiness and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nascently complex, with gorgeous filigree and mineral undertow, a delightful core of fruit, bright acids and a long, perfectly balanced and vibrant finish. This is still a puppy and deserves a good decade in the cellar to allow it to really start to hit on all cylinders. 2029-2070. **94+**.

2019 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #12- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2019 Himmelreich Spätlese from Katarina Prüm is utterly brilliant! The bouquet is so expressive already, soaring from the glass in a constellation of fresh pineapple, lime, casaba melon, bee pollen, wild yeasts, a beautiful base of minerality and a pungent floral topnote divided between scents of white lilies, apple blossoms and lilacs. On the palate the wine is pure, dancing and medium-full, with flawless balance and grip, laser-like focus, beautiful mineral undertow and a very, very long, filigreed and lifted finish. This is the most stunning young Himmelreich Spätlese I have ever tasted from the Prüm family! Do not waste bottles opening them too soon! 2029-2070+. **98.**

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #13- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard is seldom one that reveals all of its charms early on in its evolution, for like the Doctor vineyard in Bernkastel, the Sonnenuhr hides many of its layers of complexity for the patient who give the wines proper bottle age. I have to assume that this is also true of the 2019 Spätlese from Weingut Prüm, but given how uncharacteristically expressive the wine is right out of the blocks on the nose, I can only imagine what lies ahead! The gorgeous

bouquet offers up scents of apple, pear, fresh lime, honeycomb, vanilla bean, slate minerality, a touch of wild yeast, lavender and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, precise and pure, with a medium-full and filigreed personality, a superb core, great acids and grip and a long, nascently complex and utterly refined finish. This has true Sonnenuhr reserve on the palate and will want some extended bottle age, but it is going to be magical juice! 2030-2080. **96+**.

2019 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese AP #16- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2019 Himmelreich Auslese AP #16 from Weingut Prüm is a stunning young wine. The bouquet is so pure and precise, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, white grape, a hint of tangerine, honeycomb, bee pollen, citrus zest and a beautiful base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, nascently complex and transparent, with zesty acids, seamless balance, great bounce and grip and a long, perfectly balanced finish. The botrytis here is so clean and pure and yet gives the wine a very exotic personality this year, with the Himmelreich minerality augmented by so many fruit and floral scents that one does not often find from this vineyard, at any Prädikat level! A beautifully refined walk on the wild side! 2029-2100. **96**.

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #17- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The AP #17 Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr from Katarina Prüm is also exquisitely glazed with clean botrytis, offering up a stunning aromatic constellation of pear, apple, white cherries, vanilla bean, passion fruit, honeycomb, gentle floral notes of white lilies, slate, citrus zest and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and medium-full, with a great core, excellent mineral undertow, bright, zesty acids and laser-like focus on the long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This will want a few more years in the cellar to blossom than the Himmelreich Auslese, but it will be every bit as beautiful when it blossoms completely! 2032-2100. **96**.

2019 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #18- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

Katarina Prüm's 2019 Goldkapsel Auslese from the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr is gorgeous, as the botrytis here is very clean and pure. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of pear, white cherry, tangerine, honeycomb, a nice foundation of slate and honeysuckle in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, precise, medium-full and still quite youthful, with a lovely core, excellent bounce and grip and a very long, very promising finish. This is a lovely wine in the making, but it needs time in the cellar to open up and display its secondary layers of complexity. 2030-2085. **94**.

2019 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel AP #19- Joh. Jos. Prüm

The Long Gold Kap Auslese from the Himmelreich is one of Katarina Prüm's most beautiful wines from the 2019 vintage (at least of what I have tasted, there are often more treasures from great vintages still tucked away in the estate's cellars waiting for later release!). The beautiful glaze of botrytis has concentrated each facet of the *terroir* here, without masking any of them, so the bouquet is truly stunning in its vibrancy and complexity, offering up scents of white cherry, pineapple, pear, iris blossoms, crystalline minerality, violets, bee pollen and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is pure, precise, youthful and fullish, with great intensity of flavor, vibrant acids and grip, laser-like focus and a very long, very elegant and dancing finish. A stunning, stunning young wine! 2035-2100. **97**.



Weingut Keller (Flörsheim-Dalsheim)

Dry Riesling

2019 Westhofen Riesling Trocken - Weingut Keller

The 2019 Westhofen Riesling Trocken from Klaus-Peter Keller hails from the grand cru Morstein vineyard, but these are the younger vines, which are now bottled on their own to take the Grosses Gewächs cuvée even closer to the sun. The wine comes in at a svelte 12.5 percent octane and offers up a stunning bouquet of lemon, sweet grapefruit, a gorgeous base of limestone minerality, a beautifully complex array of floral scents that recall both white lilies and citrus blossoms and a touch of lemon peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and racy, with a full-bodied format, stunning, salty mineral drive, a lovely core, ripe, zesty acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a touch more open-knit than the old vine Morstein bottling, and will drink a bit sooner as a result, but this is an outstanding wine in its own right and should not be ignored by Keller fans searching for Grosses Gewächs bottlings, as this is probably as high in quality as some of those early vintages of the GGs back in the day. 2026-2060+. **93.**

2019 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The Keller family's 2019 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs is totally stunning on both the nose and the palate. The bouquet is very pure, very precise and oh, so complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of tart orange, lemon, a gorgeous base of chalky minerality, white

flowers, lemongrass and just a whisper of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is racy, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with snappy acids, a great core of fruit, stunning mineral drive and grip and marvelous backend lift on the very long and nascently complex finish. This wine is tightly-knit out of the blocks and will demand some cellaring, but I have never tasted a better young Kirchspiel from Klaus-Peter! 2031-2085. **96.**

2019 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2019 Hubacker is another stunning young wine. This is a touch deeper, broader-shouldered and more exotic than the utterly classical Kirchspiel this year, offering up a stunning aromatic constellation of sweet grapefruit, blood orange, a touch of passion fruit, a beautiful base of minerality, wild yeasts, lemongrass, orange peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, young and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, stunning transparency and cut, zesty acids and a very, very long and mineral-driven finish. This is every bit as reserved out of the blocks as the Kirchspiel and will need some extended bottle age to blossom, but it is going to be stunning in due course! 2031-2085. **95.**

2019 Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The Morstein bottling from Klaus-Peter Keller has been one of the wine world's greatest dry white wines for many years now, but the decision a couple of vintages back to limit this cuvée to only the oldest Riesling vines in the parcel has taken it to even another level of quality. The 2019 is pure magic, delivering a youthfully complex and multi-faceted nose of grapefruit, tart orange, citrus blossoms, a hauntingly beautiful and kaleidoscopic base of limestone minerality, wild yeasts, lemongrass and dried flowers. Though this wine is loaded with fruit and floral tones, it is the ever-changing base of minerality that defines its aromatic personality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a great core, stunning mineral undertow, ripe, brisk acids and laser-like focus on the long, nascently complex and very, very promising finish. I know that on some absolute level, the G-Max is probably somehow even better than the 2019 Morstein, but I do not like it any better than this stunning wine! 2034-2100. **99.**

2019 Abtserde Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The Abtserde Grosses Gewächs bottling from Weingut Keller has been one of the greatest three or four white wines in the world for well more than a decade now, is it not perhaps time for the German wine authorities to relent and let the historical name of this vineyard finally appear on labels? I know that adaptability and change are not easy things in officialdom, but this is the historical name of this section of the Brunnenhäuschen that goes back centuries, and it really deserves to be on the label, as it is a singular *terroir* from the rest of the vineyard. In any case, the 2019 Abtserde is utterly brilliant, offering up a young and stunning bouquet of tart orange, pink grapefruit, lemon, a very complex base of salty, chalky minerality, spring flowers, just a whisper of wild yeasts, citrus zest and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is precise, deep and full-bodied, with flawless balance and grip, snappy, buried acids, stunning mineral drive and grip and a very, very long, complex and electric finish. Sheer brilliance! 2034-2100. **99.**

2019 G-Max Riesling- Weingut Keller

Klaus-Peter Keller's 2019 G-Max is a magically refined and precise wine, which of course, is nothing new for this iconic bottling. The wine is a tad riper than the other Grosses Gewächs in the Keller lineup in 2019, coming in listed at thirteen percent octane. It offers up a young, pure and stunning bouquet of pink grapefruit, green apple, a touch of tangerine, kaleidoscopic limestone minerality, beeswax, gentle notes of wild yeast, wild flowers, lemon blossoms and a discreet topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and youthful, with a rock solid core of fruit, a riptide of mineral undertow, snappy, buried acids and

laser-like focus on the , very, very long, brilliantly complex, seamless and electric finish. I have been fortunate to taste most of the young vintages of G-Max and I cannot recall any that were superior to the 2019! But, this is a very young wine and it would be criminal to even think of opening up a bottle before this wine is twenty years of age! 2039-2100. **100.**

Prädikat Wines

2019 Niersteiner Hipping Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Keller

The 2019 Hipping Kabinett from Weingut Keller is everything one would expect from the confluence of a winegrower at the top of his game, a great vineyard site and a vintage whose characteristics are picture-perfect for Kabinetten! The gorgeous bouquet offers up scents of pear, golden delicious apple, a hint of raw almond, a gorgeous base of red slate, gently musky white flowers, bee pollen and wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-bodied and complex, with great delineation and filigree, stunning intensity of flavor, zesty acids, perfect balance and a very, very long, crystalline finish. Breathtakingly beautiful wine! 2026-2065+. **97.**

2019 Niersteiner Pettenthal Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Keller

The 2019 Pettenthal Kabinett from Klaus-Peter Keller seems hell bent on making the argument that Klaus-Peter is a better Kabinetten winemaker than he is a dry Riesling *maestro!* The bouquet is pure, precise and still so youthful, offering up a gorgeously complex blend of apple, white peach, wild yeasts, kaleidoscopic slate minerality, bee pollen and a very complex floral topnote redolent of lilacs, iris blossoms and white lilies. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, dancing and filigreed, with breathtaking weightlessness, stunning intensity of flavor and bounce, zesty acids and a seamless, perfectly balance and electric finish. This wine is approachable out of the blocks, but still so primary, that it would be crime to not give it at least six or seven years to further blossom before starting to drink it. Simply stunning Kabinett! 2026-2065+. **97.**

2019 Abtserde Riesling Auslese AP #16- Weingut Keller

Though I tasted the 2019 Auslese from the Abtserde vineyard over the summer, I was delighted to have a second look at the wine once it had a chance to recover a bit more from its spring bottling. While the Abtserde is known best these days for its dry wines, it is also capable of some truly stunning off-dry and noble sweet Prädikat wines and the 2019 Auslese is pure magic! The 2019 Abtserde Auslese AP #16 is a stunningly beautiful wine on the nose, offering up scents of mango, sweet peaches, casaba melon, a gentle touch of honey, kaleidoscopic limestone minerality and a beautiful topnote of apple and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is vibrant, filigreed and medium-full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, stunning mineral undertow, laser-like focus and outstanding length and cut on the youthfully complex finish. This is a stunning bottle of Auslese, but it needs to be tucked away in the cellar for at least the next ten years or so before it will even start to stir. Expect its apogee thirty years down the road! 2031-2100. **97.**

Pinot Noir

2018 Bürgel Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

After an extremely short crop for pinot noir in 2017 from Weingut Keller, the 2018s will have a bit more availability in the market. The 2018 Bürgel is beautifully transparent and loaded with personality, with the bouquet soaring from the glass in a very complex blend of red and black cherries, dark berries, beautiful spice tones, raw cocoa, chalky soil, sweet stem tones, a touch of bonfire and a very discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is medium-

full, pure, vibrant and soil-driven, with a lovely core, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy, focused and intensely flavored finish. This is a beautiful, middleweight bottle of pinot noir that will put on weight with bottle age, much like a top flight example of Chambolle might do. Fine juice. 2028-2065. **93+**.

2018 Frauenberg Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2018 Frauenberg Spätburgunder from Klaus-Peter Keller is a touch darker in color than the Bürgel, with the same beautiful synthesis of pure, vibrant fruit tones, a potpourri of spices and great soil signature. The nose delivers a superb aromatic constellation of black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, cloves, a beautiful base of limestone, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, a touch of graphite and a restrained framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a nice hint of sappiness at the core, great mineral drive and grip, ripe, buried tannins, lovely acids and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Like the 2018 Bürgel, the 2018 Frauenberg is light on its feet out of the blocks, but is destined to expand with bottle age. It is a stunning young wine! 2028-2065. **94**.

2018 Morstein “Felix” Old Vines Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

I try and be objective when comparing the three Grosses Gewächs pinot noir bottlings from Weingut Keller, but I love the *terroir* of Morstein for Riesling, and this probably prejudices me towards the pinot noir from this vineyard as well. But, that said, these are much older vines, French clones and the wine is year in and year out a testimony to the vast potential of pinot noir in the right areas of Germany in this age of global warming! So, maybe I am being objective. In any case, the 2018 Morstein pinot is a brilliant young wine, coming at the same 12.5 percent octane as these other pinots and delivering a brilliant young nose of black cherries, plums, sweet dark berries, Vosne-Romanée-like notes of cinnamon and clove, spit-roasted *pigeon*, coffee bean, woodsmoke, a complex base of limestone minerality and again, that deft touch of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, pure and sappy at the core, with great transparency down to this magical soil, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex, poised and seamlessly balanced finish. The intensity of flavor here, without undue weight on the palate, is a work of art! This does not have the same weight as one might find in a top flight example of Musigny, but it has the same breed and complexity. 2030-2075. **96**.

RECENTLY-TASTED SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE WINES FEBRUARY 2021



As I mentioned in the short piece on Spanish and Portuguese wines in Issue 90, it is the first issue of the new year where I usually begin my two part coverage on the wines of Spain and Portugal. However, at the end of last year, I received several samples “early” and had them in my cellar prior to Christmas of 2020, so I thought that it made sense to do a little “down-payment” on the coming coverage on new releases on the wines from the Iberian Peninsula in the last issue of the newsletter, as the samples in my cellar were currently in the market and might have already sold through by the time the next issue was ready to send out at the start of March. As there are so many good things going on in the wine worlds of both Spain and Portugal right now, these two part series on wines from the Iberian Peninsula are always rather long affairs, as there is an awful lot of ground to cover these days, with so many great producers currently at the top of their winemaking games and more and more old vineyards also being recovered and cultivated with love and attention to detail in recent times. So, even with the “down-payment” of notes in the previous issue, Part One on Spain and Portugal in this issue stretches to nearly fifty pages and is absolutely loaded with tasting notes on truly great new releases. Additionally, I have already received several cases of samples for Part Two on the Iberian Peninsula, which will appear in the

next issue, as the wines just arrived so close to my (missed) deadline for this issue that I could not get them tasted for inclusion in this article.

As has been the case for several years now, the coverage in Part One on Spanish and Portuguese wines is absolutely loaded with current releases from Rioja, as I received an absolute embarrassment of riches from the top estates in this region. One will find notes below on the current bottlings available from iconic estates such as Bodegas Riojanas (including a stunning lineup of cellar releases of Monte Real Gran Reserva stretching from 2009 all the way back to 1975!), Cuné, La Rioja Alta and Señorío Pedro Peciña, as well as some stellar bottles from relatively less well-known estates such as Bodegas Viña Herminia, Bodegas Exopto, Viña Otano, Torre de Oña and Alegre Valgañón. Part Two of this report will have a deeper representation of the great producers in Galicia, as samples of new releases from Envínate, Laura Lorenzo and Guimaro are part of the late-arriving samples now in my cellar, and the lion's share of bottlings from Raúl Pérez are due into the port of New York any day now. But this report does include a few new releases from Adegas Alguiera, Castro Candaz, Luna Beberide, Pétalos from Descendientes de J. Palacios and Dominio do Bibei. I want to take a moment to talk a bit more about the Dominio do Bibei wines, as I only asked to start tasting samples from this winery a year ago, based on the fact that Laura Lorenzo had been the winemaker here for several vintages prior to starting her own project, so I was curious about her past winery's lineup. This year, having tasted a couple of wines sent to me and noticing that they produce several more cuvées, I wrote to the importer to ask if I might taste a few more wines, as the samples that had been sent to me had showed beautifully. The follow-up bottles also showed very well indeed. The estate's red wines are a bit different from most of the stars in Ribeira Sacra and Bierzo these days, as they choose to de-stem their fruit one hundred percent prior to pressing and fermentation. Without any whole clusters, the wines have a bit different personalities from most of their most talented neighbors' wines, but they are excellent in quality in their own right and deserve to be more widely known. A couple of their bottlings are priced so well right now that they should be snapped up without delay!

This report also includes several other new estates (to me) whose wines merit mention in this introduction. As readers are well aware, I have been trying to cover Spain and Portugal as broadly as possible, as these two countries are two of the most dynamic in the world of wine right now and the number of truly great wines being produced on the Iberian Peninsula today is simply staggering! One of these is Diego Magaña, whose family hails from the Navarra region (and is apparently one of the top wine producers in Navarra), but who has been branching out in the last handful of years to do projects in both Bierzo and Rioja. I tasted two of his Bierzo reds from his Dominio de Anza label, which are made from very old vine parcels of predominantly Mencía, though with the traditional mix of other varieties in the field blend, as was the custom seventy-five years ago across most of Galicia. Both wines were excellent and come highly recommended. Another new estate to me was Belondrade y Lurton in Rueda, where Didier Belondrade makes simply the finest example of Verdejo I have ever tasted! While on the topic of stunning white wines, the old vine Godello "200 Cestos" from Adegas A Cocoa was also new to me in this issue and the 2017 is an absolutely stunning bottle that is just starting to blossom and is the epitome of just how good a wine can be produced from Godello!

I also had the pleasure to be introduced for the first time to the remarkable wines of Filipa Pato and her husband, sommelier and restaurateur, William Wouters, who produces a stunning range of wines from their old vine parcels in the Bairrada region of Portugal. It was really serendipity that I had a chance to taste these wines, as a subscriber had very kindly written me to ask what I thought of Filipa's wines and I had to confess that I was unfamiliar with them. However, I mentioned that I would see if I could locate samples and taste them for this article. It just so happened that I was scrolling through an importer's deep portfolio of Spanish producers, putting together my "wish list" for samples for inclusion in this feature on the very same day. I looked a little bit further down the page on the website to their list of producers from Portugal and there was Filipa Pato and William Wouters listed! The importer very generously sent me her sparkling Rosé made from a blend of the Baga and Bical grapes, a beautiful white wine made solely from Bical and an extremely old vine cuvée made from pre-phylloxera, one hundred and thirty year-old Baga vines, which is simply the finest red wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Portugal! Filipa Pato farms her twelve hectares of vineyards with biodynamic principals, ferments her wines with indigenous yeasts and raised them in older *demi-muids* and *foudres*. The three wines I tasted were all beautiful and I cannot wait for the pandemic to finally end, so I can find my way to Bairrada and visit the estate!

The following tasting notes are organized similarly to how I have done so in most recent reports on the wines from the Iberian Peninsula. I have listed all of the Spanish sparkling wines first, followed by a section of Rosados from all across Spain and Portugal. After this, I have tried to list the wines regionally in a geographic pattern, starting in the upper northwestern corner of Spain in my beloved Galicia then worked due east across the very top of Spain. Once reaching the eastern edge of wine regions, I have dipped down to the south for the next tier of wine-producing regions and again, worked my way west to east across the country once again. I have completed the sections of Spanish wines with those from the Canary Islands (which only includes a few notes this time around, as I will tackle these lovely wines in far more depth in Part Two in the next issue) and then the wines I have tasted from Portugal for this report. Within each regional subsection, the wines are listed first chronologically by vintage, followed alphabetically by producer. As I mentioned above, the sheer volume of stunning, cellar-worthy wines being produced in Spain and Portugal at the present time is hard to keep up with, as more and more young producers are getting started or just beginning to hit their strides at their wineries, and so many of the "old guard" continue to be at the absolute top of their games at the present time. With the continued reclaiming of old, abandoned vineyards, or the collaboration of farmers in some of these regions with dynamic winemakers such as the team at Envínate or Raúl Pérez and his vinous collaborators, there is no shortage of great wines currently being crafted throughout Spain and Portugal and I have the distinct sense that their numbers are growing on a daily basis. We are very clearly living through a "golden age" for the wines from the Iberian Peninsula, and I hope that you all have been taking advantage of the opportunities presented to add some of these beautiful wines to your cellars as circumstances allow, as many remain bargains in today's overheated wine market and are absolute steals! I have put a lot of these wines in my own cellar in recent years and I only regret that I had not gotten up to speed on this golden age sooner, so that I would not have to temper my purchases a bit by the realization that I just turned sixty in November and, actuarially-speaking, I do not need to lay down all that many cases for twenty years further down my wine-drinking road!



Spanish Sparkling Wines

Cava “1+1=3” Brut NV- Cava Cygnus

Cava Cygnus’ “1+1=3” is one of my favorite sparkling wine producers in Cataluña. Their non-vintage Brut bottling is made entirely from organically-certified vineyards, with the *cépages* of the new release being forty percent Xarel-lo, thirty-five percent Parellada and twenty-five percent Macabeo, with the latter two varieties hailing from vines in excess fifty years of age. The wine is from the base year of 2018 and was disgorged in June of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is vibrant and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of lemon, menthol, salty minerality, wild fennel and just a hint of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a lovely core, superb mineral drive and grip, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is 1+1=3’s entry level bottling and it is quite serious. 2021-2035. **89.**

Cava Brut Nature “Reserva” NV- Cava Cygnus (made with organic grapes)

The new release of Cygnus organic Brut Nature Reserva is produced from a blend of forty percent each of Parellada and Xarel-lo and twenty percent Macabeo. It is from the base year of 2017 and was disgorged in August of 2020. The wine offers up a refined nose of breadfruit, raw almond, ocean breeze, white soil tones and a nice touch of gently musky spring flower in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and nicely mineral in

personality, with a lovely core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, very nicely balanced and complex finish. Fine juice. 2021-2035+. **91.**

Cava Brut “Reserva” NV- Cava Cygnus (made with organic grapes)

The brand new arrival of Cygnus’ organic Brut non-vintage Cava has a slightly different *cépages* from the Brut Nature, as the blend for this bottling is thirty-five percent each of Xarel-lo and Parellada and thirty percent Macabeo. This wine is from the base year of 2018 and was aged fifteen to twenty months prior to its disgorgement in August 2020, with a finishing *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine delivers a refined bouquet of lemon, tart pear, a touch of lemongrass, *fleur de sel*, chalky soil tones and a wisp of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and shows lovely mineral drive, with a good core, fine focus, pinpoint bubbles and good length and grip on the complex finish. This is a very nice bottle of Brut, but the current release of Brut Nature is a touch more precise on the backend to my palate. 2021-2035+. **89.**

Cava “1+1=3” Brut Rosé NV- Cava Cygnus

The non-vintage “1+1=3” Brut Rosé from Cava Cygnus is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of garnaxta and pinot noir. Again, the vineyards are certified organic for this bottling. This too is from the base year of 2018, was disgorged in August of 2020 with a finishing *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The nose is bright and stylish, delivering a fine combination of blood orange, a touch of wild strawberry, saline soil tones, dried flowers and just a hint of smokiness. On the palate the wine is zesty, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, fine mineral drive and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. I find the texture of the *mousse* here just a tad more refined than in the Brut NV this year. Good juice. 2021-2035. **90.**

2018 Blanc de Blancs Brut- Raventós i Blanc (Conca del Riu Anoia)

Raventós i Blanc is based in the very heart of Catalunya’s finest sparkling wine area, in the village of Sant Sadurní d’Anoia, where they have been based since the fifteenth century! They farm their vineyards biodynamically and in 2012, they left the Cava D.O. to form their own appellation, Conca del Riu Anoia, with far higher quality standards. Their 2018 Blanc de Blancs Brut is composed of forty percent Xarel-lo, thirty-two percent Macabeu and twenty-eight percent Parellada. The wine was disgorged in November of 2020 and is non-*dosé* and is actually a Brut Nature, though the label does not indicate this. The bouquet delivers a bright and zesty nose of lemon, salty minerality, a touch of menthol, ocean breeze and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and elegant, with lovely focus and grip, frothy *mousse*, superb mineral drive and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is first class juice! 2021-2040. **91+.**

2018 Brut Rosé “de Nit” - Raventós i Blanc (Conca del Riu Anoia)

The 2018 Brut Rosé “de Nit” from Raventós i Blanc is the palest salmon color one can imagine. The *cépages* is thirty-eight percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent Macabeu, twenty-six percent Parellada and six percent Monastrell added to give the wine its pale color. The wine was aged eighteen months *sur latte* and disgorged in November of 2020. The bouquet is pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a lovely constellation of tangerine, wild strawberry, salty minerality, just a whisper of orange blossom and a topnote of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and light on its feet, with a lovely core, fine *mousse*, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and dancing finish. This was the first glass of sparkling wine I drank on my first visit to Catalunya and it has always retained a special place in my memory for that reason. It is so nice to see it every bit as refined in the 2018 vintage as it was a dozen years ago and I cannot overstate how beautifully this goes with tapas! 2021-2040. **92.**

2017 Cava “Gran Reserva” Extra Brut- Bohigas

The 2017 Cava “Gran Reserva” Extra Brut from Bohigas is composed of a blend of forty percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent Macabeo, twenty percent Parellada and ten percent Chardonnay. The wine spends two and a half years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and was finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. It delivers a lovely and vibrant bouquet of lemon, tart pear, salty soil tones, wild fennel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse* and lovely balance and grip on the long and complex finish. This is excellent Cava! 2021-2045. **91+**.

2016 “De La Finca” Brut Nature- Raventós i Blanc (Conca del Riu Anoia)

Raventós i Blanc’s “De La Finca” bottling is composed from a blend of fifty percent Xarel-lo, forty percent Macabeu and ten percent Peralada. The 2016 version was disgorged at the end of August of 2020 after three and a half years aging on its fine lees. The bouquet is bright, complex and beautifully precise, jumping from the glass in a mix of lime, tart orange, a gorgeous base of minerality, raw almond, lemongrass, *fleur de sel* and a delicate topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a lovely core, great soil undertow and grip, snappy acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is a stunning bottle of Brut Nature that is starting to drink really well, but clearly will be even better with further bottle age. 2021-2050. **94**.

2016 “Textures De Pedra” Blanc de Negres Brut- Raventós i Blanc (Conca del Riu Anoia)

The Textures de Pedra bottling from Raventós I Blanc is their Blanc de Noirs cuvée, made from the red-skinned grapes of Xarel-lo Vermell, Bastard Negra and Sumoll. The 2016 version was disgorged at the very end of October of 2020, after more than three and a half years aging *sur latte*. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of wizened apple, pecan, salty minerality, a touch of warm bread and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This wine has a lovely patina of age from its extended fine lees aging, but is still snappy and precise on the palate and will age long and gracefully. Fine, juice. 2021-2045+. **93**.

Rosado

2020 Bovale Rosado (Utiel-Requana) screwcap

The Bovale Rosado hails from forty year-old Bobal grapes grown at an elevation of three thousand feet above sea level. The 2020 is a lovely, very pale salmon color and offers up a pretty nose of watermelon, white cherries, white soil tones and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and nicely light on its feet, with sound framing acids, good focus and bounce and a sneaky long finish. This is made for easy quaffing and is quite tasty. 2021-2022. **87**.

2020 Garnacha Rosado- Legado del Moncayo (Campo de Borja) screwcap

As readers know, I am a big fan of Legado del Moncayo’s red wines made from their old vine Garnacha, grown on the side of an extinct volcano in the Campo de Borja D.O. Their 2020 Rosado hails from these same vineyards and is a good bottle, offering up a vibrant nose of strawberries, watermelon, orange blossoms, chalky soil tones and a hint of violets. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a good core of fruit, sound acids and good length and grip on the finish. This is still quite young and will be more complex with a bit of

bottle age, but has good constituent components. It is already a bit pinched by its closure, so it really needs a bit of aeration to blossom in the glass. 2021-2024. **88.**

2020 Rioja Rosado “Solarce”- Casa La Rad

The 2020 Solarce Rosado from Casa La Rad is composed of twenty-five percent each of Tempranillo, Graciano, Garnacha and Mazuelo. The wine is a very pale salmon color and offers up a beautifully expressive nose of white cherries, nectarine, salty white soil tones, spring flowers and a gentle touch of Rioja spice. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and youthful, with a lovely core and mineral undertow, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and very promising finish. This is drinkable today, but clearly built to age gracefully and will be far more complex with a bit of bottle age. First class Rioja Rosado! 2021-2030+. **90+.**

2019 Rioja Garnacha Rosado- Viña Otano (screwcap)

The 2019 Garnacha Rosado from Viña Otano is a lovely, pale salmon color and offers up a bright bouquet of strawberries, orange peel, salty soil tones and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bouncy, full-bodied and juicy at the core, with a good foundation of soil tones, moderate acids and good length on the finish. This is not overly complex, but hits all the right notes and is quite food friendly. 2021-2023. **87.**

2019 Rosa De Arrocal (Ribera Del Duero)

The 2019 Rosa De Arrocal is composed entirely of tempranillo and is nicely ripe, coming in at thirteen percent in this vintage. The wine is a fairly dark Rosé, with a vibrant cherry red color and delivers a pretty nose of tangerine, cherries, rose petals and a touch of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a very good core of fruit, good framing acidity and lovely length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This has a nice vinous touch to it and would be lovely with little grilled lamb chops in the heat of a summer evening. 2021-2024. **88.**

2019 Fontecón Rosé- Bodegas Zarate (Val do Salnés)

The Fontecón Rosé from Bodegas Zarate is made from a blend of Caiño Tinto, Espadeiro and Albariño. It is a beautiful salmon color and delivers a nascently complex bouquet of strawberries, watermelon, *fleur de sel*, stony minerality, bonfire, brown spices and orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, complex and has a touch of natural wine “wildness” to it (Eulogio Pomares bottles with very minimal sulfur), with lovely intensity of flavor and length and a vibrant, zesty finish. This does not strike me as quite as structurally sound as the Albariños from Zarate, so I would opt for drinking this very interesting Rosé over the relative near-term. 2021-2023. **91.**

Rias Baixas Blanco y Tinto

2020 Albariño “Nessa”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas) screwcap

Nessa is the entry level bottling of Albariño from Gran Vinum, and I understand that the market wants this wine under screwcap, but to my palate, it is just too good an example to be sacrificed under the screw! The 2020 offers up a bright and zesty nose of lime, green apple, sea salts, wet stone minerality and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and complex, with a good core, fine mineral undertow and a long, classy finish. This is very good Albariño for its very moderate price tag! 2021-2028. **89.**



2020 Albariño “Mar de Viñas”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Val do Salnés) screwcap

The 2020 Albariño “Mar de Viñas” from Adegas Gran Vinum is a lovely bottle. The nose offers up an aromatic constellation of lemon, green apple, salty minerality, a bit of ocean breeze and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an impressive core of fruit, lovely mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, poised and vibrant finish. This is very good Albariño, which really deserves a natural cork closure! 2021-2026+. **90+**.

2019 Albariño “Selección Especial”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)

Gran Vinum’s Selección Especial is produced from fifty-plus year-old Albariño vines. The wine is aged for seven months on its fine lees, with a small percentage of the blend raised in older Burgundy casks, rather than the stainless steel for the remainder of the cuvée. The 2019 offers up a lovely bouquet of grapefruit, lemon peel, ocean breeze saltiness, wild fennel and a lovely base of wet stone minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, vibrant, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and backend lift and a long, zesty and very well-balanced finish. This is drinking beautifully, but will also age very gracefully. 2021-2035+. **93**.

2019 Albariño- Lagar de Cervera (Rías Baixas)

Lagar de Cervera is owned by La Rioja Alta, who purchased this seventy-seven hectare vineyard back in 1988. The 2019 Albariño is a fine example, offering up a bright bouquet of

lime, salty minerality, tart pear, just a hint of menthol, white flowers and a topnote of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with good, zesty acids, lovely focus and a long, bouncy finish. This is the first vintage of Lagar de Cervera Albariño I have tasted and I have been remiss in not having tried it previously, as it is very good juice. 2021-2028. **91.**

2019 Albariño “A Cruz das Ánimas”- Atalier Raúl Pérez (Val do Salnés)

The 2019 Albariño “A Cruz das Ánimas” from Raúl Pérez is made from a pair of vineyards near Cambados planted to very old, pergola-trained vines, with one of the parcels at least one hundred and fifty years of age! The wine is fermented and aged in older *foudres*, rather than the stainless steel more typically used in the region. The 2019 offers up a fine young nose of grapefruit, lemon peel, salty minerality, a touch of wild fennel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent backend mineral drive and cut, zesty acids and a long, focused and very classy finish. This is excellent Albariño! 2021-2035+. **94.**

2019 Albariño “Tabla de Sumar”- Compañía de Vinos Tricó (Rías Baixas)

José Antonio López’s Tabla de Sumar bottling is his entry level Albariño, produced from vineyards in the southern sector of Condado do Tea. The wine is aged six months in tank on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2019 Tabla de Sumar offers up a wide open and beautifully expressive nose of lemon, tart orange, striking minerality, a bit of ocean breeze and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely mineral undertow, an excellent core of fruit, lovely balance and a long, vibrant finish. This is lovely Albariño. 2021-2030. **90.**

2019 Albariño- Bodegas Zarate (Val do Salnés)

The 2019 Albariño regular bottling from Eulogio Pomares’ beloved family estate of Bodegas Zarate is simply outstanding. The wine is made from some of Eulogio’s youngest vines, averaging about thirty-five years of age, which he ferments with indigenous yeasts. The 2019 version is precise, complex and minerally in personality, offering up scents of fresh lime, gooseberry, stony minerality, lemongrass, a bit of briny ocean breeze and a delicate topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a rock solid core, great mineral drive and grip, snappy acids and a very long, focused and complex finish. This is great Albariño in the making, which is approachable today, but really deserves a few years in the cellar to show off more of its layers of complexity! 2021-2040. **93+.**

2019 Albariño “Balado”- Bodegas Zarate (Val do Salnés)

The single vineyard bottling of Balado from Eulogio Pomares hails from a pair of small parcels of extremely old, ungrafted vines. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and given six months aging on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2019 version delivers a stunningly deep and complex nose of bread fruit, lemon, complex, granitic minerality, a lovely touch of the lees, dried flowers and a whisper of white lilies in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very mineral in personality, with a great core of fruit from the old vines, snappy acids, excellent grip and a very long, nascently complex and extremely promising finish. The 2019 Balado really demands a few years (at least) in the cellar before broaching, as it is still tightly-knit and is only showing a small slice of the complexity to come! 2024-2050. **94+.**

2019 Fontecón Tinto- Bodegas Zarate (Val do Salnés)

The Fontecón Tinto from Bodegas Zarate is made from a blend of Caiño Tinto and Espadeiro. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in open top vats for one month, with daily punch-downs and then aged for one year in large, used casks prior to bottling. The 2019

Fontecón Tinto offers up a beautifully bright and complex bouquet of red berries, cherry stone, peppercorn, stony soil tones, cinnamon and a wide array of very attractive botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-bodied and intensely flavored, with lovely transparency and bounce, a tightly-knit personality and a long, tangy and very promising finish. Though this wine has little tannin, it is still a young wine and needs some bottle age to unfurl and drink with all of its inherent complexity. Lovely juice. 2025-2045+. **91.**

2018 Albariño “Tras da Viña”- Bodegas Zarate (Val do Salnés)

The Tras da Viña single vineyard bottling from Eulogio Pomares is his youngest vines bottled on their own, as these were planted from cuttings taken from one of his pre-phylloxera parcels and planted in 1970. The soils here produce a very long-lived wine and this bottling will typically go through malolactic fermentation and this is given a year and a half on its fine lees aging prior to bottling. The 2018 Tras da Viña offers up a beautifully precise and saline bouquet of lemon, lime, a very complex base of salty minerality, citrus peel, incipient notes of beeswax and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely signature of soil, a fine core, bright acids and a long, complex and vibrant finish. There is a roundness here from the malo that gives the wine more accessibility out of the blocks than the Balado vineyard bottling, but this too will be a long-distance runner in the cellar. 2021-2045. **94.**

2016 Albariño- Compañía de Vinos Tricó (Condado de Tea)

This is Señor López’s top bottling of Albariño, also produced from vineyards in the warmer Condado de Tea section of Rías Baixas. The wine is aged on its fine lees for fully eighteen months prior to bottling, and then given an additional year of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release! The 2016 version is superb, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a deep and complex blend of lime, sweet grapefruit, a beautifully complex base of salty soil tones, lemongrass, a hint of wild fennel and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, deep and full-bodied, with a rock solid core, excellent mineral drive, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is fairly powerful for Albariño, but still light on its feet and minerally in personality. Very, very impressive juice! 2021-2040+. **93.**

Ribera Sacra Blanco

2018 Godello- Alvaredos-Hobbs

The foundation of this project is the lovely family vineyards of Antonio López Fernández, whose family had farmed in the village of Alvaredos for several generations. However, Antonio, like many in his family, had immigrated to the United States and the family vineyard heritage was falling into neglect. Antonio met Paul Hobbs in 2014 and together they started resurrecting these steep, primarily slate-based vineyards. Their Godello is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in older *foudres* for ten months prior to bottling. The wine does not go through malolactic fermentation. The 2018 version offers up a ripe and exotic nose of pineapple, passion fruit, lime peel, lovely mineral undertow and just a touch of cut grass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and ripe, with respectable framing acids, lovely focus and bounce and a long, fairly complex finish. This comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane, but seems a touch riper to my palate. I like its tropical flavors and impressive depth, but it is a bit of a stylistic outlier for Godello. 2021-2023. **87.**

2018 Lapola- Dominio Do Bibei (Quiroga-Bibei)

The 2018 Lapola from Dominio Do Bibei is composed from a rather unique *cépages* of seventy-five percent Godello, twenty percent Albariño and five percent Doña Blanca. The vineyards are planted on a combination of schist and slate and the wine is fermented in *foudre* and cement vats, without going through malolactic fermentation. *Elevage* is done in *demi-muids* and *foudres*. The 2018 Lapola delivers a fine aromatic constellation of lemon, pear, paraffin, lovely minerality, raw almonds and a musky topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely snappy, with an excellent core of fruit, superb soil signature and grip, fine complexity and a long, bouncy and finely tuned finish. Fine juice. 2021-2030. **90.**

Ribera Sacra Tinto

2019 Mencía- Adega Algueira (Amandi)

The vineyards for the regular bottling of Mencía from Adega Algueira range from thirty to fully eighty years of age. This is the estate's entry level bottling, fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks. The 2019 comes in at a cool thirteen percent octane and offers up a refined and youthfully complex blend of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, stony soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, transparent and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, impeccable balance and a long, complex and focused finish. There is a bit of backend tannin here, but it is buried in the lovely fruit of this wine and it is hardly a crime to be drinking it right out of the blocks, despite the fact that it clearly has the depth and structure to age gracefully for twenty-five years or more. Fine juice. 2021-2050. **92+.**

2019 Castro Candaz Tinto- Raúl Pérez y Rodrigo Méndez (Chantada)

The 2019 Castro Candaz Tinto from Raúl Pérez and Rodrigo Méndez is composed of the region's classic field blend of Mencía, Bastardo, Mouratón, Caiño, Brancellao and Garnacha Tintorera. The grapes are sourced from two vineyards, with the soils more granitic and slate in this section of the Sil River. The wine is one hundred percent whole clusters and raised in older *foudre* and *demi-muids*. The bouquet is bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of pomegranate, red berries, tree bark, a nice touch of Brancellao botanicals, stony soil tones, sweet stem elements and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a succulent core, excellent backend lift and grip, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and vibrant finish. This is approachable out of the blocks, but really deserves some time in the cellar to let those tannins soften more completely and the wine to unlock its secondary layers of complexity. This is outstanding and beautifully light on its feet! 2025-2055. **93.**

2018 Castro Candaz “Finca El Curvado”- Raúl Pérez y Rodrigo Méndez (Chantada)

The Finca El Curvado bottling from Castro Candaz is produced from two vineyards: Finca Vilanova (planted 1950) and Finca Rumiños (planted in 1972), with both of them on primarily granite and schist soils, with a veining of slate. The vines are mostly Mencía, but with the usual field blend suspects of Garnacha Tintorera, Bastardo and Caiño also co-planted here. The 2019 was fermented with all whole clusters and raised in older *foudres* and *demi-muids*. It offers up pure, black fruity nose of cassis, pomegranate, coffee bean, tree bark, stony minerality, graphite and just a touch of upper register botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with a superb core of fruit, lovely mineral transparency, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is still quite tightly-knit and will probably

need to be a decade old before it really blossoms, but all of the constituent components are in place for fine, fine future drinking! 2028-2055+. **93.**

2018 Castro Candaz “A Boca Do Demo”- Raúl Pérez y Rodrigo Méndez (Chantada)

The single vineyard A Boca Do Demo cuvée from Castro Candaz hails from the vineyard of Finca as Bodegas, which was planted in 1950 to the usual field blend of primarily Mencía, married with the customary augmentation of Garnacha Tintorera, Bastardo and Caiño. Again, the soils are mostly granite, interspersed with schist and slate and the wine is one hundred percent whole clusters and raised entirely in older *foudres*. The 2018 A Boca Do Demo offers up a youthful bouquet of dark berries, pomegranate, tree bark, cigar ash, coffee grounds, lovely botanicals, stony soil elements and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, sleep and still quite tightly-knit finish. There is plenty of depth and complexity lying in wait here, but a bit of patience will be required. 2028-2060+. **93+.**



The ancient, terraced vineyards along the Miño River in Ribeira Sacra.

2016 Lalama- Dominio Do Bibei (Quiroga-Bibei)

Dominio Do Bibei probably would not have come to my attention, if Laura Lorenzo had not been the winemaker here prior to starting out her own project of Daterra Viticultores. As the name implies, Dominio Do Bibei is located in the most isolated and rustically beautiful corner of Ribeira Sacra, Quiroga-Bibei, where the terraced mountain vineyards are planted on granite to the customary regional blends dominant in Mencía, co-planted with smaller percentages of Brancellao, Garnacha Tintorera, Bastardo and Caiño. The Lalama bottling is made from destemmed grapes, fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in older Burgundy casks prior to bottling. The 2016 version is a beautifully refined wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pomegranate, red and dark berries, woodsmoke, a touch of sweet hazelnut (like a Rostaing Côte-Rôtie), stony soil tones, graphite and a gentle floral topnote that hints at violet. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with a beautiful core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins, fine soil signature and outstanding length and grip on the very well-balanced and complex finish. This is outstanding juice and a stunning value! 2025-2055+. **93.**

2016 Lacima- Dominio Do Bibei (Quiroga-Bibei)

The 2016 Lacima bottling from Dominio Do Bibei is an old vine cuvée composed from a blend of seventy-five percent Mencía, twenty percent Brancellao, three percent Mouratón and two percent Sousón. The vines range from sixty to fully one hundred and ten years of age! The bunches are destemmed, the wine undergoes its malolactic fermentation in used Burgundy casks and is aged for about a year and a half in barrel, prior to racking to large vats for another five months prior to bottling. The 2016 is the new release of this bottling, as the winery also holds it back in the cellars to give it some bottle aging prior to shipping. The wine is beautifully complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, pomegranate, tree bark, graphite, stony minerality, just a touch of nutty oak and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core of black fruit, great mineral drive and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length on the complex and vibrant finish. This is still a young wine and deserves another five years or more in the cellar, but in due course, this is going to be flat out brilliant! 2026-2065. **94+.**

2016 Dominio Do Bibei Tinto- Dominio Do Bibei (Quiroga-Bibei)

The cuvée that takes its name from the winery actually includes no Mencía in its *cépages*, as this bottling is comprised of eighty percent Brancellao and twenty percent Mouratón. The bunches are destemmed (as is the case for all the estate's wines) and then fermented in open top, five hundred liter casks. It undergoes malo in three hundred liter *barriques* and is aged in the same for fifteen months, prior to being racked to fifteen hundred liter vats for the final six months of its *elevage*. The 2016 Domino Do Bibei delivers a superb aromatic constellation of cherries, pomegranate, tree bark, lovely Brancellao botanicals, granitic minerality and a touch of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy and full-bodied, with gorgeous transparency and complexity, a lovely core of fruit, moderate tannins and super backend mineral drive on the long, perfectly balanced finish. This is a great wine in the making. 2025-2060. **94.**

Bierzo Blanco

2020 Godello- Bodegas Luna Beberide

Bodegas Luna Beberide's Godello vines are old, planted on a combination of schist and slate. Their 2020 version is a lovely wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting

from the glass in a youthful mix of tart pear, lemon, wild fennel, stony soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a superb core, lovely mineral undertow and cut and a long, nascently complex and classy finish. I really like the gentle botanical layers here from the wild fennel-like elements, as they work beautifully at the table. 2021-2030. **91.**

Bierzo Tinto

2019 Mencía- Bodegas Luna Beberide

The Mencía bottling from Bodegas Luna Beberide is made from vines that range from thirty to forty years of age, grown on clay and limestone soils. This cuvée is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel and comes in at 13.5 percent octane in 2019. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of dark berries, cassis, tree bark, bonfire, a touch of fresh thyme, dark soil tones and chicory. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a good core, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is a touch reductive when first opened, so if you are inclined to drink it in its youth, then decant it for fifteen or twenty minutes before serving. Despite its modest price tag, it will age very nicely and I would be inclined to give it at least a few years of bottle age and really let it blossom properly. It is an outstanding value! 2021-2045+. **90.**

2019 Dominio de Anza “Selección de Parcelas”- Diego Magaña

Diego Magaña is a native of Navarra, but has developed projects in both Bierzo and Rioja Alavesa in the last half dozen years. His Dominio de Anza label produces two, old vine cuvées of primarily-Mencía field blends, with the vines for his Selección de Parcelas bottling ranging from eighty to one hundred years of age. The Selección de Parcelas includes a bit of Bastardo and Garnacha Tintorera to go with the Mencía. The wine is fermented in open top *tinias* and then aged in used casks and *demi-muids* for twelve months prior to bottling. The 2019 delivers a fine bouquet of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, tree bark, espresso, cigar smoke, a touch of grilled meats and a superb base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, good soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, poised and nascently complex finish. This is first class Bierzo! 2026-2055. **92+.**

2019 Dominio de Anza “Finca el Rapolao”- Diego Magaña

Diego Magaña’s single vineyard bottling of Finca el Rapolao is his top cuvée, produced primarily of Mencía, with a bit of Bastardo, Doña Blanca and Garnacha Tintorera co-planted here. The 2019 vintage was quite warm, so Señor Magaña decided to fully de-stem the bunches this year, with the wine fermented with native yeasts and aged in older Burgundy casks for twelve months prior to bottling. The wine delivers a fine aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, coffee bean, a beautifully complex base of Bierzo’s dark soil tones, a nice touch of upper register botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and ripely tannic, with a fine core, lovely soil transparency and grip, very good balance and a long, nascently complex and extremely promising finish. This is a great wine in the making! 2029-2060. **94.**

2019 Pétalos- Descendientes de J. Palacios

The 2019 Pétalos from the Ricardo Perez’s and Alvaro Palacios’ Bierzo project, Descendientes de J. Palacios, is a superb young bottle of Mencía. The wine offers a pure and complex bouquet of dark berries, graphite, pomegranate, a hint of anise, stony minerality, tree bark and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe tannins and a long,

complex and very promising finish. This bottling is designed for early drinking, but to my palate, the excellent 2019 Pétalos is too serious to drink without giving it at least a handful of years in the cellar to let some of its backend tannins soften up and more of the submerged complexity here to surface. This is excellent. 2027-2055+. **93.**



2018 Mencía “Finca Luna Beberide”- Bodegas Luna Beberide

The Finca Luna Beberide bottling is from the estate’s own vineyard, which is planted on slate, chalk and clay and has vines that are sixty years of age. The wine is aged in a combination of new and one wine French barrels prior to bottling. The 2018 Finca Luna Beberide shows off a lovely nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, espresso, slate, tree bark, woodsmoke, smoked meats, cedar and a nice touch of graphite in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely old vine creaminess at the core, superb mineral drive and grip, excellent focus and a long, suavely-tannic, complex and tangy finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it is approachable today, but it is built to age and will be even more dazzling five to ten years down the road. Great juice. 2021-2065. **93+**.

2018 Mencía “Art- Viña la Recuperada”- Bodegas Luna Beberide

The 2018 vintage of Luna Beberide’s Art bottling is an outstanding example of old vine Mencía (the vines are seventy to eighty years of age), with the wine aged for fourteen months entirely in new French Burgundy barrels. The bouquet offers up a pure and complex blend of cassis, dark berries, tree bark, dark soil tones, a touch of smoked meats, black tea, licorice, slate

and a nice touch of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and nicely structured, with a good core, excellent soil signature and grip, chewy tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. Because of the utilization of all new casks here, this wine still needs some extended time to fully integrated its oak tannins on the palate before it will start to drink well. However, it should have the stuffing to carry the wood in due course and should be very tasty. But, that said, there are some serious oak tannins here still be absorbed and this wine really does not gain anything from all new wood- raise it in one wine barrels next time and it will not require a period of hibernation before one can get into all this great, old vine complexity! 2026-2055+. **90.**

2018 Mencía “Paixar”- Bodegas Luna Beberide

Paixar is the old vine bottling from Bodegas Luna Beberide, with all of these bush vines planted at high elevations and at least eighty years of age! The grapes are destemmed, the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts and then aged in used French barrels and *demi-muids* for fourteen months prior to bottling. The 2018 delivers a fine young bouquet of dark berries, cigar smoke, a touch of anise, a superb base of dark soil tones, coffee bean, graphite and just a wisp of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core of old vine fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, well-balanced and gently peppery finish. This is outstanding Mencía. 2027-2055+. **94.**

2018 Villa de Corullón- Descendientes de J. Palacios (half bottle)

The 2018 Villa de Corullón from Descendientes de J. Palacios is their old vine, blended cuvée (as opposed to the winery’s three single vineyard bottlings). It delivers marvelous aromatic refinement and complexity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of blackberry, pomegranate, bonfire, pepper, gentle botanical overtones, cola, bergamot, dark soil tones, graphite and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a lovely core, fine-grained tannins, impeccable focus and balance and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is so well balanced that it is pretty easy to drink today, but in reality, it is still a young wine and it is crazy not to give it at least five or six years in the cellar to let it deliver its secondary layers of complexity. Fine, fine juice. 2026-2065. **94.**

2018 Encinas- Antoine Graillet & Raúl Pérez

The 2018 Encinas from Antoine Graillet and Raúl Pérez is composed primarily of mencia, with some of the other local varieties included in small percentages as part of the field blend for this vineyard. The wine is fermented in cement vats and then aged in older *foudres* for ten months prior to bottling. It offers up a youthful and still slightly reductive bouquet of cassis, tree bark, espresso, dark soil tones, pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with ripe tannins, a good core of fruit, fine soil signature and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. This will want at least a few years in the cellar to blossom, but will be a very good bottle in due course. 2028-2055. **92.**

2018 Ulteira “St. Jacques”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez

The Ulteira “St. Jacques” bottling from Raúl Pérez is one of my favorite wines from him, as these vines were planted between 1900 and 1940. The vineyard is a classic, Mencía-dominated field blend, with the 2018 version including eighty percent whole clusters and aged in a combination of various old oak casks and vats, as well as some cement tanks. The wine offers up a pure and complex nose of dark berries, pomegranate, tree bark, woodsmoke, a beautiful base of dark soil tones, a dollop of sweet stem botanicals and just a touch of cigar ash in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and displays outstanding mid-palate depth, with a fine foundation of soil tones, ripe, buried tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long,

complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is simply outstanding young Bierzo! 2026-2060. **94.**

Valdeorras Blanco

2019 Godello- Adegas A Coroa

The regular bottling of Godello from Adegas A Coroa is produced from vines grown on slate soils, fermented with native yeasts in tank and raised in stainless steel prior to bottling. The wine does not go through malolactic fermentation and the 2019 version delivers a very pretty aromatic constellation of tart pear, a hint of beeswax, white flowers, a lovely base of soil tones and a nice touch of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral undertow, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is very good Godello. 2021-2026. **90.**

2018 Godello “Pagos del Galir”- Virgen del Galir

The Godello “Pagos del Galir” bottling from Cuné’s Virgen del Galir property is produced from the single vineyard of A Malosa, with the wine fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. The 2018 version offers up a lovely bouquet of tart orange, pear, hazelnut, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with fine balance and bounce, good mineral undertow and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is excellent Godello! 2021-2030+. **92.**

2017 Godello “200 Cestos”- Adegas A Coroa

The 200 Cestos bottling of Godello from Adegas A Coroa is sourced from the single, terraced vineyard of Valdaguas, which was planted in 1940! The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in a combination of *demi-muids* and *foudres* and aged in the same for six months prior to bottling. The 2017 version of 200 Cestos delivers a fine nose of pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, a superb base of soil tones, lavender, beeswax, fresh almonds and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with a great girdle of acidity, laser-like focus, seamless balance and a long, precise and vibrant finish. This is simply stunning Godello, which will age long and gracefully! 2021-2045+. **94.**

Getariako Txakolina

2019 Txakoli Malda- Bodegas Zudugarai

The 2019 Txakoli Malda from Bodegas Zudugarai is composed entirely of Hondarrabi Zuri and is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. It offers up a very pretty, expressive nose of breadfruit, a touch of casaba, lemongrass, salty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-full and gently *frizzante*, with nice mid-palate depth, good mineral undertow and a long, nicely balanced finish. Good juice. 2021-2027. **90.**

Rioja Blanco

2019 Rioja Blanco- Alegre Valgañón

The 2019 Rioja Blanco from Oscar Alegre and Eva Valgañón is comprised of a blend of ninety percent Viura and ten percent Garnacha Blanca, with the wine aged for a year in used *demi-muids*. The wine offers up a beautiful young bouquet of tart pear, bread fruit, raw almond, very salty soil tones, a touch of iodine and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak from the older casks. On the palate the wine is bright, young and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, a hint of

natural wine wildness to it on the backend, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This could do with a bit of bottle age to blossom fully. 2022-2045. **90.**

2016 Rioja “Suañé” Reserva Blanco- Alonso & Pedrajo

The 2016 Rioja “Suañé” Reserva Blanco from Alonso & Pedrajo is fermented and aged three months in amphora and bottled without any added sulfites. The 2016 version is a lovely golden color and offers up a complex bouquet of tangerine, toasted nuts, salty soil tones, citrus peel, a bit of browned butter and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite rock solid at the core, with lovely soil signature and grip, almost a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and zesty finish. There is a touch of natural wine “wildness” on the nose here, but the palate is fresh, vibrant and complex and seems to still have years of life ahead of it. This is hardly a classical example of Rioja Blanco, but it is an excellent wine with its own, unique personality. 2021-2026. **92.**

Rioja Tinto

2019 Rioja “Acentor”- Bodegas Casa La Rad (Rioja Baja)

The 2019 Acentor bottling from Casa La Rad is made from a blend of eighty-five percent tempranillo, ten percent graciano and five percent matorana tinto. The wine is raised for ten months in French oak casks, but none of the oak is new. It delivers an impressively deep and nascently complex bouquet of black raspberries, cigar ash, Rioja spice tones, a fine base of soil and a suave framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the nascently complex and nicely balanced finish. This is a young wine and needs cellaring before it starts to drink with generosity, but it is going to be excellent in due course. At \$20 a bottle here in the US, it is an outstanding value! 2027-2055. **91+.**

2019 Rioja “Bozeto de Exopto”- Bodegas Exopto

Tom Puyaubert moved from France to Rioja in the year 2000, having fallen in love working for a French *tonnelier* in the Spanish market prior to decamping to start his own winery in Rioja. His Bozeto de Exopto is composed of a blend of Garnacha (from vineyards in Rioja Baja), fifty percent Tempranillo and ten percent Graciano (both from parcels in Rioja Alta). The wine is fermented with native yeasts in cement *lagars* and aged in a combination of cement and *foudres*. The 2019 comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a ripe and complex nose of dark berries, Rioja spice tones, cigar ash, a lovely foundation of soil, a bit of pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, young and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is a very good wine in the making- just give it a few more years in the cellar to soften up a bit more on the backend. 2025-2045. **90.**

2019 Rioja “Cosecha”- Bodegas Señorío Pedro Peciña (Rioja Alta)

The 2019 Rioja “Cosecha” from Bodegas Peciña is a lovely wine, with plenty of black fruit informing both the nose and the palate. The bouquet is bright and jumps from the glass in a mix of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, just a touch of Rioja spice tones and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core of ripe fruit, good focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is still a young wine, but it is eminently drinkable already and will only get better with a bit of bottle age. This augurs extremely well for the Crianzas, Reservas and Gran Reservas we will see down the road from the 2019 vintage, as this wine is really excellent for its level! 2021-2040. **90.**



2018 Rioja “Solarce”- Bodegas Casa La Rad (Rioja Baja)

The blend for the Solarce bottling from Casa La Rad is quite different than their Acentor, as the *cépages* here is sixty percent tempranillo, thirty percent garnacha and five percent each of maturana and cabernet sauvignon (perhaps paying homage to all those great old Marqués de Riscal bottlings of yesteryear?). The wine is aged for eight months in used French barrels prior to bottling. The 2018 Solarce comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a ripe and complex nose of black cherries, hung game, a touch of *garrigue*, coffee grounds, a fine base of soil and just a whisper of cedar from the used barrels. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively transparent down to the soil, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. There is a touch of backend heat here, but the wine generally does a fine job of handling its octane quite well. Good juice that needs some time in the cellar. A fine value. 2024-2055. **89.**

2018 Rioja “Horizonte de Exopto”- Bodegas Exopto

The Horizonte de Exopto bottling from Tom Puyaubert is all made from high altitude, organically-farmed vineyards in the Rioja Alta sector, right at the foot of the Sierra Cantabria Mountains. The *cépages* is eighty percent Tempranillo and ten percent each of Garnacha and Graciano. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in concrete vats and aged in used, French barrels, with most of them *demi-muids*. The 2018 Horizonte de Exopto is a simply superb wine in the making, delivering a refined aromatic constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, Cuban cigar wrapper, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, blossoming notes of Rioja

spices and a very discreet framing of cedary French oak. On the palate the wine is suave, pure, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very, very promising finish. This is a great wine in the making, but it will need a fair bit of bottle age to start to soften up those backend tannins. In due course, it will be stellar! 2028-2065. **93+**.

2017 Rioja “Herminia”- Bodegas Viña Herminia (Rioja Baja)

The Herminia bottling from Bodegas Viña Herminia is graced with a label that features an artist’s rendering of one of the matriarchs from the founding family of this estate. The cuvée is composed entirely from tempranillo and is given four months of aging in cask and an additional four months of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. The 2017 Herminia is fairly ripe in style, offering up a nose of dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, well-aged leather, just a hint of cedary oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already quite velvety on the attack, with a nicely plump core, good soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, gently chewy and slightly warm finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol in this vintage, but carries it quite well. 2021-2045. **89**.

2017 Rioja “Crianza”- Bodegas Viña Otano (Rioja Alta)

The Crianza bottling from Viña Otano is composed from a blend of ninety percent tempranillo and ten percent mazuelo, with the wine aged in a combination of French and American oak for a year prior to bottling. The wine offers up a deep and youthful nose of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of Rioja spice, incipient nutskin, a lovely base of soil tones and smoky oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and has plenty of mid-palate depth, with moderate tannins, fine balance and grip and a long, tangy finish. This is still a puppy and deserves some bottle age to fully blossom. It will be a fine bottle when it is ready to drink, but it needs a bit of cellaring. 2025-2055. **90**.

2016 Rioja “Viña Real” Crianza- Cuné (Rioja Alavesa)

The 2016 Viña Real Crianza from Cuné is crafted almost entirely from tempranillo, with small percentages of garnacha, graciano and mazuelo in this vintage and was aged for just over a year in a mix of American and French oak barrels. It is a pretty, ripe, and already quite generous wine, delivering a deep and spicy bouquet of black raspberries, smoked meats, cloves, cigar smoke, a hint of dill, a good base of soil and some cedary oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core and soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy and spicy finish. This is an excellent Crianza that is drinking well already, but will be even better with a bit more bottle age. A stunning value! 2021-2050. **91+**.

2016 Rioja “Crianza”- Bodegas Viña Herminia (Rioja Baja)

Bodegas Viña Herminia is owned by the excellent Sherry house of Lustau and is making excellent wines. Their 2016 Crianza is composed of a blend of eighty-five percent tempranillo and fifteen percent garnacha, with the wine aging for one year in a combination of French and American oak barrels. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a bit of roasted meats, gentle oakiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a nice touch of velvetiness on the attack, ripe tannins and a long, complex and slightly warm finish. This comes in at 14.5 percent octane, but carries its alcohol quite well. 2021-2045. **89+**.

2015 Rioja “Reserva”- Contino (Rioja Alavesa)

The 2015 Contino Reserva is composed this year of a blend of eighty-five percent tempranillo, ten percent graciano and five percent a mix of garnacha and Mazuelo. The wine was aged two years in cask, with all of the barrels older, comprised of a mix of sixty percent French oak and forty percent American oak. The wine comes in at fourteen percent and delivers a deep and beautifully refined bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, Cuban cigar wrapper, Rioja spice tones, a touch of smoked meats, complex soil tones and just a whiff of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely structured out of the blocks, with a great core, excellent soil transparency and grip, ripe tannins and a long, vibrant and very, very promising finish. In due course, this is going to be a very elegant vintage of Contino Reserva, but it will need some time in the cellar to really start to blossom! 2028-2075. **94.**

2015 Rioja “Reserva”- Cuné (Rioja Alta)

Cuné’s 2015 Rioja “Reserva” is a very lovely bottle and a fine value! The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, black raspberries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, cloves, a nice touch of both cedary and American oak aromatics and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, suave, moderate tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice. 2021-2050. **91.**

2015 Rioja “Viña Real” Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alavesa)

Cuné’s 2015 Viña Real Reserva is comprised this year of a blend of ninety percent tempranillo and ten percent a mix of graciano, mazuelo and garnacha. It is aged for twenty-two months in a combination of seventy percent French casks and thirty percent American barrels, with the oak being one or two years of age. It is also given another year in the cellar after bottling before being released. It delivers a pure and complex bouquet of red and black raspberries, cigar wrapper, cinnamon, cloves, salty soil tones, a hint of celery seed, woodsmoke and a nice mix of cedar and American oak scents. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with the first hints of velvet already showing on the attack, a lovely core, beautiful transparency and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a superb vintage for Viña Real Reserva! It is certainly easy to drink already, but it will be even better a decade down the road, when the tannins have softened up a bit more and the wine is even more completely velvety and complex! 2021-2075+. **93+.**

2015 Rioja “Imperial” Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alta)

The summer of 2015 was plenty warm, so the Imperial Reserva from this vintage comes in at fourteen percent octane. The bouquet offers up a deep and complex constellation of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of clove, a touch of spiced meats and a sound foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with the first vestiges of velvetiness on the attack, a lovely core and soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, classy and tangy finish. This is approachable at six years of age, but is still a young wine and will be an even better drink five to ten years down the road. 2021-2065. **93.**

2015 Rioja “Viña Alberdi” Reserva- La Rioja Alta (Rioja Alta)

The 2015 Viña Alberdi Reserva from La Rioja Alta is just a stunning wine and a superb value, as seems to always be the case! The wine is composed entirely of Tempranillo and offers up a beautifully pure and classic bouquet of red and black cherries, raspberries, cinnamon, cloves, lavender, salty soil tones, Cuban cigar wrapper and toasted coconut American oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and very elegant in profile, with a velvety attack, a sappy core,

great backend soil definition, tangy acids, a bit of buried tannin, great grip and a very long, poised and complex finish. This is such a classic, old school Rioja bottling from La Rioja Alta that never seems to get the respect it deserves! 2021-2050. **93.**

2014 Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Cuné (Rioja Alta)

The 2014 Rioja “Gran Reserva” from Cuné is a beautiful wine and an outstanding value. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a classical blend of black raspberries, black cherries, cigar wrapper, Rioja spice tones, dark soil elements, a wisp of cedar and a lovely foundation of toasted coconut American oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and just starting to get velvety on the attack, a lovely core of fruit, ripe, suave tannins, tangy acids and great focus and balance on the long, complex and vibrant finish. This is a beautiful wine that is just starting to truly blossom, but which will be even better a decade down the road! The straight Cuné bottlings often get overlooked by fans looking for either the Imperial, Viña Real or Contino cuvées from the bodegas, but this wine is a beautiful example of just how good these wines are as well! 2021-2060. **94.**

2014 Rioja “Imperial” Gran Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alta)

The 2014 vintage of Rioja “Imperial” Gran Reserva from Cuné is composed of its customary *cépages* of eighty-five percent tempranillo, ten percent graciano and five percent Mazuelo. It is aged three years in barrel and another four years in bottle prior to release. The wine is beautiful aromatically, wafting from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, black cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, a touch of celery seed, a salty base of soil tones, clove-like spice tones and a nice framing of French and American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core, bright acids, suave tannins and a very long, very pure and complex finish. This is a great bottle in the making, but though it is already very easy to drink, give it five more years in the cellar to allow it to become completely velvety and even more complex! 2026-2075. **94+.**

2014 Rioja “Finca Martelo” Reserva- Torre de Oña (Rioja Alavesa)

The Finca Martelo bottling is an old vine selection from Torre de Oña. The wine is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent tempranillo and the other five percent made up of a mix of garnacha, graciano and viura. The wine is aged for fully two years in barrel, with eighty percent of the oak of American origin and twenty percent French. The 2014 Finca Martelo offers up an excellent and very classical bouquet of raspberries, cherries, Cuban cigars, a complex base of soil tones, Rioja spices and a superb framing of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, refined and full-bodied, with a velvety palate impression, a superb core of fruit, fine soil undertow and a long, suavely tannic and complex finish. Torre de Oña is owned by La Rioja Alta, so it comes as no surprise how classically-styled this lovely Rioja is in 2014! This is already drinking quite nicely, but clearly still has room to grow with further cellaring. Fine juice. 2021-2055. **93.**

2014 Rioja “Reserva”- Bodegas Viña Otano (Rioja Alta) served from magnum

The 2014 Rioja “Reserva” from Viña Otano is a lovely wine that is really starting to drink beautifully at seven years of age. The *cépages* of the 2014 is eighty-five percent Tempranillo, ten percent Graciano and five percent Mazuelo. The wine was aged for a year and a half in barrel, in a combination of French and American oak and has just been released from the cellars in magnum. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, black raspberries, Cuban cigar, a touch of spiced meats, a lovely base of soil tones, Rioja spice tones and a nice foundation of oak that blends cedar with the toasted coconut, American oak side of the

ledger. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature, still some moderate tannins and a long, tangy and focused finish. The wine is just starting to blossom in magnum and still has decades and decades of fine life ahead of it! This is fine juice and priced at \$50 a magnum in the US, is a superb value. 2021-2060+. **93.**

2014 Rioja “Reserva”- Bodegas Viña Herminia (Rioja Baja)

The 2014 Rioja “Reserva” from Bodegas Viña Herminia is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent tempranillo, ten percent garnacha and five percent graciano. The wine was aged for eighteen months in eighty percent American oak casks and twenty percent in French wood. The wine comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol and delivers a fine bouquet of black cherries, cigar wrapper, Rioja spice tones, a good base of dark soil, a bit of coconutty American oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already getting nicely velvety on the attack, with a lovely core, good soil undertow, suave tannins and a long, complex and ever so slightly warm finish. This is a lovely bottle in the making, but it has just enough tannin on the backend that a few more years in the cellar will pay dividends. 2024-2055+. **92.**

2014 Rioja Graciano “Reserva”- Bodegas Viña Otano (Rioja Alta)

This bottling from Viña Otano is made from fifty-plus year-old graciano vines. It is aged for two years in French oak barrels prior to bottling. The 2014 version is pretty ripe, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but offers up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, dark berries, Rioja spices, balsamic overtones, bonfire, incipiently autumnal soil tones, cedar and a lovely touch of savory elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, lovely transparency and grip, moderate tannins and just a whisper of backend heat on the long and tasty finish. This is an excellent example of graciano! 2026-2055. **92.**

2014 Rioja “Crianza”- Bodegas Señorío Pedro Peciña (Rioja Alta)

The 2014 Rioja “Crianza” from Bodegas Peciña is a gorgeous bottle of utterly classical Rioja, offering up an expressive and nicely precise bouquet of cherries, red and black raspberries, cloves, Cuban cigar wrapper, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a touch of bonfire and a lovely framing of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and already velvety on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins, excellent focus and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a beautiful example of how it is not necessary to buy Reservas and Gran Reservas exclusively to get a great bottle of Rioja! The wine is starting to drink quite nicely at age seven, but there are still some backend tannins here that would not look unkindly on another three to five years of cellaring. 2021-2045. **92+.**

2013 Rioja “Reserva”- Bodegas Señorío Pedro Peciña (Rioja Alta)

The 2013 Rioja “Reserva” from Bodegas Peciña is a beautifully classic and perfumed example of old school Rioja, offering up a gorgeous bouquet of raspberries, cherries, cloves, salty soil tones, a touch of spiced meats, sweet cigar smoke and a nice framing of American oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and spicy, with a lovely core of fruit, superb soil signature, tangy acids, suave, moderate tannins and a long, focused and very complex finish. Though this wine is now eight years of age, it is still a puppy and has decades and decades of life ahead of it, so despite it being already extremely tasty, it will be even better if tucked away in the cellar for at least another decade! Fine, fine juice. 2021-2065+. **93+.**

2012 Rioja “Viña Ardanza” Reserva- La Rioja Alta

The 2012 vintage of Viña Ardanza “Reserva” from La Rioja Alta is composed of a blend of seventy-eight percent tempranillo and twenty-two percent garnacha. The two varieties were fermented and aged in older American oak barrels separately, with the final blending not done until March of 2016. The wine is fairly ripe for this bottling, coming in at 14.5 percent octane this year, but classically balanced and carries its alcohol beautifully. The refined bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, raspberries, smoked meats, clove-like spice tones, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil and a nice touch of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and already quite velvety on the attack, with a superb core, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, complex finish. This is a lovely wine. 2021-2055. 92+.



2011 Rioja “Gran Reserva 904”- La Rioja Alta

The 2011 vintage of Gran Reserva 904 from La Rioja Alta is a beautiful bottle of Rioja. At ten years of age, it is starting to really arrive at its sweet spot of drinkability, where it will probably remain for the next half century or so! The gorgeous bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of raspberries, red plums, cloves, Cuban cigar wrapper, a complex base of salty soil tones, a hint of celery seed, orange zest, gentle smokiness and a lovely framing of toasted coconut American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, velvety and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, superb complexity and focus, suave, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy

and perfectly balanced finish. This is a fairly ripe vintage of 904, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but it is impeccably balanced and will age forever! Stunning wine. 2021-2075. **95.**

2010 Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Viña Otano (Rioja Alta) served from magnum

The 2010 Gran Reserva magnums from Viña Otano are also a new release out of the cellars. The wine is composed of a blend of eighty percent Tempranillo, fifteen percent Graciano and five percent Mazuelo, with the wine spending two years in cask (both American and French barrels). It was given nearly eight years of bottle aging in the bodegas’ cellars prior to this new release and is a lovely bottle. The nose delivers a superb aromatic constellation of black cherries, black raspberries, cloves, cigar smoke, almost salty soil tones, cedary oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and classy, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow and grip, still a bit of tannin and a long, tangy, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This seems a touch more influenced by its French oak than the 2014 Reserva, so it has a slightly different personality from that wine, without that lovely touch of toasted coconut from the American barrels that I find marries so beautifully with classical Rioja. Though this wine is now eleven years of age, it is still fairly youthful and will continue to get even better with further bottle age. Another fine value, as this is priced at \$70 per magnum here in the states, and probably quite a bit less in the EU. 2021-2060+. **93.**

2010 Rioja Gran Reserva “Finca Iscorta de Peciña”- Bodegas Hermanos Peciña

It had been two and a half years since I last tasted a bottle of the 2010 Rioja Gran Reserva “Finca Iscorta” from Bodegas Hermanos Peciña, so I was delighted to see how it was evolving with some bottle age. Readers may recall that this is a single vineyard bottling, produced from vines situated at five hundred meters above sea level and planted to fifty year-old tempranillo vines. The wine is given four years of aging in American casks and then another three years of bottle aging in the cellar before it was released. At age eleven it offers up a beautifully refined bouquet of black cherries, a touch of raspberry, Cuban cigar, a complex base of salty soil tones, a touch of celery seed, Rioja spices, coconutty oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and still quite youthful, with a beautiful core of fruit, the first vestiges of velvetiness on the attack, well-integrated, still fairly firm tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. It has moved along very nicely over the last two and a half years, but it is really still in climbing mode and deserves a bit more cellaring so that it can blossom completely. I clearly underestimated it a bit when I last tasted it! 2025-2075. **94.**

2009 Monte Real Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

When I wrote my feature on Bodegas Riojanas back in 2019, our vertical of Monte Real Gran Reserva skipped back from the 2010 vintage to 2004, so you can imagine my excitement when I heard that the estate was going to release a range of older vintages here starting with the 2009, which I had not tasted in many a year! The 2009 Monte Real Gran Reserva is an excellent wine, offering up a complex and now nicely mature bouquet of red and black raspberries, Cuban cigar wrapper, cinnamon and clove-like spice tones, a lovely base of quite salty soil tones, a hint of celery seed and a lovely framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and starting to get quite velvety on the attack, with a lovely core and soil signature, still a fair bit of ripe tannin and a long, tangy and very complex finish. At twelve years of age, this wine is approachable today, but still really a young wine and it will be even better if given at least a few more years in the cellar to further soften up its backend tannin. This is a riper year for Monte

Real, as the wine comes in listed at fourteen percent octane, but it is already displaying all of the characteristic elegance that is the calling card of this iconic bottling of old school Rioja! 2026-2075. **93+**.

2008 Monte Real Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 2008 vintage of Monte Real Gran Reserva is more black fruity in personality than the slightly riper 2009, offering up a deep, very complex and nicely “cool” aromatic constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, a lovely undertow of spice tones, savory elements of fresh bay, dried eucalyptus and balsam, a complex base of soil, cigar ash, graphite and a deft touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent transparency and focus, suave, buried tannins and a long, complex and utterly seamless finish. This is not quite as big of a wine as the 2009 version, but it is more precise, more complex and even a touch more promising. This is already drinking beautifully, but it is still in climbing mode and will be even better with further bottle age. A great vintage of Monte Real Gran Reserva! 2021-2075. **95**.

2007 Monte Real Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

As I noted in last summer’s article on Bodegas Riojanas’ Viña Albina bottling, 2007 does not have a great reputation as a vintage in Rioja, but it is extremely successful here and the wines are now drinking at their apogees and are one of my favorites for current consumption. The bouquet of the Monte Real 2007 Gran Reserva is beautifully aromatic, offering up a potpourri of spice and herb tones in its blend of clove, cardamom, fresh bay, balsam, allspice, black raspberries, cherries, forest floor-like soil tones, cedar and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and wide open on the attack, with a lovely core, beautiful soil signature and grip, still some backend tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. In contrast to the 2007 Viña Albina, there is a bit of backend tannin here from the French casks used for the *elevage* of this wine, which may never fully resolve and add a bit of grip here that is not found in the more velvety 2007 Viña Albina today. This is still a very tasty bottle, but I have to give the Viña Albina a slight nod in this vintage, due to its all older American oak *elevage*. 2021-2045+. **90**.

2006 Monte Real Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 2006 vintage was a difficult growing season in Rioja, with spring frosts and then drought conditions during the summer, but the Monte Real Gran Reserva has transcended those challenges and ended up a very, very good bottle. The bouquet is still a bit marked by its oak component, but offers up lovely complexity in its mélange of sweet dark berries, black cherries, cigar ash, celery seed, cloves, a fine base of soil tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely velvety on the attack, with a good core, tangy acids, fine focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex finish. Whereas I gave a slight nod to Bodegas Riojanas Viña Albina bottling in the 2007 vintage, the 2006 Monte Real is clearly the star in the cellars in this vintage! This is lovely juice (and truly exceptional for a 2006 Rioja!), with its touch of French oak adding another layer of complexity to a beautifully classic bottle of Rioja. 2021-2055. **93**.

2005 Monte Real Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

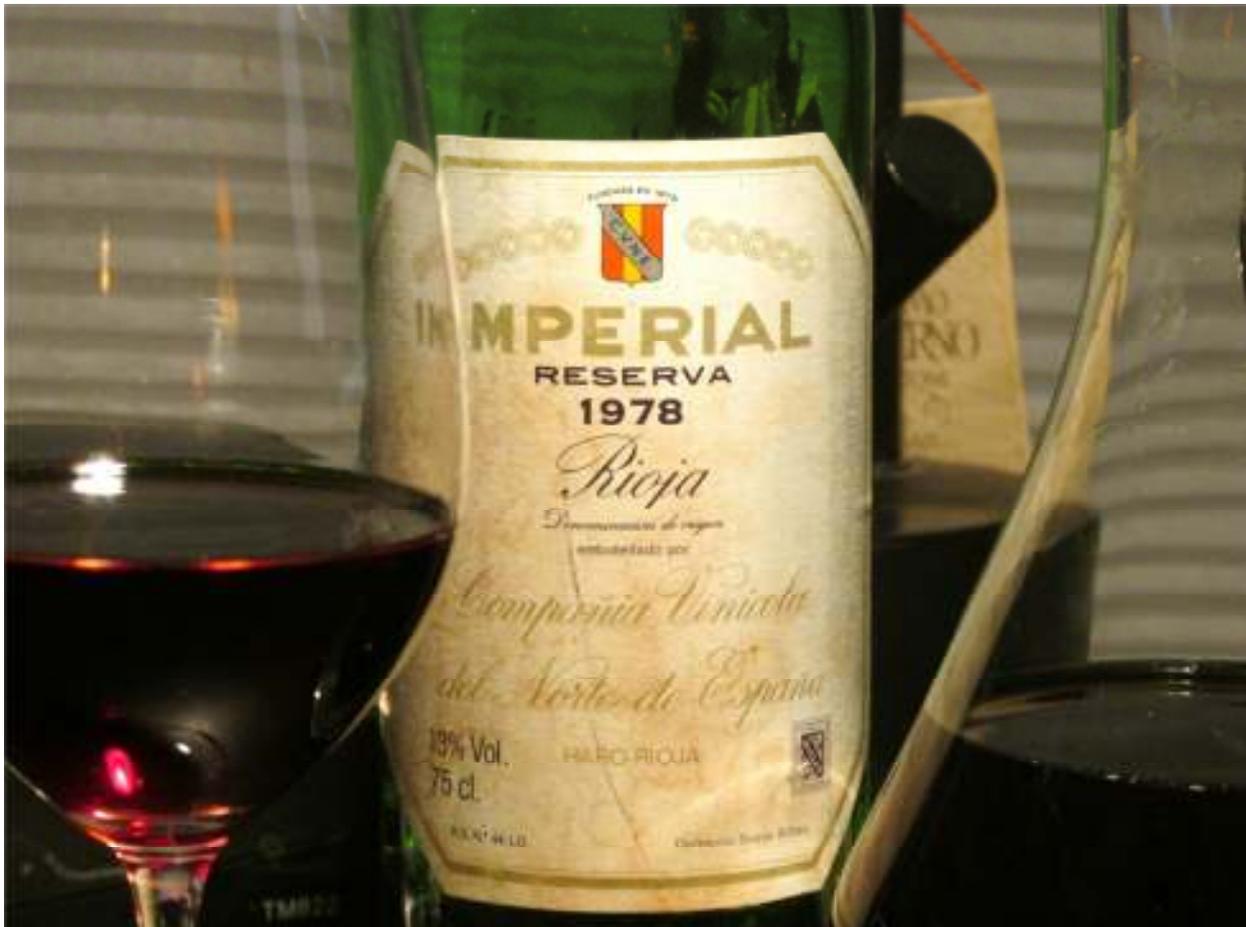
As readers may recall, the hot summer of 2005 is universally recognized as one of the finest recent vintages in Rioja, and the Monte Real Gran Reserva lives up to all of the expectations one might have when a great vintage meets an iconic bottling! The bouquet is deep, pure and fairly black-fruited in personality, offering up notes of black raspberries, black cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, woodsmoke, spiced meats, a refined base of salty soil tones, cloves, brown spices and a lovely framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just approaching its apogee of peak drinkability, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. The 2005 is a deeper and slightly more broad-shouldered vintage than the 2008 Monte Real, and I am sure that each vintage will have its staunch fans, but to my palate, they are simply two different vintage interpretations of one of the finest bottlings in all of Rioja! This is already very easy to drink, but I might be inclined to still tuck it away in the cellar for another five years or so and let it get even more complex and velvety, which it will continue to do for the coming two or three decades! Great juice. 2021-2075. **95.**

1978 Rioja Imperial “Reserva”- Cuné (Rioja Alta)

The 1978 Rioja Imperial “Reserva” from Cuné is drinking splendidly at age forty-three. The wine is gorgeously expressive on the nose, jumping from the glass in a spice box blaze of cherries, cloves, cinnamon, a touch of brown spices, Cuban cigar wrapper, salty soil tones, a touch of orange zest, gentle smokiness and a discreet framing of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, focused and tangy, with superb complexity and grip, a good core, lovely soil signature, melted tannins and a long, refined and tertiary finish. The tannins have all now faded away here, but there remains plenty of acidity to provide structure. Though the intensity of flavor here is still stellar, I have the sense that this wine is starting to get towards the far side of its plateau and will eventually start to give up a bit more fruit and leave the acidity a bit bare-boned in coming years. There is no sign of decline today, but there is a sense in the wine that it is not too far over the horizon. I would opt for drinking this up over the next decade or so, while it is still so beautiful. 2021-2035? **92.**

1975 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas (served from magnum)

I reported on the lovely 1975 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva out of regular bottle a couple of years ago in my historical feature on Bodegas Riojanas. The winery has just released another *tranche* of the 1975, this time all in magnums, and the wine is (not surprisingly) drinking even better out of magnum than regular-sized bottle at this point in its evolution. The pure and very complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, cigar ash, gentle meatiness, celery seed, a superb base of soil tones, bonfire, Rioja spices, an almost Burgundian sense of autumnal forest floor, anise and an understated framing of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, velvety and beautifully resolved, with a full-bodied format, a lovely core of fruit, still a nice touch of tannins, good acids and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. I liked this wine very well out of regular bottles, but it is a serious upgrade today in magnum! 1975 was considered a very warm vintage back in the day, but the wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane and seems ideally ripe by today’s new standards, post-global warming. Great juice at its apogee, but still with at least a couple of decades of life ahead of it in magnum! 2021-2040+. **94.**



Navarra

2017 Syrah “Paal 01”- Bodegas Caudalia

I have very much liked this wine in past vintages and the 2017 version is another fine bottle. The wine is one hundred percent organically-farmed syrah, fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement vats and aged in the same for twenty-seven months prior to bottling. The wine delivers a fine bouquet of black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, a bit of black tea, a fine base of soil tones, fennel seed and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a very good core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, firm, chewy, but well-integrated tannins and a long, gently warm finish. This vintage comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane. Good juice, but I would love to see the wine a half point lower in alcohol. 2027-2055. **89+**.

Valdejalón

2018 Garnacha “Microcósmico”- Bodegas Frontonio

The 2018 Garnacha “Microcósmico” from Fernando Mora’s Bodegas Frontonio is produced from organically-farmed, steep, high elevation, old bush vines. The soils are slate and sand, with lots of rocks, and they have a northerly exposition that slows ripening, so that this lovely 2018 comes in at a svelte 13.5 percent octane. The wine is raised in cement vats for one year prior to bottling and offers up a very aromatic and beautifully transparent nose of raspberries, lavender, rosemary, stony soil tones, wild fennel, spiced meats and a touch of cedar.

On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, vibrant and still quite youthful finish. This is really a lovely bottle of garnacha and a very fine value. 2026-2055. **92.**

2018 Macabeo “Microcósmico”- Bodegas Frontonio

The 2018 Macabeo “Microcósmico” from Bodegas Frontonio is made from old vines planted on a chalk and clay soil base. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and raised in a combination of tank and used barrels. The bouquet is bright and classy, wafting from the glass in a mix of fresh lime, tart pear, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, raw almond, white lilies and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, impeccable balance and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is one of the finest examples of still Macabeo I have ever tasted! 2021-2028. **93.**

Toro

2019 Malvasia- Bodegas San Román

This is the only white wine that I can recall every tasting from Toro, and I was very happy to see that the 2019 version was a superb follow-up to the exceptional 2018 vintage of this cuvée. As I mentioned last year, this wine is made from sixty year-old Malvasia vines grown in the organically-farmed El Pinar vineyard; the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for ten months in French *demi-muids* prior to bottling. The 2019 comes in at 13.5 percent octane and delivers a superb bouquet of breadfruit, lemon peel, a touch of green olive, salty soil tones, wild fennel and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, deep and complex, with a superb core, lovely soil signature and grip, good acids and a very long, beautifully balanced and classy finish. 2021-2035. **94.**

2018 Tinto- Bodega Elias Mora

The regular bottling of Tinto from Elias Mora hails from thirty year-old, organically farmed vineyards and is composed entirely of Tempranillo. The wine is aged for six months in American oak casks prior to bottling. The 2018 version comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and delivers a deep and promising bouquet of cassis, black cherries, a bit of roasted meats, dark soil tones, a touch of saddle leather, cigar smoke and a deft seasoning of American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, broad-shouldered and quite solid at the core, with good focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and really very nicely balanced finish. This is a young wine and deserves some time in the cellar to soften up a bit more on the backend, but it is only moderately tannic and will not demand long cellaring before it really starts to drink well. A fine value. 2025-2050. **90.**

2018 Prima’- Bodegas San Román

The 2018 Prima’ bottling from Bodegas San Román is composed of a blend of eighty-five percent tempranillo and fifteen percent garnacha. The vines range from twenty to fifty years of age, are farmed organically and are in conversion to biodynamics. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and was raised in combination of seventy-five percent French and twenty-five percent American oak, with all of the casks used. The wine comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up fine nose of black cherries, plums, cigar wrapper, a nice touch of soil and a gentle framing of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good focus and grip, fine nascent complexity and a long, ripely tannic and nicely balanced finish.

This carries its octane very well indeed, and though there is a hint of backend heat, the wine will age very gracefully and is quite impressive. 2028-2055. **92.**

2017 Tinto Crianza- Bodega Elias Mora

The 2017 Crianza from Bodega Elias Mora is a big, ripe wine, coming in at fifteen percent octane in this vintage. The bouquet offers up impressive depth in its blend of black cherries, cassis, saddle leather, cigar ash, dark soil tones, nutty new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plush on the attack and rock solid at the core, with ripe, fairly firm tannins, good focus and grip and a long, youthfully complex and really quite well balanced finish. This carries its octane very well and only shows a whisper of backend heat. It really is a very well-made wine that will need six to eight years to properly soften up and start to drink at its peak. 2027-2050+. **90.**

2017 Descarte- Bodega Elias Mora

The 2017 Descarte bottling from Elias Mora is produced from tempranillo vines in excess of forty years of age, with the wine aged in a combination of new and used French casks for eighteen months prior to bottling. The wine tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol in this vintage and delivers a superb nose of black cherries, a hint of sultana raisin, leather, roasted venison, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, broad-shouldered and impressively light on its feet for its octane, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip, firm, chewy tannins and a long, complex finish. There is just a bit of heat poking out here on the backend, but this is fairly well-balanced for a Toro in this day and age. 2026-2055. **91.**

2017 San Román Tinto- Bodegas San Román

Bodegas San Román is owned by Mariano García (longtime cellar master at Vega Sicilia) and his family, and this is the sister property of his Mauro estate in Ribera del Duero. They bought their first vineyards here in 1996 and opened their winery the following year. Their 2017 San Román Tinto is composed entirely from organically-farmed old vine tempranillo, with the vines ranging from sixty to one hundred years of age. The wine is fermented with native yeasts and aged for two years in a combination of French and American oak casks, with only twenty-five percent of the wood new each year. The 2017 comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a superb bouquet of cassis, black cherries, sweet new leather, cigar smoke, a nice touch of tempranillo spice tones and a deft framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, impressive balance and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a very long, classy finish. There is a wisp of backend heat here, but this is Toro after all (in an age of global warming), and the wine is really very well balanced and carries its alcohol very well indeed. It will age beautifully. 2030-2080. **94+.**

2015 Tinto “Gran” - Bodega Elias Mora

The Gran bottling from Bodega Elias Mora is made entirely from eighty-five year-old, organically-farmed tempranillo vines, from the vineyard of Senda del Lobo, which has a soil foundation of clay and limestone, with plenty of surface stones. The yields here are miniscule, with the 2015 cropped at fifteen hectoliters per hectare. The wine is one hundred percent whole clusters and aged in one hundred percent new French oak for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2015 Gran delivers a deep bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, cigar wrapper, new leather, a quite refined framing of toasty oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins and

impressive length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This comes in listed at a full fifteen percent octane, but seems a bit lower than that on the palate, as there is only a wisp of backend heat and the wine is fresh as can be on the nose and palate. This is a big, powerful and chewy wine of admirable balance and it should age long and gracefully- though it will demand a full decade in the cellar to start to soften. 2031-2075. **93.**

2015 Cartago Paraje de Pozo- Bodegas San Román

The 2015 Cartago Paraje de Pozo bottling from Bodegas San Román is produced from a forty-five year-old vineyard that is farmed biodynamically, planted on *franc de pied* rootstock, planted to ninety percent tempranillo and the other ten percent being a field blend of other varieties. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged fully three years in a combination of used and new casks; the 2015 vintage comes in at 14.5 percent octane. The bouquet here is deep and excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, a touch of meatiness, beautiful brown spice tones and a refined foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with great mid-palate depth, excellent, salty soil signature, ripe, chewy tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is still a young wine and need at least another decade in the cellar to fully blossom, but it is going to be a stellar bottle in due course. 2031-2080+. **94.**



2014 Tinto Reserva- Bodega Elias Mora

The Reserva bottling from Elias Mora also hails solely from those eighty-five year-old vines in the Senda del Lobo vineyard. This wine is also aged entirely in new French oak barrels, for two years prior to bottling. The 2014 Reserva comes in listed at fifteen percent alcohol and offers up a deep, complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, saddle leather, woodsmoke, a superb base of chalky soil tones, cigar smoke, a touch of coffee grounds, *garrigue*, a hint of celery seed and a very well done foundation of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is broad-shouldered, full-bodied and powerful in profile, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins and a long, complex and impressively balanced finish. Again, this really carries its octane very well, and though there is some sense of backend heat, it is quite modest and I foresee this wine aging long and well. 2030-2075. **92+**.

Rueda

2020 Verdejo- Egeo

The 2020 Verdejo from Egeo is a very pretty and expressive wine on both the nose and palate. The classy nose jumps from the glass in a mix of pear, casaba melon, a touch of candied lime peel, salty soil tones, a hint of beeswax and a lovely mix of gently savory and floral elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good acids and grip and a long, vibrant finish. This is very good Verdejo, produced from sixty year-old bush vines grown on alluvial soils. It is a superb value! 2021-2025. **91**.

2020 Sauvignon Blanc- Mantel Blanco (Álvarez y Díez)

The 2020 Sauvignon Blanc from Mantel Blanco is a fine example of this varietal, with an extroverted personality that does not shy away from this grape's lovely grassiness. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of gooseberry, tart orange, fresh-cut grass, salty minerality and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and bouncy, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, sound framing acids and a long, wide open and complex finish. I like this quite well, as stylistically, it bears some resemblance to very good Pouilly-Fumé, but with the soil Rueda's traditional salty minerality, rather than the flintiness one finds in that corner of the Loire. This will want drinking over the next few years, as it is bottled under a synthetic cork and only has good, not great acidity. But, it will be very tasty during its prime! 2021-2024. **89**.

2020 Verdejo "Sobre Lías"- Mantel Blanco (Álvarez y Díez)

The 2020 Verdejo "Sobre Lías" from Mantel Blanco is produced from thirty year-old vines and fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. The wine offers up a ripe and vibrant bouquet of fresh lime, casaba melon, a lovely touch of green olive, a fine base of minerality, sea salts and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip, good acids and a long, very nicely balanced finish. This is fairly ripe, as 2020 was a warm summer, so I would opt for drinking this over the next few years. It is also bottled under a synthetic cork of some brand, so it is probably better to enjoy it over the near-term. But, it will deliver plenty of enjoyment over the coming few years. 2021-2024. **89**.

2018 Verdejo- Belondrade y Lurton

Didier Belondrade ferments his Verdejo with indigenous yeasts and ages the wine for a full year in three hundred liter French casks, prior to bottling. The wine is then given an

additional six months of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release, so that the 2018 is the current release in the market. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of lemon, pear, a hint of green olive, beeswax, salty soil tones and a refined framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature and grip, fine balance and a long, vibrant and gently new oaky finish. This is outstanding juice! 2021-2035+. **93.**

Castilla y León

2020 Verdejo- Sotomonte (screwcap)

The 2020 Verdejo from Sotomonte just arrived in the US a few weeks prior to my deadline for this article. The wine is very pretty, offering up a vibrant nose of tart orange, fresh apricot, a hint of guava, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and juicy, with a good core, zesty acids and good length and grip on the bouncy finish. This is lovely and really deserves a natural cork as its closure! 2021-2024. **89.**

2019 Quinta Apolonia Verdejo- Belondrade y Lurton

The Quinta Apolonia bottling is the second wine from Belondrade y Lurton. It is composed of roughly one-third of declassified lots from their first wine, blended with two-thirds of the younger vine production on the estate. The top wine is barrel-fermented and aged in older barrels, whereas the younger vine fruit is fermented and raised in solely in stainless steel tanks. The 2019 Quinta Apolonia offers up a bright and inviting bouquet of lime, tart pineapple, a nice touch of fresh-cut grass, salty soil tones, citrus peel and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, ripe and full-bodied, with a wide open personality, a good core and lovely length and bounce on the succulent finish. The heat of September of 2019 has lowered the acids here a bit, so this will be a wine best drunk over the next few years, but it will provide plenty of pleasure during that time. Good juice. 2021-2024. **89.**

Ribera de Duero

2019 Bodegas Arrocal Tinto

There is a very slight change in the *cépages* of the Arrocal Tinto in 2019, as for the first time in my knowledge, this bottling includes two percent cabernet sauvignon and one percent merlot to go along with its tempranillo. These are thirty year-old, organically-farmed vines and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts. Since the 2016 vintage, this wine has been raised entirely in used barrels, of which eighty percent are French and twenty percent American oak. The 2019 Arrocal comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up lovely precision in its bouquet of plums, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a good base of soil, a hint of violet and a nice framing of smoky oak scents. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent for a 2019, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and fine length and grip on the balanced and nascently complex finish. This is a lovely wine in the making and quite light on its feet for the vintage. It is an outstanding value! 2025-2055. **90+.**

2019 Ojo Gallo “Torremilanos” Clarete- Bodegas Peñalba Lopez (Aranda de Duero)

The 2019 Ojo Gallo “Torremilanos” Clarete from Bodegas Peñalba Lopez is composed of a field blend of Tempranillo, Garnacha, Bobal, Monastrell, Viura, Albillo and Malvasia. It is hard to say if it is a light red wine or a dark Rosé, but as it is bottled in a clear bottle, I will opt for classifying it as the latter. In any case, I drank it with a slight chill, which seemed to be perfect. The wine is fermented in cement vats and aged in old casks for eight months prior to bottling. The 2019 offers up a vibrant and classy bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar smoke,

clove-like spice tones, a fine base of salty soil tones, rose hips and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and succulent, with a good core, nice soil tones, very modest tannins, fine grip and a long, moderately complex and very tasty finish. This is a very old-fashioned style of wine that is a lovely drink and would really work well in the heat of the summer with red meats off of the grill. It makes me want to settle in a shady corner of the terrace and read Hemingway while the grill gets ready! 2021-2025. **89.**

2019 Finca La Mata (Isaac Fernández Selección)

As I have mentioned in the past, the Finca La Mata is made from old vines, with these bush vines of tempranillo ranging from sixty to eighty years of age and grown at nine hundred meters above sea level on soils of sand and gravel. It is fermented with indigenous yeasts and the 2019 was raised entirely in used barrels, with the origins of the oak being ninety percent French and ten percent American wood. The 2019 Finca La Mata is riper than the 2016 and 2017 versions, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but offers up a fine nose of cherries, red plums, clove-like spice tones, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil, a touch of nutskin and still a bit of spicy oak from the used casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe, with a good core, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. I tend to like this bottling in the slightly less torrid vintages, but it has turned out very well in 2019, despite the heat of summer here. It will need a bit of time in the cellar to soften up its tannins, but it will be a good drink in due course. 2025-2050. **89.**

2018 Passión “Crianza” Tinto- Bodegas Arrocal

The 2018 Passión “Crianza” from Bodegas Arrocal hails all from a single vineyard, perched at six hundred and fifty meters above sea level and farmed organically. The Tempranillo vines here are thirty years of age, the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for one year in a combination of seventy percent French casks and thirty percent American oak barrels. One-third of the casks are renewed each vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a sophisticated blend of plums, black cherries, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil tones and a very well done framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is listed at 14.5 percent octane and shows just a whisper of backend heat, but carries its alcohol well and will age long and gracefully. It needs a bit of time to integrate its oak component more completely, but will do so seamlessly with some bottle age. Good juice. 2028-2055. **91.**

2018 Ψ Psi Tinto- Peter Sisseck

The Ψ Psi Tinto from Peter Sisseck is produced from purchased, old vine fruit that Peter has been able to source from local farmers who are willing to farm their vines with more organic methods and crop at lower levels, in exchange for Peter paying above market price for their grapes. It is a win-win situation, and once the grapes arrive in the cellars, they are raised in a combination of cement vats, older cask and larger vats, with little or no new oak utilized for the wine. The 2018 Ψ Psi Tinto includes about ten percent garnacha in the blend, as well as trace elements of albillo, to augment the tempranillo and comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane. The wine delivers a youthful bouquet of red and black cherries, a bit of roasted meat, a fine base of salty soil tones, cigar smoke and a nice topnote of tempranillo spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and youthful, with a fine core, excellent soil signature and grip, firm, chewy tannins and a long, gently warm and complex finish. This is built for the cellar and needs some bottle age to soften up properly, but it will be a fine bottle in due course. 2028-2055. **90+.**

2018 Los Cantos- Finca Torremilanos

Finca Torremilanos, founded in 1903, is the second oldest winery in Ribera del Duero, after Vega Sicilia. Today, the entire two hundred hectare estate is farmed biodynamically and Demeter-certified. Their Los Cantos bottling is comprised of a blend of ninety-five percent tempranillo and five percent merlot, with the wine is aged in French oak casks for sixteen months prior to bottling and the 2018 comes in at 14.5 percent octane. It offers up a refined bouquet of red plums, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a nice array of spice tones, a good foundation of soil and a quite suave framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a good core of ripe fruit, sound acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. There is just a whisper of backend heat here, but this is 2018 after all, and in essence, it really is quite nicely balanced. Lovely juice. 2026-2055. **92.**

2018 Montecastrillo- Finca Torremilanos

Montecastrillo is Finca Torremilanos' younger vine bottling, with eighty percent of the cuvée raised in stainless steel and the other twenty percent in a mix of French and American oak barrels. The 2018 also comes in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol and delivers a vibrant nose of black cherries, cigar smoke, a good base of soil, a touch of clove and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and nicely delineated, with a perfectly respectable core, moderate tannins and a long, bouncy and quite tasty finish. This is made for earlier consumption, but still could do with a bit of bottle age, to let that handful of backend tannin soften up a bit more. This is quite a good entry level bottling. 2024-2045. **89.**

2017 Bodegas Arrocal “Selección” Tinto

As I have noted in the past, Bodegas Arrocal is located in the village of Gumiel del Mercado in the eastern end of the plateau of Castilla y León, not far from Goyo Garcia, which is decidedly cooler than the western end of Ribera del Duero. Their Selección bottling is produced from tempranillo fruit from the Los Astrales vineyard, with the vines now forty-five years of age. The wine is aged for a year and a half in French oak barrels, with half of them new casks in past vintages, so I assume that this is still the case for the 2017 version. The wine comes in at 14.5 percent this year and is a beautiful follow-up to the stunning 2016 bottling. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of plums, black cherries, Cuban cigars, a lovely base of soil tones, fresh nutmeg and smoky oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and already starting to get velvety on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex finish. This is a touch higher in octane than the 2016 Selección bottling, but carries its ripeness beautifully. 2027-2060. **92+.**

2016 Ángel Tinto- Bodegas Arrocal

The Ángel Tinto bottling from Bodegas Arrocal is one of their two very old vine cuvées, as the Tempranillo used for this bottling all hails from the Finca La Clara vineyard, which was planted all the way back in 1936! The vines sit at eight hundred and twenty-five meters above sea level and are farmed organically. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, undergoes malo in barrel and is aged for twenty-six months in French oak casks. The 2016 Ángel comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and offers up a pure, nascently complex and new oaky nose of black cherries, black plums, raw cocoa, cigar smoke, a nice touch of soil and a good framing of nutty and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely sense of nascent elegance on the attack, a fine core of fruit, good focus and grip and a long, tannic and well-balanced finish. This wine needs time to soften up and fully integrate its new

oak, but in due course, it is going to be a superb wine. That said, I have the sense that these great old vines deserve to be treated more like Pétrus, rather than Angélus, with the malolactic done in tank and a bit less obvious new oak in the personality of the wine, as there is so clearly such great potential here with this old vineyard that it seems paramount to me to not let any aspect of the winemaking get in the way of the expression of underlying *terroir* in this obviously very special vineyard. This is a very lovely wine, but a bit less new oak and malo in tank could take it to the stars! 2028-2060. 93+.

2016 Torremilanos Crianza- Finca Torremilanos

The Crianza bottling from Finca Torremilanos is made from vines in excess of fifty years of age, composed from a *cépages* of ninety-five percent tempranillo and five percent cabernet sauvignon and aged entirely in French oak barrels for twenty months prior to bottling. The 2016 Crianza tips the scales at 14.5 percent octane and a deep and classy nose of plums, red and black cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, cloves, nutmeg, a fine base of soil tones and a well done seasoning of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with fine mid-palate depth, ripe, buried tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is not the most powerful example of Ribera del Duero, but it has plenty of intensity of flavor and is really lovely in its lightness of step and backend lift. Impressive and quite unique in the pantheon of wines from this D.O. 2026-2055. 92.



2015 Máximo Tinto- Bodegas Arrocal

The Máximo bottling from Bodegas Arrocal is also a single vineyard bottling from old vines, as this wine hails from the vineyard of El Portillo and the Tempranillo here is eighty-five years of age! The vines are farmed organically, the vineyard sits at eight hundred and sixty meters above sea level and the soils are clay and limestone. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, undergoes malo in barrel and is raised for twenty-six months in Radoux French oak cask prior to bottling. As this is from the warmer summer of 2015, it is a touch riper than the 2016 Ángel Tinto, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of plums, dark berries, Cuban cigar wrapper, chocolate, a nice touch of Tempranillo spice tones, smoke and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off lovely old vine creaminess in the mid-palate, with excellent focus and grip, budding complexity and a very long, suavely tannic and impeccably balanced finish. I like the oak signature of this wine, which is both nutty and spicy at the same time, without being overbearing to the stunning fruit here. This is a gorgeous wine, but like the Ángel Tinto, I have a gut feeling that there is still another level up in quality this wine could go if it were given the Pétrus treatment of only fifty percent new oak and malo in tank, to allow even more soil signature to shine through. That said, this is still brilliant wine! 2030-2080. **95.**

Priorat

2017 Vega Escal- Reserva De La Tierra

The 2017 Vega Escal is composed of an eclectic blend of twenty-seven percent merlot, twenty-six percent garnaxta, twenty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, fifteen percent cariñena and seven percent syrah. All of the vineyards are planted on a combination of slate and granite. The wine is aged for eight months in French casks prior to bottling. The 2017 comes in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of raspberries, spiced meats, stony minerality, cigar wrapper, clove-like spice tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with excellent mineral drive, a fine core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins and a long, well-balanced and quite classy finish. This carries its octane very well indeed, with perhaps just a wisp of backend heat perceptible. I do not know what percentage of the casks used here are new, but there are some wood tannins on the finish that are not yet fully integrated into the wine, so give it some time in the cellar. I would love to see it raised entirely in one and two wine casks in the future, so one would not have to wait for the wood tannins to be absorbed. This wine is built to age long and gracefully and at \$27 a bottle retail here in the US, this has to be one of the finest values to be found from the entire region of Priorat! 2027-2055. **91+.**

Campo de Borja

2019 Garnacha- Legado del Moncayo

The vineyards for this bottling sit at the foot of an extinct volcano, with the average age of the vines now twenty-five years of age. The soils are a combination of volcanic gravel and chalky loam, with the 2019 version coming in at 14.5 percent octane (though it seems lower than this on the palate). The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel and see no oak. It offers up a superb nose of red and black raspberries, *garrigue*, bonfire, smoked meats, lovely spice tones and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, spicy and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, very nicely balanced finish. This has consistently been one of the best values to be found from Spain (one of

the great value-oriented wine-producing countries on the planet!) and the 2019 is absolutely superb. 2021-2035. **90.**

2019 Garnacha “Montaña” Vendimia Seleccionada- Legado del Moncayo

The “Montaña” Vendimia Seleccionada bottling from Legado del Moncayo hails from vineyards growing up the side of the volcano, with the vines ranging from forty to sixty years of age now. Unlike the regular bottling, the Montaña is raised in used French casks for eight months prior to bottling. The wine offers up a wilder personality, from the combination of the older vines and the higher elevation, with the 2019 delivering scents of dark berries, spit-roasted game, pepper, *garrigue*, stony minerality, bonfire and a touch of celery seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and very nicely balanced, with a good core, ripe tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and still light on its feet finish. This has a bit broader shoulders than the regular bottling, as well as just a bit more tannin, but it shares the same exceptional value, as this excellent bottle of Garnacha retails in the US for \$15 a bottle! 2023-2040. **91+.**

La Mancha

2020 Pago de La Jaraba Blanco (Sauvignon Blanc)

The 2020 Pago de La Jaraba Blanco is composed entirely of Sauvignon Blanc, which hails from a stony vineyard planted at seven hundred meters, with a subsoil of limestone. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks and offers up a bright bouquet of gooseberry, lime peel, chalky soil tones, a touch of fresh-cut grass and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-full and bouncy, with good acids and grip, nice mineral undertow and a long, fairly complex finish. This is quite tasty! 2021-2023. **88.**

2019 Viña Jaraba “Cosecha”- Pago de La Jaraba

The 2019 Viña Jaraba “Cosecha” from Pago de La Jaraba is composed of a blend of eighty percent tempranillo and ten percent each of cabernet sauvignon and merlot. The vineyards sit at seven hundred and fifty meters above sea level on mixed soils of sand, clay, pebbles and chalk, all over limestone Mother Rock. The varieties are fermented and raised separately for four months prior to blending, with the wine raised in a combination of eighty percent American oak and twenty percent French casks. The 2019 comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a fine nose of red and black cherries, Sultana raisin, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of clove and a very discreet foundation of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows a bit of raisin tone to its fruit, with a good core, modest tannins and a long and complex finish. The raisiny tones make me think that there was a bit of sunburn to the bunches during the heat spike of the summer, but the wine does have impressive complexity and depth, and if one does not mind this raisin overtone, there is a lot to like here. I have scored the wine in a range, based on one’s affinity for raisin aromatics and flavors. 2021-2030. **84-87.**

2018 Viña Jaraba “Selección Especial”- Pago de La Jaraba

The *cépages* of the 2018 Viña Jaraba “Selección Especial” is seventy percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and ten percent merlot. Half of the cuvée underwent malolactic fermentation in five thousand liter French oak *foudres*, with the other half undergoing malo in tank. The wine was then blended and aged for one year in casks- fifty percent American oak and fifty percent French in origin. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, cigar wrapper, lovely spice tones, a hint of coffee grounds, chalky

soil, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. This is a very well-made wine and an excellent value, as it sells for only \$20 a bottle here in the US (and probably decidedly less in the EU). Good juice! 2021-2040. **91+**.

2018 Pago de La Jaraba Tinto- Pago de La Jaraba

The Pago de La Jaraba Tinto bottling is the “modern wine” in the winery’s portfolio, as this wine is fermented in five thousand liter French oak vats, undergoes malolactic in all new French two hundred and twenty-five liter casks and aged for one year in the same barrels. I fully understand the market necessity for making a wine like this, but to my palate, it is just not as complex or interesting as the Selección Especial or the Reserva done in a more traditional style. That said, this is very well done in the modern idiom, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a precise bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, cloves, a nice touch of smokiness and plenty of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and new oaky in personality, with a good core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex finish. This is nicely done, but all the new oak has actually taken away a bit of the complexity found in the estate’s other top bottlings. Still, at \$20 a bottle here in the states, at least it is not priced like Screaming Eagle! 2026-2045. **89+**.

2017 Viña Jaraba “Crianza”- Pago de La Jaraba

The Viña Jaraba “Crianza” from Pago de La Jaraba is made from the same *cépages* as the Cosecha bottling and given eight months in cask prior to bottling, rather than the four months of the other cuvée. It is then given some bottle aging in the cellars prior to release, so that the 2017 is the new release in the market. The wine delivers a fine nose of desiccated dark berries and black cherries, clove-like spice tones, cigar wrapper, excellent soil tones and an understated framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a good core of fruit, fine soil undertow and grip, buried tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. There is just a whisper of raisin tones on the backend, but this is far more understated than in the 2019 Cosecha and here just adds a bit more complexity, rather than defining the personality of the wine. This is a very well-made wine and another outstanding value, as this retails in the US at \$14 per bottle! 2021-2032. **89**.

2016 Viña Jaraba “Reserva”- Pago de La Jaraba

The 2016 Viña Jaraba “Reserva” from Pago de La Jaraba shares a similar blend with the Selección Especial- seventy percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and ten percent merlot. The wine is fermented in cement vats and aged for one year in a combination of seventy percent American barrels and thirty percent French. It is then assembled and given additional aging in vat, prior to bottling, and the further bottle aging in the cellar prior to release! The wine offers up a lovely and complex bouquet of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, brown spices, a fine base of soil, cloves, a hint of Sultana raisin and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, suave tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and very classy finish. This is an insanely good value, as this wine sells for only \$16 per bottle in America! 2021-2040. **92**.

Viños de Madrid and Sierra de Gredos Mountains

2018 Navaherreros Garnacha- Bernabeleva (Viños de Madrid)

These Garnacha vines are now eighty-five years of age, as this vineyard was purchased back in 1923 by Dr. Vincente Alvarez-Villamil. There was a long period where no wine was produced by his family from this parcel at the base of the Sierra de Gredos Mountains, but in 2006, two of his grandchildren restarted the Bernabeleva winery. As I have noted before, the high elevation here provided excellent diurnal temperature swings and the wine is aged only in older casks, so it is impressively light on its feet and zest. The 2018 Navaherreros Garnacha comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully transparent nose of raspberries, cherries, dried eucalyptus, smoked meats, a lovely base of stony soil, beautiful, delicate spice tones and some discreetly savory elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is refined, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a lovely core, good focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is just beautiful Garnacha! Give it a few more years' worth of bottle age just to let it soften up more fully on the backend. 2025-2055. **93.**

2018 Arroyo Del Tórtolas- Bernabeleva (Viños de Madrid)

The Arroyo Del Tórtolas bottling from Bernabeleva hails from a parcel of sixty-five year-old vines, planted at an altitude of eight hundred meters above sea level and with a northerly exposition. The wine is treated similarly in the cellars to the Navaherreros cuvée, but comes in listed a full point higher in octane in this vintage. It delivers a fine bouquet of black raspberries, fruitcake, cloves, roasted meats, a lovely salinity to the soil signature, cedar and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral undertow, firm, chewy tannins and a long, impressively well-balanced finish. This really does not taste like a 15.5 percent octane wine, but the tannins have a coarser texture than the blended Navaherreros bottling this year. This is still a good wine, but it will demand some bottle age before it starts to soften up. 2028-2055. **90+.**

Utiel-Requena

2019 Bovale- Isaac Fernández Selección

This wine is composed entirely of Bobal, which is a grape that I like very much. These particular vines are between fifty and sixty years of age, planted on crumbling brown limestone soils. The grapes are completely destemmed, the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for eight months in used barrels, with seventy percent of the casks of French origin and the rest of American oak. The 2019 Bovale comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a vibrant nose of black cherries, dark berries, smoked meats, bonfire, wild fennel and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, broad shoulders, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and ever so slightly warm finish. Good juice that is approachable today, but will also age well. A super value, as this retails in the US for \$16 a bottle! 2021-2045. **89.**

Jumilla

2019 Monastrell "Old Vines"- Porto Regia

The 2019 vintage of Monastrell "Old Vines" from Porto Regia is pretty ripe, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane this year. The wine offers up a fine nose of dark berries, black cherries, spiced meats, woodsmoke, a good base of soil and just a touch of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, robust and full-bodied, with a very good core of fruit, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, complex finish that shows just a bit of backend heat. This handles its alcohol

pretty well, but it is just a touch higher in octane than I would ideally like to see. Still, good juice and a fine value. 2021-2030. **87+**.

2018 Monastrell “5 Meses Barrica”- Porto Regia

The 2018 “5 Meses” bottling from Porto Regia also comes in tabbed at 14.5 percent alcohol, but to my palate, it seems just a touch lower than the 2019 Old Vines bottling. The bouquet is deep and quite refined, delivering scents of black cherries, a touch of fruitcake, cigar smoke, a good base of soil, lovely, clove-like spice tones and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and really quite elegant in profile, with a fine core, good soil signature and grip, a bit of chewy tannin and a long, well-balanced finish. This will need a bit of bottle age to soften up its tannins, but will be an excellent wine in due course and does not show any of the backend heat found in the 2019 version. 2026-2045. **89**.

2018 Monastrell “12 Meses Barrica”- Porto Regia

The 2018 Monastrell “12 Meses Barrica” cuvée from Porto Regia is a lovely bottle on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, cigar wrapper, good soil tones, a hint of mincemeat and a nice touch of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, well-balanced and gently chewy finish. This too comes in at 14.5 percent octane, but the wine is cooler on the backend than the 2019 Old Vines bottling and carries its ripeness beautifully. This is an outstanding bottle of Monastrell! 2026-2045+. **91**.

Canary Islands Blanco

2019 Trenzado- Suertes del Marqués (Valle de la Orotava- Tenerife)

The 2019 Trenzado bottling from Suertes del Marqués is composed primarily of Listán Blanco, but there are probably about five percent of other grapes co-planted here in these very old vineyards. The grapes hail from several parcels of vines, all braided and many in excess of one hundred years of age. The wine itself is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement vats and then aged for six months in used, five hundred liter, French *demi-muids* prior to bottling. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful and classy mix of lemon, breadfruit, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core, lovely transparency and backend bounce and a long, complex and very tasty finish. This was just a touch reductive when I first opened it, so give it a few minutes of air to blossom. Fine juice. 2021-2030. **91**.

Canary Islands Tinto

2018 Seven Fuentes- Suertes del Marqués (Valle de la Orotava- Tenerife)

The Seven Fuentes bottling from Suertes del Marqués is comprised of a blend of ninety percent Listán Negro and ten percent Castellana Negra. All of the vineyards are pruned in the traditional manner of “braiding” them and letting them grow along the ground. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement vats and aged in the same. The 2018 version offers up a young and peppery nose of bitter cherry, peppercorn, tree bark, a nice array of botanical herb tones, volcanic soil and a topnote of distant bonfire. On the palate the wine is young, bright and full, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and tightly-knit finish. This could do with some bottle age to relax structurally and let the herb tones take on a secondary role in its personality, but it is approachable now if given a good thirty minute decant prior to serving. 2021-2045. **90**.



Portuguese Sparkling Wine

Beiras “3B” Extra Bruto Rosé NV- Filipa Pato (Bairrada)

The current release of Filipa Pato’s non-vintage Beiras “3B” Extra Bruto Rosé is composed of a blend of seventy-one percent Baga and twenty-nine percent Bical- two indigenous grape varieties in Bairrada that Filipa farms biodynamically. The *vins clairs* are fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and the wine is aged nine months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine is finished non-*dosé*. The color is a nice, deep salmon and the bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of blood orange, rhubarb, cherry skin, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of brown spices and a topnote of gentle smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, good soil signature and grip, extremely elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is really, really good! I am extremely impressed with the refinement of the bubbles, given that it only spends nine months aging on its fine lies! 2021-2030. 91.

Branco do Portugal

2019 Redoma Branco - Dirk Niepoort (Douro)

The Redoma Branco bottling from Dirk Niepoort is made from a field blend from a forty year-old, organically-farmed, high altitude vineyard. The primary varieties included are Rabigato, Codega, Viosinho and Arinto, though there are others co-planted as well; the soils are schist. The wine is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts, does not go through malolactic

fermentation and is aged for ten months in these older French casks prior to bottling. The 2019 Redoma comes in at a cool twelve percent octane and delivers a lovely bouquet of green apple, raw almond, green olive, wild fennel, salty minerality and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, and focused, with a good core, lovely mineral signature, sound acids and lovely balance on the long and complex finish. Despite the lack of malo, this wine only has framing acidity and will probably be most enjoyable drunk young, though it is so well balanced that it may well age longer than I suspect. Good juice. 2021-2024+? **90.**

2019 Nossa Calcário Branco- Filipa Pato & William Wouters (Bairrada)

The Nossa Calcário bottling from Filipa Pato is composed entirely from the Bical grape, planted on limestone soils and which Filipa farms biodynamically. She barrel-ferments the wine raises it in used, five hundred liter French casks. The 2019 Nossa Calcário is excellent, offering up a deep and precise bouquet of gooseberry, lime peel, chalky minerality, a hint of green olive, wild fennel and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, zesty acids and impeccable balance and grip on the long, vibrant and seamless finish. I have a sense that the citrus peel element in the wine is going to become “candied” with bottle age, as happens with the lemon peel notes in the wines from Vincent Dauvissat and the Raveneau family. A beautiful wine. 2021-2035. **93.**

2018 Argilla Branco- Anta de Cima (Alentejo)

The 2018 Argilla Branco bottling from Anta de Cima is made from one-third each of Alvarinho, Verdelho and Viosinho, with the wine fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks. The bouquet is bright and bouncy, offering up scents of lime, green olive, citrus peel, salty soil tones, raw almond and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and fairly complex, with a good core, sound framing acids and lovely balance on the long finish. This has sufficient acidity to carry it over the next year or two, but will want drinking on the young side, like most white wines from the Alentejo. It is a good example. 2021-2023. **88.**

2017 Talha de Argilla Branco- Adega Anta de Cima (Alentejo)

The Talha de Argilla line from Anta de Cima are the wines that are vinified and then aged four months in the traditional large, clay amphora that were ubiquitous in the region’s wine culture until the second half of the twentieth century. The wine is composed of a blend of one-third each of Alvarinho, Verdelho and Viosinho. The 2017 is cool and collected, coming in at twelve percent octane and delivering a vibrant bouquet of pear, green olive, salty soil tones, fresh almond, a touch of clay from the amphora and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and pure, with a lovely core, fine complexity and a long, very well-balanced finish. Though this wine is fresh as a daisy, the acids are not particularly prominent and I would be inclined to drink this up over the next few years- though it is so impeccably balanced that it may well age longer than I anticipate. 2021-2024+? **90.**

2015 Gonçalves Faria’ Vinho Branco (Bairrada)

The 2015 Gonçalves Faria’ Vinho Branco is made from an eight year-old vineyard that is planted primarily to Bical and Maria Gomes. The wine is fermented and aged in thousand liter *foudres*. The 2015 needs a bit of air before it starts to open up aromatically, but eventually comes to offer scents of pear, lime peel, raw almond, chalky soil tones, white flowers and just a whisper

of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a good core, a lovely girdle of acidity, fine mineral undertow and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is built to age and will be better a few more years down the road, but if one decants it for thirty minutes prior to drinking, it is already quite enjoyable. A lovely bottle. 2021-2040. **91+**.

Tinto do Portugal

2018 Twisted Tinto - Dirk Niepoort (Douro)

Dirk Niepoort's "Twisted" Tinto is made from an old field blend of grapes that includes Touriga Franca, Touriga Nacional, Tinto Roriz, Tinto Amarela, Tinto Cão and more than a few others. Three quarters of the cuvée is raised in stainless steel tanks and the other quarter in older, French casks. The 2019 Twisted Tinto offers up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, cassis, new leather, tree bark, cigar ash and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a good core of fruit and soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, bouncy finish. This is nicely light on its feet in 2019, coming in at thirteen percent octane, is already approachable out of the blocks and should age very nicely. 2021-2040+. **90**.

2017 Argilla Tinto- Anta de Cima (Alentejo)

The Argilla Tinto bottling from Anta de Cima is composed from a *cépages* of forty percent Alicante Bouschet, thirty percent Alfrocheiro, twenty percent Touriga Nacional and ten percent Petit Verdot. The bottling is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel and offers up a deep and black fruity bouquet of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, a good base of soil, pepper, a touch of tobacco leaf and a topnote of new leather. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, good soil signature, ripe, well-measured tannins and a long, well-balanced and gently chewy finish. This wine comes in at thirteen percent octane, which is really pretty low octane for the Alentejo. It could do with a few years in the cellar to let those backend tannins soften up a bit more, but it is going to be an excellent wine. 2025-2050. **91**.

2017 Alfrocheiro em Talha de Argilla- Anta de Cima (Alentejo)

This wine, as the name implies, is comprised entirely from Alfrocheiro, which is fermented and raised in one hundred and forty liter clay amphora. The 2017 comes in at a svelte thirteen percent alcohol and delivers a superb aromatic constellation of dark berries, black tea, spit-roasted game, a touch of tree bark, dark soil tones, clay and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a fine core, excellent complexity and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, balanced and beautifully energetic finish. This is outstanding juice and all it needs is some bottle age to fully blossom! I cannot overstate how impressive this wine is in terms of its lightness of step, as the Alentejo is a fairly hot region and it is not easy to keep this kind of finesse in a red wine from the area! Fine juice. 2026-2050. **93**.

2017 Tinto- Quinta de S. José (Douro)

The 2017 Tinto from Quinta de S. José is composed of a blend of Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca. The wine is aged entirely in used French casks and the 2017 vintage comes in listed at an even fourteen percent octane. It offers up a deep and pure bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, pipe tobacco, a fine base of soil tones, a hint of mint and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in profile, with a rock solid core, broad shoulders, ripe, firm tannins and a long, very well-balanced and nascently complex finish. This is going to be excellent wine, but it will need some cellaring to soften up. Good juice. 2027-2055. **90**.

2017 Touriga Nacional- Quinta de S. José (Douro)

The pure Touriga Nacional bottling from Quinta de S. José is also raised entirely in used French barrels, for twelve months prior to bottling. This is more elegant on the nose than the Tinto 2017, delivering a promising bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a touch of road tar, fennel seed and dark soil tones. Not surprisingly, this smells like a young dry Port. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite precise on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, excellent balance and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, promising and still very youthful finish. This is going to be very good in due course. 2030-2065. **92.**

2017 Tinto “Reserva”- Quinta de S. José (Douro)

Quinta de S. José’s 2017 Tinto Reserva is made from old vines, with the *cépages* a combination of Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca. Like the above wine, it is aged for one year in used French casks. This is a touch riper than the Touriga Nacional 2017, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offering up a youthfully complex nose of dark berries, black cherries, a bit of roasted game, dried eucalyptus, anise, dark soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with broad shoulders, fine focus and grip, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, balanced and nascently complex finish. This will need extended bottle age as well to really blossom, but it will be a very good bottle once it is ready to drink. 2030-2065. **92+.**

2017 Tinto “Grande Reserva”- Quinta de S. José (Douro)

The Grande Reserva bottling from Quinta de S. José is made from the very oldest vines on the estate. The grapes are foot-trodden and fermented in the traditional stone *lagars* of the Douro, before the wine is racked to French casks for one year of oak aging. The 2017 Grande Reserva is a deep, young wine, offering up a nascently complex nose of black cherries, sweet blackberries, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil, a touch of fennel seed, dried eucalyptus and spicy French oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with good focus and structure, well-integrated tannins and just a trace of backend heat on the long and promising finish. This has beautiful old vine fruit tones, but the new oak needs time to integrate and I would opt for burying this wine for at least a decade before broaching bottles. This seems quite more marked by its new oak component than the Reserva, and I am not sure this wine really needs all the new wood, as the fruit here is so beautiful that it seems a shame to mask some of it with spicy oak. But, it seems likely to have the stuffing to eventually absorb the oak tannins here, so all that is needed is patience. 2032-2065. **90-93** (depending on just how well the oak integrates with extended bottle age).

2017 Tinto “Vinha Ruy Francisco”- Quinta de S. José (Douro)

This is a vineyard selection bottling from a prime parcel, named for the winery owner’s father. The 2017 Vinha Ruy Francisco comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and delivers a superb, black fruity bouquet of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a bit of roasted game, dried eucalyptus, discreet notes of road tar and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a plush core of fruit, lovely soil signature and grip, ripe, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, ripe and youthfully complex finish. This bottling has no issues with uncovered wood tannins out of the blocks and I really like the balance, other than a wisp of backend heat on the very long finish. This is a big, broad-shouldered and ripe wine of very impressive breed and nascent complexity. 2030-2065. **93.**



2016 Nossa Missão Baga “Prephylloxera”- Filipa Pato & William Wouters (Bairrada)

The Missão vineyard is just fifty-seven *ares* in size and is planted with one hundred and thirty year-old Baga vines, that predate phylloxera. These venerable old vines only produce a tiny number of bunches of grapes, which are meticulously collected by Filipa Pato and her husband, William Wouters and fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged a year and a half in larger casks prior to bottling. The wine typically will include some whole clusters, but the percentage of stems retained is dictated by the style of the vintage. There were only 490 bottles and 76 magnums of this beautiful wine produced in the 2016 vintage. The wine delivers a deep and very, very pure bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, violets, cigar ash, a touch of new leather a beautiful base of limestone soil tones, tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, firm tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex, beautifully balanced and light on its feet finish. At five years of age, this is still a puppy and deserves several more years in the cellar to let those backend tannins fade away a bit more and the next layers of complexity emerge. This is probably the finest red wine I have ever tasted from Portugal! 2026-2060. 96.

2016 Touriga Nacional- Quinta de S. José (Douro)

The 2016 Touriga Nacional from Quinta de S. José is starting to open up nicely on the nose as it reaches its fifty year out from the vintage. This is the same octane as the 2017 version, coming in at fourteen percent, but the wine is far less primary on the nose at this point in its

evolution, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, pipe tobacco, a touch of fennel seed, a fine base of dark soil tones and a topnote of eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is ripe, pure and impressively precise, with a full-bodied format, very good focus and grip, firm tannins and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is still a very young wine as well, but it is settling in nicely and one can really see the shape of things to come. 2029-2065. **92.**

2015 Tinto “Vinha Ruy Francisco”- Quinta de S. José (Douro)

The 2015 vintage of Vinha Ruy Francisco is still a nicely youthful wine, but it is starting to show some secondary complexity on the nose, which offers up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, eucalyptus, roasted venison, dark soil tones, saddle leather, cigar ash and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is broad-shouldered, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe, buried tannins, good focus and grip and a long, complex and still quite youthfully chewy finish. This is going to be an excellent wine in due course, but it is still in need of some time alone in the cellar! 2028-2065. **93.**

RECENTLY-TASTED WHITE BURGUNDY WINTER 2021



The following article is an attempt to put into practice the recommendations found in the feature on where the best white Burgundy values are to be found today. So, the following notes are composed mostly of wines from domaines that appear among the list of recommended sources for outstanding wines in the region that also represent relative value. I suppose I could have fleshed out this article and written to Domaine Leflaive to ask for samples, but I suspect that they might not have responded in the affirmative. ☺ But, as was outlined in the article that appears earlier in this issue, there remains an awful lot of white Burgundy produced today that does not cost a king's ransom to procure and which can deliver much of the pleasure one associates with the "best of the best" in the realm of white Burgundy. As I write about the Côte Chalonnaise and Mâconnais each year on their own, I have not reached out for too many samples from my favorite producers in these two regions, as I will write about these lovely wines a bit later in the spring. However, as one generous importer did offer me new releases from Laurent Juillot of Mercurey's Domaine Michel Juillot and Christophe Denizot of Domaine des Moirots, I was very happy to taste through these and include them in the notes that follow below. My yearly timing for the article on the Côte Chalonnaise and Mâconnais has usually been a bit late for the new releases from Domaine Juillot in particular, so I was grateful to be able to write up these

beautiful wines while they were still relatively plentiful in the market. For those who have not tasted any of Laurent Juillot's wines in recent vintages, I cannot recommend them highly enough, as they are beautifully crafted wines and are truly some of the most stunning bargains to be found in the world of white Burgundy today. They will not scale quite the same heights as the Meursault "Perrières" from Domaine Coche-Dury or the Puligny-Montrachet "Clos des Caillerets" from Jean-Michel Chartron, but the Mercurey and Rully Blanc bottlings from Monsieur Juillot are utterly complete, transparent and superbly refined white Burgundies that will satisfy even the pickiest palate! And, you can have a case of any of them for less than a single bottle of the most famous premier crus from Puligny, Chassagne or Meursault!

As my article on finding white Burgundy values notes earlier, Chablis remains one of the most fertile hunting grounds for values in this section of the market, so it should not be surprising that there is an awful lot of Chablis covered in the following pages. I should take a moment to mention a couple of relatively new to me domaines in the region that are making excellent wines and figure prominently in the coverage below. One of these is Domaine Dampt Frères, which now farms nearly ninety hectares of vines in the region, divided between the Chablis and Bourgogne appellations. Bernard Dampt, the father of the three brothers who currently run the family domaine, used to be a member of the cooperative in the town of Chablis, *la Chablisienne*, but started to ease into making his own wines in the early 1980s. His three sons, Hervé, Emmanuel and Eric now run the domaine. The vineyards are not all owned by the three brothers, as there are also cousins (and a couple of neighbors) with parcels of vines that contribute to the vineyard largesse of the estate. The family has an impressive lineup of premier crus and grand crus, but one of the hidden gems in their lineup is their Bourgogne Tonnerre bottling that they call "le Clos du Château". It is clearly of Chablis *villages* quality and one of the real stunning bargains to be found in the domaine's lineup. Bernard Dampt started buying and replanting vineyards that had gone fallow in the post-War period in the region, which serves as the foundation for the domaine's pair of Bourgogne Tonnerre bottlings, which are planted on a range of Kimmeridgian and Portlandian soil types. The le Clos du Château bottling is raised in older casks, as are a portion of the premier crus at the domaine, with barrel ages ranging from one to ten years of age. The domaine also has parcels in two grand crus, Bougros and les Preuses.

Another excellent Chablis estate that features prominently in this article (and who I have been painfully slow to taste regularly) is Domaine Servin. François Servin runs this thirty-seven hectare family estate, ably assisted by Marc Cameron as Export Manager for the domaine. The domaine has been transitioning in recent vintages to pick more and more of their production by hand, so if Mother Nature cooperates with a relatively wide harvesting window, their fine grand cru and premier cru parcels are all picked by hand, with the Petit Chablis and Chablis *Villages* vines still harvested primarily by machine. As Marc Cameron notes, in some vintages it is too hot at harvest time and they take the decision to pick some of the premier crus still be machine, if this will allow them to keep the potential alcohols down in the resulting wines. François Servin's father and grandfather were never fans of clones, so the family vineyards have been replanted with *selection massale* for three generations now, which gives the domaine great genetic material to work with each year. The estate has a very impressive lineup, with vines in four of the grand crus: les Clos, les Preuses, Bougros and Blanchots, as well as in the premier crus of Montée de Tonnerre, Butteaux, Mont de Milieu, la Forêt, Vaillons and Vaucoupin, as

well as fairly extensive holdings in the *lieu à dit* of les Pargues, which is situated alongside of Vaillons and Montmains and used to be ranked at the same level as these premier crus (and where Patrick Piuze produces his superb “la Grande Vallée” bottling). Domaine Servin still raises most of its bottlings in stainless steel, but they have been using a bit more older cask in recent years, so that their Vieilles Vignes bottling (from les Pargues) includes thirty percent barrel-fermented juice in the blend, and their old vine Butteaux is at least fifty percent barrel-fermented and raised in older casks, and if vintage characteristics allow, this cuvée can be entirely fermented and raised in older barrels. Among their grand crus, the Blanchots is raised in stainless, the les Preuses in thirty percent oak casks (six to fourteen years of age) and the Bougros (from the upper, more minerally Bougerots section of this vineyard) and the les Clos in one to six year-old barrels. The wines are very good across the board, no matter their *elevage* and I should have written more extensively about them sooner!

The following notes are listed first by vintage (starting with a nice selection of really, really good 2019s), and then by appellation, with the Bourgogne level bottlings grouped together first. After these come the wines from Chablis and then the notes proceed geographically from north to south, finishing up with wines from Santenay and the Côte Chalonnaise. Within each communal subsection, I have listed all of the *villages* level wines first (and sorted alphabetically by producer within this grouping), followed by premier crus and then grand crus.

2019 Bourgogne Tonnerre “Sagara” – Domaine Marc Cameron

Marc Cameron was born in Australia and today, his day job is as Export Manager for Domaine Servin in Chablis. On the side, he makes a pair of Bourgogne bottlings from his own vineyards, which he first started to acquire in 2005. His Bourgogne Tonnerre is hand-harvested, made from twenty-five year-old vines and sees some aging in three year-old Burgundy casks. The 2019 version is a lovely example, offering up a bright and complex nose of tart orange, apple, a lovely base of limestone minerality, dried flowers, a whisper of vanillin oak and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an impressive core, lovely mineral drive and grip, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, very well-balanced finish. This is outstanding Bourgogne! 2021-2030. **90+**.

2019 Bourgogne Tonnerre “Chevalier d’Eon” - Domaine Dampfrères

The Bourgogne “Chevalier d’Eon” bottling from Domaine Dampfrères hails all from vineyard up on the top of the slope in the village of Tonnerre, with these vines having been planted in 1987. The 2019 version is lovely, offering up a classy bouquet of apple, pear, wet stone minerality, beeswax, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, fine mineral drive and grip and a long, classy finish. This is, for all intents and purposes, as good as most Chablis *villages* bottlings out there and a superb value! 2021-2030. **88+**.

2019 Bourgogne Tonnerre “le Clos du Château” - Domaine Dampfrères

The le Clos du Château bottling from Domaine Dampfrères is one of the few bottlings from the brothers that is raised in cask- older oak, prior to bottling. The 2019 version is classy on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, a hint of almond, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive and bounce and a long, quite complex finish. This is superb Bourgogne! 2021-2030. **90**.

2019 Petit Chablis “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Dampt Frères

The 2019 Petit Chablis “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Dampt Frères is produced from vines that range from fifty to seventy-five years of age. The wine offers up a pretty and youthful nose of tart orange, fresh pineapple, chalky soil tones, straw and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with an excellent core from the old vines, good mineral drive and grip and a long, focused and complex finish. This is a very good example of Petit Chablis! 2021-2035. **89+**.

2019 Chablis “Bréchain”- Domaine Dampt Frères

The 2019 Chablis “Bréchain” from the Dampt brothers (and a couple of neighbors, who also contribute parcels to the enterprise) is a fine bottle of *villages*, offering up a vibrant nose of pear, lemon, a touch of anise, chalky soil tones, a touch of paraffin and plenty of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and youthfully reticent, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and cut, lovely focus and a long, nascently complex finish. This is approachable out of the blocks, but really deserves a couple of years in the cellar to fully blossom. These vines lie across from the grand cru of Blanchots. Fine juice. 2023-2045. **90**.

2019 Chablis “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Dampt Frères

The 2019 Chablis “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Dampt Frères is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a classic nose of green apple, lemon, wet stone minerality, a dollop of beeswax and a topnote of straw. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely mineral in profile, with a lovely core, good acidity and focus and a long, complex and wide open finish. A very good example of Vieilles Vignes. 2021-2045. **90+**.

2019 Chablis “les Forêts”- Domaine Servin

François Servin’s parcel in les Forêts is probably comprised of his youngest vines, as these are now only eighteen years of age and just coming into their prime. However, these vines have excelled in the beautiful vintage of 2019 and the wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, beeswax, lovely floral tones and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil undertow, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and very classy finish. Lovely juice! 2021-2045. **92**.

2019 Chablis “Fourchaume”- Domaine Dampt Frères

The 2019 Dampt Frères Fourchaume is a fine example of this superb premier cru, with more of a flinty minerality to its personality than the more “woody” soil signature one finds in certain parts of this large vineyard. The bouquet is bright and focused, wafting from the glass in a mix of lemon, tart orange, a fine base of flinty minerality, white lilies, paraffin and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is zesty, full-bodied and complex, with plenty of chalky soil signature, a fine core and impressive length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. 2021-2050. **92**.

2019 Chablis “les Fourneaux”- Domaine Dampt Frères

The 2019 les Fourneaux from Dampt Frères is a very good example of this lesser-known premier cru. The wine offers up fine depth and complexity in its bouquet of pear, apple, chalky dusty minerality, a touch of chicken broth and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely mineral in personality, with a good core of fruit, fine balance and grip and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is fine juice. 2021-2040+. **91**.

2019 Chablis “Mont de Milieu”- Domaine Damppt Frères

The Damppt brothers 2019 Mont de Milieu is a fine bottle in the making, with plenty of wet stone minerality augmenting the lovely fruit tones on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of green apple, lime, wet stones, white flowers, a touch of straw and a chalk dusty topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, lovely mineral drive and grip and a long, zesty and well-balanced finish. This is very tasty. 2021-2040+. **91.**

2019 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Damppt Frères

The 2019 Montée de Tonnerre bottling from Domaine Damppt Frères is properly more reserved out of the blocks than their other premier crus, but offering the same purity, precision as these other wines, just asking for a bit of cellaring time first. The excellent nose delivers scents of apple, tart orange, a fine base of chalky minerality, dried flowers, a hint of anise and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine girdle of acidity, a very good core of fruit, lovely backend mineral drive and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. Good juice in the making. 2024-2050. **92+.**

2019 Chablis “Vaillons”- Domaine Servin

Domaine Servin’s 2019 Chablis “Vaillons” is an excellent wine. These are some of the younger vines owned by the domaine, though still ranging from twenty-five to thirty-five years of age, so hardly “young vines”. The wine is fermented and aged solely in stainless steel and offers up a superb bouquet of pear, lemon zest, an incipient note of beeswax, chalk and oyster shell minerality and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a superb core, lovely mineral drive and grip, bright acids and a long, poised and vibrant finish. This is approachable out of the blocks, but has room to grow if given a bit of bottle age. First class Vaillons! 2021-2045. **92.**

2019 Chablis “Vaillons”- Domaine Testut

The 2019 Chablis “Vaillons” from Cyril Testut is a lovely example of this fine vintage, offering up a ripe, minerally-infused and very precise bouquet of pear, tart orange, wet stone minerality, incipient notes of paraffin, straw, a hint of anise and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, youthful and beautifully balanced finish. This is lovely, but deserves at least a couple of years in the cellar to unlock its secondary layers of complexity. Fine juice. 2023-2050. **92.**

2019 Chablis “Vaucoupin”- Domaine Damppt Frères

The 2019 Chablis “Vaucoupin” from Domaine Damppt Frères is an excellent example of this outstanding vintage and one of my favorite premier cru bottlings that I tasted from the estate for this report. The bouquet is pure and very precise, jumping from the glass in a blend of green apple, pear, tart orange, chalky minerality, white flowers and incipient notes of the beeswax to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and lift, zesty acids and a long, vibrant and very well balanced finish. This is very tasty out of the blocks, but has the backend structure to also age long and gracefully and will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2021-2045+. **92+.**

2019 Chablis “Vaucoupin”- Domaine Servin

François Servin’s Vaucoupin is produced from a parcel of vines that is nearing fifty years of age. The 2019 version is outstanding on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a blend of pear, sweet grapefruit, complex chalky soil tones, beeswax, a touch of vanillin oak and a lovely floral topnote redolent of white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep,

pure, full-bodied and refined, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and grip, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the seamless and complex finish. This is excellent juice! 2021-2050. **93.**



2018 Bourgogne Blanc – Domaine Anne Boisson

Anne Boisson is one of the proprietors of Domaine Boisson-Vadot in Meursault, though with generational change, some of the wines are now starting to appear under her name. Her Bourgogne Blanc is sourced from two different *lieux à dits* in the commune of Meursault, with the average age of the vines forty years of age. She ages the wine in ten percent new oak for a year and a half prior to bottling. The 2018 version is excellent, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, pear, almond, chalky minerality, white flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely complex, with a lovely core, excellent mineral undertow and grip, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced finish. This is really as good as several Meursault *villages* bottlings produced in the neighborhood! 2021-2031. **90.**

2018 Bourgogne “les Herbeux” – Domaine Pierre Boisson

Pierre Boisson is more and more in charge at Domaine Boisson-Vadot, though he continues to work alongside his father Bernard and sister Anne in a collaborative fashion. His Bourgogne “les Herbeux” hails from the vineyard of the same name and is crafted from twenty year-old vines. Like his sister’s Bourgogne, the wine is aged in ten percent new oak for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2018 les Herbeux delivers a fine aromatic constellation of apple,

pear, a touch of iodine, hazelnut, a good base of soil and a nice touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and nicely broad on the attack, with good, but not great depth at the core, a fine foundation of soil and good length on the complex finish. This is a bit broader-shouldered than Anne's Bourgogne in 2018, as the younger vines show a bit more of the generosity of 2018. It is a good wine, with plenty of Meursault character, but not quite the same potential for aging as his sister's version. 2021-2026. **88.**

2018 Bourgogne "Murgey de Limozin" – Domaine Pierre Boisson

The Murgey de Limozin parcel of vines are the oldest of the Bourgogne holdings from the Boisson family, with the vines in this *lieu à dit* fully fifty years of age. As is the case with the other two Bourgogne bottlings from the family, this wine is aged in ten percent new oak for a year and a half. The 2018 Murgey de Limozin delivers a fine nose of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, hazelnut, Meursault floral tones and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and nicely structured finish. This has fine mid-palate depth and the possibility for fine aging; I might be inclined to give it a few years in the cellar before starting to drink it, just to let some of these secondary layers emerge. 2023-2033. **90.**

2018 Bourgogne "Vieilles Vignes"- Domaine Jean-Philippe Fichet

These vines are in the village of Meursault, with the two parcels that comprise this cuvée both in excess of forty years of age. The wine offers up a refined nose of apple, a touch of fresh pineapple, salty limestone soil tones, a touch of raw almond and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, excellent mineral undertow and grip and a long, fairly complex finish. This is very good Bourgogne. 2021-2030. **89.**

2018 Bourgogne Blanc- Domaine Serrigny

The Serrigny Sisters' Bourgogne Blanc is produced almost entirely from good old vines in Meursault, but there is a small percentage of the blend now included from vines planted in 1993 in Savigny-lès-Beaune, from a high altitude and very mineral parcel. The wine is aged a year in old oak prior to a racking for a few finishing months in stainless steel tanks. The 2018 version offers up a fine nose of pear, apple, almond, chalky soil tones, a hint of iodine and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and youthful, with a good girdle of acidity, a fine core, lovely mineral undertow and a long, zesty finish. This is still quite primary in personality and really could do with another year or two of bottle age! Good juice. 2022-2032. **88+.**

2018 Chablis "les Pargues"- Domaine Servin (screwcap)

The *lieu à dit* of les Pargues lies just above Vaillons and Montmains and shares their soil signature. François Servin's vines for this bottling are thirty to thirty-five years of age in this vineyard (he has a second bottling from les Pargues- see below). The 2018 les Pargues delivers a ripe and pretty bouquet of tart orange, a touch of fresh apricot, a fine base of chalky soil tones, citrus peel and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, sound acids and a nice touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely succulent at the core, with fine mineral undertow, sound framing acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is a very tasty *villages* that is drinking beautifully today. However, it is starting to get a touch reductive

when first opened, so decant it at least fifteen minutes before serving, just to let it stretch its wings. It really deserves to be sealed under cork. 2021-2030. **89.**

2018 Chablis “Vieilles Vignes” Sélection Massale- Domaine Servin

The Chablis “Vieilles Vignes” bottling from François Servin also hails from vines planted in the superb vineyard of les Pargues, with these vines over fifty years of age and having been planted back then with *selection massale* from the best vines then growing in the vineyard. Happily, this bottling is done under natural cork. Keep in mind that this *lieu à dit* was once ranked on the same level as many top premier crus, prior to the adoption of the AOC system, and this is the vineyard where Patrick Piuze sources grapes for his best Chablis *villages* bottling called La Grande Vallée. François Servin ferments and raised this wine half in cask and half in stainless steel. The bouquet of the 2018 V.V. wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of apple, lemon, tart orange, a beautiful base of flinty minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of ripe fruit, lovely soil signature and grip, zesty acids and a long, very nicely balanced finish. This is a superb wine, but I cannot wait to taste it from a growing season a bit less sultry than 2018, as I suspect it is customarily a very racy customer! That said, this is delicious Chablis and is drinking splendidly today. 2021-2030+. **91.**

2018 Chablis “Butteaux”- Domaine Servin

Domaine Servin’s vines in Butteaux are amongst their oldest, ranging up to fifty-five years of age and happen to be planted right next to those owned by the Raveneau family. This wine is fermented and aged both in older barrels and stainless steel and delivers a very refined nose of apple, pear, candied lemon, chalky soil tones and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine soil signature, bright acids and excellent focus and balance on the long and very promising finish. This is still a young wine and deserves a handful of years in the cellar to allow it to properly blossom and release its secondary layers of complexity. It is outstanding Butteaux in the making! 2024-2050. **92+.**

2018 Chablis “Côte de Léchet”- Domaine Damppt Frères

The Côte de Léchet bottling from Domaine Damppt Frères is Kosher and is probably the best Kosher wine that has ever crossed my path. The 2018 version is lovely, offering up a bright and wide open bouquet of apple, lemon, a touch of orange peel, wet stone minerality, dried flowers and a hint of the anise to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and grip, sound framing acids and a long, complex finish. Good juice. 2021-2040. **90.**

2018 Chablis “Forêts”- Domaine Testut

Cyril Testut’s vines in the premier cru of Forêts are his oldest, as this vineyard was planted fully seventy years ago. The 2018 Forêts is an outstanding wine, offering up a complex bouquet of apple, tart orange, fresh apricot, beeswax, a beautiful base of flinty minerality, white flowers and citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with superb mineral undertow, zesty acids and outstanding length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is built for the long haul, but is also awfully easy to drink already! 2021-2050. **93.**

2018 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Servin

The vines in the Montée de Tonnerre owned by the Servin family are the same age as those in Butteaux, ranging from thirty-five to fifty-five years of age, and like their fine Butteaux, this wine is also fermented and aged in stainless steel. The 2018 offers up a deep and complex

bouquet of pear, tart orange, a whisper of the fresh apricot to come with bottle age, chalky minerality, just a touch of beeswax and a vibrant topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with beautiful balance and grip, a very good girdle of acidity and a long, complex and beautifully pure finish. This is delicious today, but still a puppy and a bit more patience will pay further dividends. Fine, fine juice! 2023-2050. **93.**

2018 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Testut

Cyril Testut’s vines in Montée de Tonnerre are more than sixty years of age. The nose of the 2018 is young, pure and very promising, offering up a nascently complex blend of apple, pear, beeswax, a hint of fresh almond, a beautiful base of limestone soils, a hint of lemon zest and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a great core of fruit, lovely transparency and bounce, zesty acids and a long, youthful and very, very promising finish. This is a properly reserved example of young Montée de Tonnerre and really deserves at least three or four more years in the cellar before starting to drink the wine, just to let it really start to open up, as there is superb depth waiting in the wings here! 2024-2050+. **93.**

2018 Chablis “Bougros”- Domaine Dampfrères

The 2018 Bougros from the Domaine Dampfrères is a fine example of this superb *terroir*, offering up a precise and complex bouquet of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, a touch of oyster shell, beeswax, anise and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is zesty, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, superb mineral drive and cut, a lovely girdle of acidity and a long, beautifully balanced and quite classy finish. This is first class Bougros that is accessible now, but has another layer of complexity to unlock if given some hibernation time in the cellar. 2021-2055. **93+.**

2018 Marsannay Blanc “les Champsalomon” Cuvée Isabelle- Domaine Collotte

The chardonnay vines for this bottling from the Collotte family are more than forty years of age. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and the 2018 version offers up a lovely bouquet of apple, white peach, hazelnut, a good base of soil tones and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, good soil signature and bounce, zesty acids and a long, succulent finish. This is very good juice and a superb value. 2021-2027. **89.**

2018 Pernand-Vergelesses “les Combottes”- Domaine Rapet

The les Combottes bottling from Vincent Rapet is a *villages* level bottling, made from vines that range from twenty-five to thirty years of age and are raised all in three hundred and fifty liter casks. The 2018 version is excellent, offering up a precise and complex bouquet of pear, fresh almond, chalky minerality, spring flowers and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and beautifully soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, good acids and grip and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This is drinking beautifully out of the blocks, but has the structure to also age very well indeed. A classy *villages*! 2021-2035. **90.**

2018 Pernand-Vergelesses “Sous Frétille”- Domaine Rapet

The Sous Frétille bottling from Vincent Rapet is a relatively new addition to the family’s portfolio. The wine is aged in thirty percent new oak for twelve months prior to bottling. The 2018 version is nicely reserved out of the blocks, offering up a very promising bouquet of lemon, pear, a superb base of limestone minerality, almond, a touch of citrus zest and a very refined

framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core of ripe fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut and a long, balanced and promising finish. The ripeness of the 2018 vintage is in evidence here, but it is coupled with the fine minerality of this *terroir* and the combination is quite flattering. I would opt to give this a couple of years in the cellar, just to let the wine's secondary layers of complexity emerge, but it is already very easy to drink! 2023-2045. **91+**.

2018 Savigny-lès-Beaune Blanc- Domaine Serrigny

The Savigny-lès-Beaune Blanc from Domaine Serrigny is composed from three different parcels, with one planted in 1989 and the other two in 2008 and 2010. The wine is given one year in older casks prior to racking into tank for *assemblage* and a finishing *elevage* of three or four months prior to bottling. The 2018 vintage is lovely and beautifully defined by its underlying soil tones, offering up scents of pear, crab apple, paraffin, a dollop of iodine, a complex base of soil, lime blossoms and a touch of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely girdle of acidity, fine balance and grip and an impressively long, nascently complex finish. This is quite drinkable out of the blocks, but it is still a young wine and more complexity with certainly emerge if the wine is given a bit more bottle age! 2023-2035. **90+**.

2018 Meursault “Sous la Velle” – Domaine Anne Boisson

The 2018 Meursault “Sous la Velle” from Anne Boisson is a beautiful young example of this first class white Burgundy vintage. The refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, fresh almond, fruit blossoms and a nice foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, deep and full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with zesty acids, fine focus and backend bounce and a long, complex and classy finish. Lovely *villages*. 2021-2045. **90**.

2018 Meursault “les Grands Charrons”- Domaine Pierre Boisson

The 2018 Grands Charrons from Pierre Boisson is a beautiful example of the vintage. The bouquet is pure, precise and very refined, offering up scents of apple, passion fruit, hazelnut, lime blossoms, just a hint of iodine, chalky minerality, citrus zest and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and youthfully structured, with an excellent core, lovely mineral drive and cut, very good acids and a long, vibrant, focused and nascently complex finish. This is outstanding Meursault in the making. It is approachable today, but really deserves at least two or three years' worth of bottle age to allow more of its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Fine, fine juice. 2023-2045. **92+**.

2018 Meursault “le Meix Sous le Château”- Domaine Jean-Philippe Fichet

The 2018 Meursault “le Meix Sous le Château” from Jean-Philippe Fichet is a very good example of this fine white Burgundy vintage. The bouquet offers up a pure and classic blend of apple, pear, hazelnut, a hint of iodine, a good base of soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, good soil signature and grip, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and wide open finish. This is pretty ripe by the Fichet family's standards, so I would be inclined to drink this bottling in its relative youth. 2021-2030. **90**.

2018 Meursault “le Tesson”- Domaine Jean-Philippe Fichet

Jean-Philippe Fichet's 2018 Tesson is a lovely bottle of Meursault, with a bit more mineral undertow than the le Meix Sous le Château in this vintage. The first class nose jumps from the glass in a combination of pear, lime blossoms, almond, chalky minerality, fruit blossoms, a touch of iodine and a lovely foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is

bright, pure and full-bodied, with a good core, fine mineral drive and grip, sound acidity and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a bit lighter on its feet than the le Meix Sous le Château and will last longer in bottle, but it too shows just a bit of extra ripeness in 2018 compared to most vintages of this fine cuvée. 2021-2035+. **91.**

2018 Meursault “les Grands Charrons”- Domaine Sébastien Magnien

Sébastien Magnien’s 2018 les Grands Charrons is quite reductive when first opened, so give it some air if you are inclined to drink it now. With air, the wine starts to blossom a bit and offers up scents of apple, pear, iodine, hazelnut, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and youthful, with a good core, good soil signature and a long, promising finish. This could turn out nicely, if it can shake off its current reductive nature and blossom. Structurally, it reminds me a bit of some of those mid-1990s vintages from Domaine Leflaive- not all of which ever blossomed- so, I do not have a real sense of how this wine is going to evolve with bottle age. The constituent components here are quite good, so if the wine shakes off its reductive personality, it will be a fine example. 2023-2045. **87-89?**



Spring just starting to stir in the vineyards of Meursault.

2018 Meursault “les Meix Chavaux”- Domaine Sébastien Magnien

The 2018 Meix Chavaux from Monsieur Magnien is less reductive out of the blocks than the Grands Charrons and shows plenty of promise on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, passion fruit, hazelnut, chalky minerality, lime zest, fruit

blossoms, just a touch of new oak and a gentle topnote of iodine. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and nicely mineral in personality, with a good core of fruit, zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is still closed and slightly reductive on the palate, but I see no reason that this wine will not open up nicely with some bottle age and provide lovely drinking for a couple of decades. Good juice. 2023-2045. **89.**

2018 Meursault- Domaine Serrigny

The Serrigny sisters' Meursault AC bottling hails from two *lieux à dits*, les Clous Dessus and Moulin Landin, with the second a very limestone parcel. The wine is raised in a combination of one, two and three wine casks for twelve months, prior to *assemblage* and four months of finishing *elevage* in stainless steel. Their 2018 Meursault is lovely, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of apple, pear, fresh lime, almond, chalky minerality, spring flowers and a nice hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, zesty acids and a long, balanced and vibrant finish. Interestingly, this is a tad more forward in personality than the domaine's Savigny-lès-Beaune Blanc! This is very good Meursault. 2021-2040+. **91.**

2018 Chassagne-Montrachet “Morgeot- Les Petits Clos” V.V.- Domaine Bachey-Legros

The Bachey brothers' vines in Morgeot were planted in 1950, so these are truly old vines now. This wine has been bottled in a fairly reductive state, so it needs a bit of aeration to blossom before drinking right now. However, with air, it opens up nicely to deliver a superb aromatic constellation of fresh pineapple, pear, a touch of nutskin, a deep base of salty soil tones, orange zest, a touch of iodine and a nicely discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and full-bodied, with a nice sense of reserve, a rock solid core, excellent mineral drive and a long, zesty and perfectly balanced finish. This is a proper young Morgeot and could do with some bottle age to let its secondary layers emerge. It should age long and very gracefully. First class juice! 2024-2055. **93.**

2018 Santenay “Sous la Roche” Blanc- Domaine Bachey-Legros

The 2018 Sous la Roche bottling from Domaine Bachey-Legros is really a lovely wine, offering up a pure and precise bouquet that is very long in salty mineral personality, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, iodine, chalk, hazelnut and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and bouncy, with a lovely core, good soil signature, sound acids and a long, fairly complex and very satisfying finish. This is an excellent *villages!* It went into bottle a touch more reductively than the Clos des Gravières, so give it fifteen or twenty minutes in decanter prior to serving. 2021-2035. **90.**

2018 Santenay “Clos des Gravières” Blanc- Domaine Bachey-Legros

The domaine's vines in the Clos des Gravières were planted in 1997, so by Burgundian standards, they are just now starting to reach a good age. The Bachey brothers' 2018 Clos des Gravières is excellent on both the nose and palate, offering up a very expressive bouquet of apple, pear, white lilies, chalky soil tones, a touch of almond cream and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of ripe fruit, zesty acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, wide open and succulent finish. This is delicious! 2021-2035. **91+.**

2018 Rully “les Thivaux”- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Rully “les Thivaux” from Domaine Michel Juillot is crafted from vines planted in 1979, which are hand-harvested and fermented with indigenous yeasts. Half of the cuvée is fermented in casks and *demi-muids* and the other half in large *foudres*. The wine is aged for one

year in barrel, with ten percent of the casks renewed each vintage. The 2018 les Thivaux delivers an excellent nose of apple, tart orange, wet stone minerality, citrus peel, gentle floral tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good mineral undertow, sound framing acids and a long, very nicely balanced finish. This is drinking with great generosity already and is a lovely bottle of Rully. 2021-2030. **90.**

2018 Mercurey “les Vignes de Maillonge” Blanc- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Mercurey “les Vignes de Maillonge” Blanc from Laurent Juillot is produced from a nice blend of old vine parcels of chardonnay, with the plots having been planted in 1963, 1958 and 1928!). The wine is fermented in casks and *demi-muids* and sees twenty percent new oak each year. The 2018 les Vignes de Maillonge is a beautiful wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a precise mix of pear, fresh pineapple, complex, chalky minerality, lime blossoms and a discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is zesty, full-bodied, focused and mineral-driven, with a lovely core, sound acids and grip and a long, complex and wide open finish. I often like to give Laurent’s white wines a few years in the cellar before drinking them, but his 2018s are singing from the outset and I cannot see any good reason not to enjoy them in this first blush of youth! Lovely juice. 2021-2030. **90.**

2018 Mercurey “les Champs Martins” 1er Cru Blanc- Domaine Michel Juillot

The 2018 les Champs Martins is an excellent wine, with depth, ripe and pure fruit, excellent mineral undertow and the structure to age long and gracefully. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in twenty percent new oak casks. The bouquet delivers a fine aromatic constellation of apple, pear, a hint of hazelnut, chalky soil tones, gently musky floral tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with a fine core, good transparency and grip, sound acids and a long, still fairly reserved finish. Of all of the Juillot premier crus from 2018, this is the one that really will demand a bit of bottle age before it reveals all of its layers of complexity. In due course, it will be excellent. 2023-2045+. **92.**

2018 Mercurey “Clos des Barraults” 1er Cru Blanc- Domaine Michel Juillot

Like all of Laurent Juillot’s premier cru white wines, the Clos des Barraults is hand-harvested, barrel-fermented and aged one year in twenty percent new casks. The vines here are the youngest of his premier crus, having been planted in 1989 and 1995. The 2018 version is a beautiful example of the vintage, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a refined blend of pear, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, a touch of orange zest, vanillin oak and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely mineral tension and bounce, zesty acids and a long, perfectly balanced and vibrant finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2045+. **92.**

2018 Mercurey “en Sazenay” 1er Cru Blanc- Domaine Michel Juillot

The 2018 En Sazenay from Domaine Juillot is really a refined example of the vintage, offering up a bright and nicely reserved bouquet of apple, pear, limestone minerality, almond, a suave framing of vanillin oak, white flowers and a topnote that promises notes of *crème patissière* with just a bit more bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and transparent, with an excellent core of fruit, a fine girdle of acidity, impeccable balance and a long, complex finish that closes with impressive lift and grip. This is outstanding juice and a stunning value! 2021-2050. **93.**

2018 Givry Blanc- Domaine des Moirots (Christophe Denizot)

Christophe Denizot’s Givry Blanc AC is produce from seventy year-old vines, which he treats to twenty-five percent new oak each year. His 2018 version is a lovely wine, offering up a

deep and complex bouquet of white peach, apple, a beautiful base of soil tones, spring flowers, just a whisper of *crème patissière* and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a long, complex and juicy finish. This has fairly modest acidity, so it will probably be fairly short-lived by Monsieur Denizot's high standards, but for the next couple of years, it will be highly enjoyable. 2021-2023. **88.**

2018 Montagny “le Vieux Château” 1er Cru Blanc- Domaine des Mirots (C. Denizot)

The 2018 Montagny “le Vieux Château” from Christophe Denizot is fermented in a combination of both cement vats and casks, with the wine then blended and aged for eleven months in barrel. The 2018 iteration is lovely and beautifully accessible out of the blocks, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, white peach, almond, chalky soil tones, white flowers, a touch of orange zest and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a lovely core, good framing acids and grip and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. Good juice. 2021-2028. **90.**

2017 Aloxe-Corton- Domaine Michel Voarick

Jean-Marc Voarick's 2017 Aloxe-Corton Blanc is a lovely example of this superb white Burgundy vintage. The bouquet is bright and wide open today, offering up scents of pear, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, a hint of citrus zest and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, fine soil signature, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the nicely balanced finish. This is a very good *villages* level wine that is drinking very well indeed at four years of age. 2021-2030. **89+.**

2017 Pernand-Vergelesses- Domaine Michel Voarick

Monsieur Voarick's 2017 Pernand-Vergelesses Blanc is also a fine bottle, offering up a vibrant and complex nose of apple, pear, a hint of honeycomb, salty minerality, orange peel, a dollop of vanillin oak and a topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is bouncy, full-bodied and complex, with a fine girdle of acidity, a lovely core of fruit, good mineral undertow and a long, complex and zesty finish. Good juice. 2021-2030. **90.**

2017 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Michel Voarick

The 2017 Corton-Charlemagne from Domaine Michel Voarick is a fine young bottle in the making. The youthful nose is still a hint reductive, but with swirling offers up a promising blend of apple, pear, fresh almond, a touch of iodine, lemon zest, chalky soil tones, white flowers and a lovely, discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core and soil signature, bright acids and impressive balance and grip on the long and vibrant finish. This is very good juice, done in a more old-fashioned style that is short on makeup and long on mineral personality. 2024-2055. **92+.**

2017 Meursault “les Chevalières”- Anne Boisson

The 2017 Meursault “les Chevalières” from Anne Boisson is a beautiful young wine, with the nice, racy structure of the vintage perfectly presented here. The vibrant and youthful nose wafts from the glass in a classy combination of apple, pear, fresh almond, white lilies, iodine, chalky minerality, citrus zest and just a dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive, a very good girdle of acidity and a long, nascently complex and energetic finish. This is already very expressive on the nose, but is still youthfully closed on the palate and deserves some bottle age before drinking. It is going to be simply outstanding! 2024-2045+. **93+.**



2016 Chablis- Domaine Vincent Dauvissat

The 2016 Chablis AC from Vincent Dauvissat is a lovely and quite stylish example of this concentrated vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautiful and very refined blend of apple, tart orange, a hint of pineapple, oyster shells, chalky soil, just a bit of straw and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite concentrated at the core, with fine limestone undertow, zesty acids and fine backend tension on the long and complex finish. This is a first class *villages*. 2020-2030+. **90.**

2016 Chablis “Grenouille”- Domaine Testut

This is the only grand cru in which Cyril Testut owns vines, but they are over sixty years of age. The 2016 Grenouille offers up a deep, complex and beautifully blossoming bouquet of pear, tart orange, apple, wet stone minerality, a touch of citrus peel, anise, lemongrass and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is very deep, complex and full, with a bottomless core, lovely soil signature, good acids and grip and a long, very well-balanced and just blossoming finish. This is a long distance runner version of Grenouille, and though it is hardly a crime to be drinking the wine today, it is still young and will only get better with further bottle age! Fine, fine Grenouille! 2021-2060. **93.**

2008 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Louis Michel

The 2008 Louis Michel Montée de Tonnerre is an outstanding wine that is just now hitting its apogee of peak drinkability. The bouquet soars from the glass in a vibrant blend of lemon, pear, flinty overtones, wet stone minerality and a topnote of candied lemon peel. On the

palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with great mid-palate depth, laser-like focus and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and absolutely classical finish. 2020-2040. **94.**

2007 Chablis- Domaine Louis Michel

The 2007 Chablis *villages* from Domaine Michel has aged quite nicely and is still drinking surprisingly well at age thirteen. The wine offers up a bright and still zesty nose of lemon, tangerine, chalky minerality and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and wide open in personality, with a very respectable core and decent length on the easy-going finish. This was meant to be drunk earlier on than this, but the wine has aged pretty well and remains quite tasty. 2020-2025. **88.**

2007 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Louis Michel

Not surprisingly, the 2007 Montée de Tonnerre from Domaine Louis Michel is a far more serious example of the vintage than the *villages* bottling. The bouquet delivers a fine, focused and complex blend of lemon, pear, chalky soil tones, a bit of wet stone, beeswax, smoke and a topnote of candied limepeel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and *à point* finish. Good juice that is now drinking in its plateau of maturity. 2020-2035. **92.**

2006 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Louis Michel

There was quite a bit of botrytis to be found amongst the 2006 Chablis bottlings and this was never one of my favorite years in the region. However, the 2006 Montée de Tonnerre from Louis Michel does not show any botrytis character that I can find, though it is also not what one would term a classic example of this *terroir* and is far more a creature of its vintage characteristics. That said, the wine is still bright and complex, offering up a nose of yellow fruit, hay, anise, chalky dust soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and has an impressive girdle of acidity, with a fine core and very good length and grip on the moderately complex finish. This is still emerging from its adolescent phase and may yet improve with further bottle age. It is a bit idiosyncratic in style, but a good wine. 2020-2035. **90+.**

2003 Chablis “Grenouilles”- Domaine Louis Michel

This is one of the more surprising example of the 2003 vintage that I have tasted, but I cannot recall every having many bottlings of Chablis from this torrid summer. The bouquet is bright and impressively classical in style, offering up scents of lemon, tangerine, chalky, flinty minerality, candied citrus peel and a topnote of paraffin. On the palate the wine is deep, long and complex, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful balance and grip, zesty acids and a long, poised and quite classy finish. Shockingly good juice for a 2003! 2020-2030+. **92.**

1999 Chablis “les Clos”- Domaine Vincent Dauvissat

I was lucky to get a bottle here that had escaped the long reach of premoxy, which made me happy on one hand, as the wine was drinking beautifully, but sad on the other, as I had a case of this I sold when the 1996 started to go south. This bottle of the 1999 les Clos from Vincent Dauvissat is at its absolute apogee of maturity right now and drinking with great style and grace. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of candied lemon, pear, a touch of oyster shell, a fine base of limestone minerality, dried flowers and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the

palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, fine acids and grip, impeccable balance and a long, complex and very refined, classic finish. Lovely juice. 2020-2030+. **94.**

1997 Chablis “la Forest”- Domaine Vincent Dauvissat

I remember drinking quite a bit of 1997 Chablis when it was first released, reasoning that it was the vintage to drink while my 1995s and 1996s were resting comfortably in my cellar for further on down the road. Of course, this was before any of us knew anything about premature oxidation. In any case, this bottle of 1997 la Forest came out of Monsieur Dauvissat’s cellars and had never left the domaine, so it remains fresh as a daisy and really shows just how good this vintage was in Chablis. The nose delivers a gorgeous blend of lemon, a touch of tangerine, chalky minerality, beeswax, white lilies and a topnote of candied lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still quite racy, with fine focus and grip, lovely balance and a long, complex and utterly complete finish. 2020-2035. **93.**