

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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**BODEGAS RIOJANAS**  
**ANOTHER OF THE GREAT, OLD SCHOOL RIOJA PRODUCERS**



I attended a superb vertical tasting of Bodegas Riojanas' Monte Real bottling of Rioja back in the spring of last year. At that time, I had originally intended to hold off writing my feature on Bodegas Riojanas and their superb wines until I had a chance to delve more deeply into their second top line bottling of Rioja, which they call Viña Albina, but with the world so uncertain at the present time, it may be many months before getting together for vertical wine tastings (despite the well-known healing properties of mature Rioja!) is considered a prudent health risk. So, rather than continue to sit on the notes from this great Monte Real vertical tasting from last spring, I decided to go ahead and write my feature on this great classicist Rioja estate now, and if the future allows, I will return somewhere down the road to more fully explore the winery's Viña Albina bottling. I have always considered Bodegas Riojanas one of the "Big Six" of great traditionalist Rioja estates, alongside of López de Heredia, Cuné, La Rioja Alta, Marqués de Riscal and Marqués de Murrieta. Unlike several of these producers, Bodegas Riojanas is not located near the train station in Haro in the *Barrio de la Estación* (as are Cuné, La Rioja Alta and López de Heredia for instance), but in the town of Cenicero, located on one of the deep southern bends of the Ebro River in the La Rioja Alta district. Cenicero is in the heart of

vineyard country, about halfway between the two traditional urban hubs of the Rioja region, Haro and Logroño, and has been home to Bodegas Riojanas since 1890.

Bodegas Riojanas was founded in 1890 by Don Rafael Carreras, who started out on quite a small scale, due to his relatively modest means. Rafael Carreras was not originally from the Rioja region, but from Cataluña, and he envisioned a promising future for the wines of Rioja in this era and settled down here to produce wines in the region. He settled on Cenicero as his locale to be close to his vineyard sources, as he originally did not own any vines of his own and was buying the fruit with which to make his wines. His business thrived from the outset and expanded fairly rapidly throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century and Don Carreras soon partnered with two local vineyard owners, Román and Fortunato Artacho, who were cousins, and whose family had widely-planted vineyards in the area around Cenicero in the mid-nineteenth century. When Don Carreras passed away, he passed on his business interests to his wife and children, who could not continue to run the business on a day to day basis, and the management of the estate passed on to the Artacho cousins. Finally, in 1930, the widow of Don Carreras sold her family's last shares of Bodegas Riojanas to the Artacho family and Bodegas Riojanas has been synonymous with the Artacho family ever since that time.

The Artacho family was one of the earliest vineyard owners in the area around Cenicero, as they can trace back their exploitation of the vine in this region nearly one hundred years prior to the formation of Bodegas Riojanas, as they still have a large stone archway that enters into one of their vineyards and which is dated 1799. Given the family's important role as major vineyard owners in the area, it was logical that they would eventually partner with Don Carreras and begin to eventually produce their own wines. In the very early years of Bodegas Riojanas, most of the winery's production was sold in bulk, rather than in bottle, with an emphasis placed on making wines that would drink well from an early age for their customers. It would not be until 1930, once the full ownership in the estate was held by the Artacho family that the winery would change strategic directions and start committing to selling all of its production in bottle and adopting the classical Rioja model of long barrel aging for its wines prior to bottling and eventual release. As is the case with the other great classically-styled Rioja bodegas, the emphasis remained on offering wines that were still ready to drink, but from the 1930s forward, this was done here by giving the wines extended aging in the cellars both in cask and bottle prior to releasing them into the market and focusing far more on Reservas and Gran Reservas.

Bodegas Riojanas was first incorporated in 1940, after the close of the Spanish Civil War, and though it has had various investors now for many years, it has remained essentially a family-run winery, as it has been directed from the 1940s forward by descendants of the Frías Artacho family. In 1997, it began to be a publicly traded company in Spain. Today, two generations of the family remain at the helm of the winery, with long-time Technical Director Felipe Nalda Frías still sitting on the board of directors, with his nephew, Emilio Sojo Nalda having taken over the cellar management responsibilities in 2006 when his uncle retired after fifty-two years as the head winemaker here. Additionally, Felipe Nalda Frías' son, Santiago Frías Monje is the Managing Director of Bodegas Riojanas today, having joined the winery in 2001 as its Chief Financial Officer and moving up to lead the winery a few years later. His great uncle, Marcelo Frías, had been the Director of Bodegas Riojanas for fully half a century. While Cenicero is in the heart of vineyard land in La Rioja Alta, the only other major bodegas located within the town

besides Bodegas Riojanas is Marqués de Cáceres, who holds the dubious distinction (at least to my palate) of being the first major Rioja producer to introduce French oak barrels to its aging regimen in the 1970s.

While Bodegas Riojanas makes more than twenty-five different bottlings of Rioja today, its two flagship wines remain its Monte Real and Viña Albina cuvées. Both are made primarily from estate-grown grapes from the winery's own vineyard holdings, which have grown over the years and now total fully two hundred hectares of vines, with almost all of them still centered around Cenicero. In addition to farming two hundred hectares of vineyards, Bodegas Riojanas also has long-standing contracts with over one hundred small farmers in Rioja and purchases fruit from them to augment their own vineyard production. The two flagship bottlings here take their names from the two finest vineyards that the Artacho family purchased back in the early years of the twentieth century: *El Monte* and *Viña Albina*. Monte Real was the first of the two red wine bottlings to be created at Bodegas Riojanas, as the estate's chief winemaker in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a French oenologist named Gabriel Larrendant (who had been specifically brought in at Bodegas Riojanas when the Artachos decided to start focusing on producing higher quality wines for long aging), first presented the proposed blend for the cuvée to Román Artacho in his office in 1930 and told him, I have already come up with a name for this new bottling: Monte Real. Señor Artacho was dutifully impressed with the proposed Monte Real cuvée and it has been one of the foundations of Bodegas Riojanas ever since that day.

From the time of his arrival at Bodegas Riojanas, Monsieur Larrendant had begun experimenting with wines from certain parcels in the vineyard of *El Monte* with an eye towards creating the new cuvée which would eventually become Monte Real. It took several years of blending trials and aging in the cellars to finalize the bottling, which was one of Rioja's very first single vineyard wines (though *El Monte*, like the *Tondonia* vineyard of López de Heredia, is quite a large vineyard) and would eventually be released onto the market in 1933. While the exact records have been lost at Bodegas Riojanas, Santiago Frías and Emilio Sojo Nalda believe that the first vintage released of Monte Real was the 1926. From its original release in 1933 up through the decade of the 1950s, the fruit used for Monte Real continued to be sourced exclusively from the *El Monte* vineyard, but beginning in the 1960s, as the popularity of the bottling grew, the vineyard sources were expanded for the wine, but with all of the fruit continuing to hail from vineyards within the town limits of Cenicero.

Interestingly, Bodegas Riojanas' other flagship red wine bottling, Viña Albina, actually began its life ahead of Monte Real as the winery trademarked this name in 1901! However, Viña Albina began its life exclusively as a white wine, as the twenty hectare vineyard of *Viña Albina* was planted solely with white wine grape varieties at the turn of the twentieth century. The first release of Viña Albina Blanco was in 1901 and it was the produced from the 1900 vintage, so one can see that the tradition of aging of white Rioja in this era had not yet really begun. The wine and the vineyard were originally named in honor of the daughter of one of the partners in the bodegas at this time: Albina Carreras. It was the very first bottled wine ever sold by Bodegas Riojanas, which prior to the release of the 1900 Viña Albina Blanco, had sold exclusively red and white wines in bulk. Today, from this original white grape vineyard of Viña Albina, still five hectares of the parcel are planted to white grapes and it is used today for the production of Bodegas Riojanas' late harvest, sweet white wine bottling, Viña Albina Dulce "Vendimia

Tardía”. However, despite its historical foundation as a white wine, the vast majority of wine sold by the estate under the Viña Albina label today is Rioja Tinto, as the wine is sold as a Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva, as well as a “Reserva Seleccionada”. In addition to the late harvest Dulce bottling, there also remains a small amount of white wine made and marketed under the Viña Albina label, including a “Semi-Dulce” bottling and a dry Viña Albina Blanco.

As the original *Viña Albina* vineyard was planted exclusively to white grapes when the brand was launched in 1901, as the brand was expanded to include aged red wines, vineyard sources had to be allocated to the red wines of Viña Albina. Since the first release of Viña Albina Tinto, the grapes have come from a range of different villages in the Rioja Alta region, including Cenicero, San Vicente de la Sonsierra, Avalos, Peciña and Rivas de Tereso. As Señor Frías and Señor Sojo Nalda observe, “the vineyards used for Viña Albina are mostly higher altitude, which allows for fresher wines” and craft the more elegant style that is the hallmark of this cuvée. In the mid-twentieth century, the strategy was to produce two slightly different interpretations of classic Rioja Tinto with the bottlings of Monte Real and Viña Albina, with the former made in a more robust style (and bottled in a Burgundy shaped bottle to denote this stylistic slant) and the Viña Albina in a more elegant style, with this cuvée always bottled in a Bordeaux-shaped bottle. A similar distinction by style and bottle shape is practiced at Cuné for instance, with their Viña Real the more broad-shouldered wine and bottled in a Burgundy-shaped bottle, while their Imperial is crafted in a more elegant style and shares a Bordeaux-shaped bottle with Viña Albina.

Both Monte Real and Viña Albina Tintos shared a similar *cépages* for more than the first six decades of their existence, with both wines made from blends in most vintages of eighty percent Tempranillo, fifteen percent Mazuelo and five percent Graciano. This classical blend of Rioja grapes has been continued for the Viña Albina Tinto bottling on into the present day, but the proprietors at Bodegas Riojanas decided to change course just a bit with the Monte Real bottling in the late 1990s, so that from the 1998 vintage forwards, this cuvée has been produced solely from Tempranillo. This was in an era where certain estates were starting to rethink a bit the style of Rioja, with producers such as Bodegas Roda gaining critical acclaim for their more powerful style of Rioja, which they were aging in French oak casks, rather than the traditional American oak barrels, and releasing into the market far earlier than had been the norm amongst the great traditionalist estates of Rioja. From the 1998 vintage forwards, Monte Real has been composed solely from Tempranillo, but it continued to be raised entirely in American oak casks for more than a decade after the change in *cépages*. Eventually, the directors here also decided to start using a bit of French oak for the barrel aging of the Monte Real, in combination with American oak barrels. It was not until the 2013 vintage of Monte Real that the bodegas began to use French oak casks for the *elevage* of these wines, with the eventual percentage settled on today being fifty percent French oak casks and fifty percent American oak barrels.

Since the 2013 vintage, the Monte Real “Reserva” and “Gran Reserva” bottlings are aged for their first year in the cellars in the fifty-fifty combination of French and American oak barrels, with all of the wood new for this first year. After one year of *elevage* in the new casks, the wine is racked into three year-old barrels for the next year of barrel aging. Both Reserva and Gran Reserva Monte Real are now bottled after two years of barrel aging, with the Gran Reserva then given at least another year of bottle aging in the cellars before it is considered for possible release. In contrast, the Monte Real Crianza bottling never sees any new oak during its own



*elevage*, as it is raised in “one wine barrels” for its year in the cellars prior to bottling, but again, with the fifty-fifty split of French and American oak barrels still used, so that there is a consistency of oak origin today for all three levels of Monte Real. The philosophy at Bodegas Riojanas was to try and put a bit more stylistic difference between their two flagship wines, which previously had been made from similar *cépages* and American oak regimens during their period of barrel aging, with the principal difference between the two being the desire to have the Viña Albina be the more elegant and delicately-styled bottling of Rioja, and the Monte Real to be the slightly more powerful and broad-shouldered example. As Monte Real is a wine that ages long and gracefully and takes decades after its release to fully blossom, it is still too early to tell if these changes will produce dramatic differences in the style of the wine at peak maturity, as the 1998 and subsequent vintages are still too young to know this with any certainty today. Certainly, the quality of the wine has not decreased one bit with these changes, but we may see a slightly different style of wine at its apogee from its *cépages* of one hundred percent Tempranillo in the wine since 1998 and the inclusion of fifty percent French casks in the aging process from the 2013 vintage forwards.



The *El Monte* vineyard, which today serves as the backbone for both of these flagship bottlings, is a classic La Rioja Alta vineyard, with a fine soil composition of clay and limestone, sitting at an altitude of four hundred and fifty meters above sea level at the confluence of the Rioja region’s two principal rivers, the Ebro and the Najerilla. The vineyard now encompasses fully one hundred and fifty hectares under vine, making it by far the largest estate vineyard owned by Bodegas Riojanas and the source not only for Monte Real, but also several other of the estate’s various Rioja bottlings. *El Monte*’s vineyards now average fifty years of age and due to the alluvial deposits here over the years from the two rivers, the soils tend to have a more stony composition than many other vineyards in the La Rioja Alta region. But, like all of the great traditionalist wineries in Rioja, Bodegas Riojanas has long purchased fruit from farmers in the

region to augment their production from their own estate vineyards. They have worked with nearly one hundred different farmers in the region for many decades, often reaching back several generations of growers in the same families, with all of their producers from whom they purchase grapes based in the La Rioja Alta region and most centered around the town of Cenicero. One interesting aspect of both Bodegas Riojanas' own estate vineyards and those from the farmers whom they buy grapes from each year is that there is a fairly significant percentage of both Mazuelo and Graciano planted in these vineyards, as the Cenicero region continues to be focal point in Rioja for these two traditional varieties, so that the estate controls a very significant percentage of production of these two classic grapes that had fallen out of fashion a bit elsewhere in Rioja.

Both Monte Real and Viña Albina have a range of different wines bottled under their brand names, with Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reservas both produced under both labels. In addition, there is today a Monte Real Blanco bottling called "Barrica" as well as a Viña Albina Blanco. With the Viña Albina Tinto bottlings, there is a single Gran Reserva produced, but currently, two different levels of Reserva, with one labeled simply as Reserva and the other labeled as "Reserva Seleccionada". For the Viña Albina Blanco bottlings, there are currently three different versions, ranging from a sweet, dessert-styled wine called Dulce "Vendemia Tardía", to a semi-sweet bottling called "Semidulce" and a traditional dry white Rioja just labeled as Viña Albina Blanco. The latter bottling is composed entirely of Viura, with the Dulce and the Semidulce's *cépages* being ninety percent Viura and ten percent Malvasia; the Dulce's Vendemia Tardía is classified as a Reserva. The *cépages* of the Monte Real Blanco "Barrica" is eighty percent Viura and twenty percent Malvasia. As the notes below will show, there was also once a Monte Real Blanco "Gran Reserva" produced at Bodegas Riojanas, which was quite different in style from the modern day Monte Real Blanco. We tasted the 1973 vintage of the Blanco Gran Reserva from Monte Real at our vertical tasting, which was one of the last vintages of this wine produced; its *cépages* was forty percent Viura, thirty percent Malvasia, twenty-five percent Garnacha Blanca and five percent Maturana, and the wine did not undergo malolactic fermentation. The 1973 was aged for two years in cask prior to bottling in early 1976 and was very, very good.

When one looks back at literature written in English on Bodegas Riojanas (of which, unfortunately, there is relatively little), the general consensus is that at the Reserva and Gran Reserva level, the estate makes wines right up there with the finest producers of classical Rioja, but further down their hierarchy of bottlings, the general opinion of other wine writers is that their wines are not quite as good as those from bodegas such as Cuné, La Rioja Alta or López de Heredia. While I have only had, for the most part, experience with the various bottlings of Monte Real and Viña Albina produced by Bodegas Riojanas, I must say that one can dip down to the Crianza level with both bottlings and still find truly excellent wines and often, terrific values as well. The most recent Crianza level wines that I tasted here, both from the 2016 vintage, were really good, well-made wines, and if past allusions from other writers that Bodegas Riojanas was not paying all that much attention to Crianza might have been accurate (I was not drinking Crianza wines here back in the old days, as my focus was most often on Reservas and Gran Reservas, so I cannot comment personally on the accuracy of these older claims), it is most assuredly not the case today. Certainly both the Monte Real and Viña Albina Crianza wines in recent times are now to be numbered amongst the real sleepers in the market for classically-

styled, well-priced and high quality Rioja bottlings. The myriad of other cuvées at the lower level that are produced by Bodegas Riojanas- brands such as El Lago or Puerta Vieja- I have never had an opportunity to taste and do not know how they stack up against other entry level bottlings from other producers in Rioja.

Beyond their twin cornerstones of Monte Real and Viña Albina, Bodegas Riojanas has also begun in recent years to produce a couple of modern-styled cuvées of Rioja, called Gran Albina and Albina Essencia, which are made with high percentages of new oak (eighty-five percent new American oak casks for the Essencia bottling and all new oak for the Gran Albina, with one-third each hailing from French, American and other European sources). The Gran Albina is not priced particularly expensively, as it is generally a tad less than the Gran Reserva bottling of traditional Viña Albina, but the Albina Essencia is quite a bit more pricey. I have not tasted either wine, so I do not know how successfully the estate has managed the attempt at making more modern, new oaky styles of Rioja, but my gut feeling is that they are probably doing a good job with them. The inclusion of these two wines in the lineup at Bodegas Riojanas shows that the current management team here is open to new styles of wines to augment their foundation of classical Rioja bottlings, but as this is a style of Rioja that does not particularly interest me, I have not sought out the wines to see how they stack up in comparison to other modern Rioja bottlings. For my palate, the magic of Rioja is to be found most prominently in the traditional wines of the region, so that has been my focus with the wines from Bodegas Riojanas.

As I mentioned in the opening of this article, my original inclination had been to not write my historical feature on Bodegas Riojanas until after the winery had organized their cellar selection tasting of older vintages of Viña Albina Gran Reserva, much as they had done with their Monte Real Gran Reserva back in the spring of 2019. However, with the coronavirus pandemic devastating so much of the world's population right now, it seemed overly hopeful to keep this article on the back burner while waiting for the ways of the world to lie open once again and to be able to include as deep a range of notes on mature vintages of Viña Albina as I have already with Monte Real. So, I have written this piece this spring and will simply look forward one day to hopefully being able to report on a great many more vintages of Viña Albina Gran Reserva. To my palate, both Monte Real and Viña Albina are amongst the very finest cuvées of classically-styled Rioja produced in the region, and the slight shift in style of Monte Real in more recent times has not diminished its quality at all from what I have tasted so far. Yes, the wine has shifted slightly in style, but my gut instinct is that with a couple of decades of bottle age, the underlying personality of the vineyard sources for the grapes here will come to define the wine at maturity, much as they have always done, and the change to a fifty-fifty mix of French and American oak barrels for the *elevage* of this wine will not change it dramatically. And of course, the Viña Albina, with its continued blend of eighty percent Tempranillo, fifteen percent Mazuelo and five percent Graciano and *elevage* exclusively in American oak casks is as traditional a style of Rioja Tinto as one can find today in the region, and it remains a superb wine for those who do not wish to experiment with a bit of French oak in their old school Rioja.

*The following notes are organized first by Blanco bottlings, followed by Crianza bottlings from both Monte Real and Viña Albina, followed by Reserva releases under both brand names, and then sections on Viña Albina Gran Reserva and finally, Monte Real Gran Reserva. As I mentioned above, with luck, one day I will be able to supply many more notes on Viña Albina*



*Gran Reserva, as the team at Bodegas Riojanas had already scheduled a comparable tasting of these wines for this spring, before the Coronavirus pandemic put that series of tastings on hold.*



*The team at Bodegas Riojanas, from left: Technical Director Emilio Sojo Nalda, Global Sales Director Josexto Soria, Felipe Nalda Frias, US Brand Manager Brandon Parker and Director General Santiago Frías Monje.*

### **Monte Real Blanco**

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

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

#### **1973 Monte Real Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

Bodegas Riojanas’ 1973 Monte Real Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva was composed of a blend of forty percent Viura, thirty percent Malvasia, twenty-five percent Garnacha Blanca and five percent Maturana, with all of the different varieties co-fermented. The wine did not go

through malolactic fermentation and spent two years aging in older casks, prior to being bottled in early 1976. Today, it continues to drink beautifully, offering up a complex and quite vibrant bouquet of apricot, orange peel, salty soil tones, a touch of nutskin, gentle framing elements of toasted coconut and a delicate topnote of browned butter. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very well-balanced, with lovely complexity and grip, sound acids and a long, focused and classy finish. A lovely example of old, white Rioja. 2019-2045+. **92.**

### ***Crianza***

#### **2016 Viña Albina Rioja “Crianza”- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 2016 Viña Albina Rioja “Crianza” from Bodegas Riojanas is a beautifully perfumed and classical expression of the region, offering up a complex nose of cherries, a touch of black raspberry, Rioja spice tones, a touch of cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and youthfully complex, with a bit of ripe tannin, good focus and grip and a long, bouncy finish. This does not have the mid-palate depth of a Reserva, but it has plenty of personality and is a very good value. Good juice. 2019-2035+. **89.**

#### **2016 Monte Real Rioja “Crianza”- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 2016 Monte Real Rioja “Crianza” from Bodegas Riojanas is a tad riper than the Viña Albina version, coming in at 13.5 percent octane, but offering up excellent purity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is first class, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, Cuban cigar, just a dollop of incipient spice elements, a fine base of soil and a nice, discreet foundation of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows quite a bit more depth at the core than the Albina Crianza, with moderate tannins, good very balance and grip and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. This is approachable today, but really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to start to blossom. It is an excellent example of Crianza and will age significantly longer than the Albina version. 2021-2045+. **90+.**

### ***Viña Albina and Monte Real Reserva***

#### **2013 Monte Real Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 2013 Monte Real Rioja Reserva is a lovely wine in the making, and though it could still do with some time in bottle to develop further layers of complexity, it is already really pretty tasty at its relatively young age. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, a touch of spices meats, Rioja spices, a good base of soil and a delicate touch of oak. On the palate the is pure, full and starting to get a bit velvety on the attack, with a good core, fine soil signature and just a whisper of backend tannin on the nascently complex finish. Good juice. 2019-2060+. **91+.**

#### **2013 Viña Albina Rioja “Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 2013 Viña Albina Rioja “Reserva” is a beautifully refined and classic bottle in the making from Bodegas Riojanas. The bouquet is still youthful, but precise and very promising, wafting from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, black cherries, cigar smoke, cloves, a touch of nutskin, excellent soil tones and a fine framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and potentially quite velvety, with a good core, excellent soil signature, suave tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is still a tad on the young side for primetime drinking (though certainly approachable), but all of the constituent components are in place for a fine, long and refined life in bottle! A first class Reserva. 2022-2050+. **91.**



### ***Viña Albina Gran Reserva***

#### **2010 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 2010 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva” from Bodegas Riojanas is an outstanding wine. At nine years of age it is starting to really drink well, but has decades of life still ahead of it. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of plums, black cherries, cigar smoke, Rioja spice tones, a fine base of soil and a fine base of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely velvety already on the attack, with a sappy core, good soil signature and grip, impeccable balance and a very long, refined and ripely tannic finish. While this bottling is starting to really stretch its wings, it is still in climbing mode and will be even better with another five years or more in the cellar. And outstanding Gran Reserva. 2019-2060. **93**.

### ***Monte Real Gran Reserva***

#### **2011 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 2011 Monte Real Gran Reserva is still a young wine at eight years of age, but it shows excellent promise and should really start to hit its stride with a bit of extended cellaring. The youthful nose is precise and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a fine, black fruity blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, fresh nutmeg, smoky American oak and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and classic in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, suave tannins and lovely soil signature on the long and very well-balanced finish. Fine, fine juice in the making. 2031-2100. **93+**.

### **2010 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 2010 Monte Real Gran Reserva is a bit riper in style than the utterly classical 2011, and hence is a bit more monolithic in profile at the present time. The bouquet offers up plenty of depth and pure, ripe fruit, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, a bit of dark soil, gentle notes of bitter chocolate, cedar and a bit of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with lovely plushness on the attack, a rock solid core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and fine focus and balance on the long, youthful finish. The 2010 vintage in Rioja has the higher reputation, due to its greater ripeness than 2011, but my gut feeling is that the latter vintage will produce the more complex wines over the long haul. That said, this is still a very good wine and will appeal more to those that like a bit more powerful style of Rioja. 2030-2100. **92.**

### **2004 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 2004 vintage has produced a very fine bottle of Monte Real Gran Reserva. The wine is starting to show a bit of this cuvée's youthful plummy on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a fine blend of black cherries, plums, Cuban cigars, fresh nutmeg, cinnamon, a touch of celery seed, toasted coconut and a really lovely base of soil elements. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classy in profile, with a fine core, moderate tannins and impressive length and grip on the poised, complex finish. This is still a good five years away from its true plateau of maturity, but it is evolving beautifully and will be a top flight vintage of Monte Real. 2024-2100. **92+.**

### **2001 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

It is interesting, as the 2011 Monte Real was probably raised in a bit less French oak than the 2004, but it shows a bit more of its cedary influence than the '04, which is probably reflective of the French casks being a bit younger than they were in '04. This was a ripe and very high quality vintage in Rioja and the Monte Real Gran Reserva shows lovely promise, with the nose offering up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, lovely Rioja spice tones, cloves, smoky US oak and quite a bit of cedary elements from the French casks also used in the *elevage*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely base of soil, very good grip, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and focused finish. This is very good and I may be underrating it just a touch, but I like the mix of US and French oak better in both the 1998 and 2004 vintages that flanked this very good 2001 in the tasting. But, the depth of fruit, soil drive and length here are first class. 20027-2100. **92.**

### **1998 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 1998 vintage of Monte Real Gran Reserva was a seminal one for this superb bottling, as this was the first year where the wine was composed entirely of tempranillo and saw a bit of its *elevage* done in French casks, rather than all American oak barrels. The percentage of French wood used for the 1998 was only ten percent (and would climb a bit in coming years). The 1998 Monte Real is still not quite ready for primetime, but it is blossoming beautifully and is going to be a reference point vintage for this wine, as it offers up a complex aromatic constellation of red plums, cherries, raspberries, a gorgeous base of soil, cloves, fresh nutmeg, coconutty oak and just a whisper of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite refined in personality, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and very, very promising finish. Great juice that still deserves some time in the cellar, but is certainly quite approachable today. 2025-2090. **94.**





### **1978 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 1978 Monte Real Gran Reserva shows just how beautifully this cuvée ages, as at forty-one years of age, this wine is really just at its peak of drinkability and has decades and decades of life still ahead of it. 1978 was a frost vintage in Rioja and therefore, a very short crop, but of high quality. The wine today is gorgeous, wafting from the glass in a wide open and utterly classic bouquet of raspberries, red plums, Rioja spices, Cuban cigars, salty soil tones, just a wisp of spiced meats and a lovely framing of smoky American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully tangy (the cuvée still included Mazuelo and Graciano back in this era), with modest tannins, lovely focus and grip and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2060. **93.**

### **1975 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 1975 vintage of Monte Real is a bit more delicately styled, but I really like its precision and high-toned complexity. It was a hot summer and the wines came in originally very ripe, with alcohols at 13.5 percent (very high in this pre-global warming era), so perhaps the fine evolution of the 1975 augurs well for riper years like 2010 in the long run. Today the 1975 delivers a fine bouquet of raspberries, cherries, cloves, a bit of cocoa powder, a fine base of soil and a bit of cigar wrapper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and quite complex, but a bit linear in personality and without the amplitude of nuance of the very top vintages of Monte Real from this era. The finish is long, with melted tannins and still good acids and this is a great pleasure to drink today. 2019-2050. **91.**

### **1968 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

Monte Real is one of the really lovely examples of the 1968 vintage that I have been fortunate enough to taste in the last few years. This was a cooler growing season in Rioja and the grapes had an extremely long hang time as a result and were still harvested with nice, high acidity, with the latest bunches not brought in until the month of November. The '68 Monte Real Gran Reserva offers up a truly refined nose of plummy fruit, sweet walnuts, a beautiful base of soil tones, a nice dollop of spices meats, toasted coconut and a lovely topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very velvety on personality, with good mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip and a long, classy and vibrant finish. This is really a lovely wine. 2019-2045+. **92.**

### **1964 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

The 1964 vintage of Monte Real Gran Reserva has always been my favorite year for this wine, and though it had some competition for my affection at this tasting by the superb wines from 1955 and 1942, this is still the reference point vintage of Monte Real. This was the very first vintage for long-time Cellar Master Felipe Nalda Frías, who was Technical Director at Bodegas Riojanas from 1964 until 2006. Not a bad inaugural vintage! The Gran Reserva 1964 spent fully nine years aging in cask prior to bottling, making it one of the longest-tenured vintages in barrel in the history of the Monte Real bottling. The beautifully classic bouquet continues to soar from the glass in a complex blend of raspberries, red plums, a touch of cocoa powder, Cuban cigars, sweet nutskin, a fine base of soil, a hint of celery seed, cloves and a discreet base of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still retains a touch of sappiness at the core, with outstanding focus and grip, tangy acids and a very long, pure and seamlessly balanced finish. A great, great wine. 2019-2060+. **95+.**

### **1955 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

I had never tasted the 1955 Monte Real Gran Reserva prior to this tasting and I was absolutely thrilled with the quality of this wine! The bouquet is very, very pure and complex, delivering an aromatic constellation of cherries, red plums, raspberries, fresh nutmeg, Cuban cigars, cinnamon, salty soil tones and a touch of toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure, complex and very intensely flavored, with a velvety palate impression, still a whisper of backend tannin and a very long, refined and gently tangy finish. This is not quite as precise today as the 1942 Monte Real, but it is very similar stylistically and a great wine in its own right. It has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2019-2050. **93.**

### **1942 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas**

1942 is one of the greatest old Rioja vintages that I have been lucky enough to taste and the '42 Monte Real Gran Reserva is one of the stars of this legendary vintage. The wines were made from a very short crop and were reportedly very structured and powerful in their youths, but they have stood the test of time marvelously and today, the Monte Real offers up a very, very complex bouquet of cherries, raspberries, cloves, a beautiful note of spiced meats, cigar wrapper, very refined soil tones and a touch of residual toasted coconut from its American oak cooperage. On the palate the wine is very pure and complex, with a full-bodied format, a superb core of sweet red fruit, sound acids and grip and a very long, perfectly balanced and utterly refined finish. A great old Rioja. 2019-2050. **94.**



## RECENTLY-TASTED MÂCONNAIS AND CÔTE CHALONNAISE SPRING 2020



I love the wines from the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise, and for this spring's report, I have tasted mostly wines from the 2017 and 2018 vintages. As is the case further north in the Côte d'Or, the two vintages could not be more stylistically different, as the 2018 growing season was hot and the wines are generally pretty big, ripe nicely concentrated at the core, fresh and wide open in personality, whereas the 2017s are quite classical in proportion, racier and more mineral-driven. There is more mid-palate volume to most of the 2018s than is the case with the 2017s, and for earlier drinking, I imagine that the 2018s are the wines that will be more popular in the general market (and probably better-suited for delivery and early consumption during coronavirus lockdowns at home), but I like the more transparent and snappy style of the 2017s even better than the wines from the 2018 vintage and, qualitative terms, have to peg this vintage just a touch higher than 2018. But, this is not to damn the 2018 vintage with faint praise in these two regions, as the wines have turned out really quite well (as is also the case with the white wines in the Côte de Beaune a bit further north) and there are lots of bottles in this vintage that are going to delight lovers of these white Burgundies from the southern fiefs, and keep in mind, that many of the very top bottlings of Pouilly-Fuissé and the better premier crus from the Côte

Chalonnaise are still resting in the cellar from the 2018 vintage, so the best is yet to come from this growing season.

As there are still quite a few 2016 wines from these two regions still in the pipeline as well, I thought it might make sense to include the vintage background from this year as well in this report. As readers will recall, the 2016 vintage was quite atypical, due to the frost damage in the spring and many of the wines have ended up more concentrated than normal as a result, from the extremely reduced yields from frost-damaged vineyards. When I last wrote a report on the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise back in February of last year, many of the 2016s here were still a bit bound up in their structural elements and in need of a bit of bottle age to blossom properly. A little over a year on from that article, the wines have indeed opened up nicely and most 2016s are now drinking very well from this southern end of Burgundy. In contrast, some of the 2017s from these two regions have started to show even better mineral definition and depth of fruit as they have seen some bottle age, and I like the vintage even more today than I did when I last covered them back in that feature (and of course, some of the higher level bottlings from the vintage have now been released). As was the case further north in the Côte d'Or, the 2017 vintage in these two regions was excellent and very classical in personality, with the biggest threat being yields that were too generous in the vineyards that had been badly frost-damaged in 2016. Today, the 2017s seem more serious than they did a year ago and I have to rate the vintage a peg up from my impressions last year at this time, with the top bottlings from Pouilly-Fuissé, Pouilly-Vinzelles and the Côte Chalonnaise likely to be some of the great bargains in white Burgundy in recent memory and very much worthy of adding to the cellar.

The 2018 vintage in the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise was a bit more difficult out of the blocks than was the case further north in the Côte d'Or, as spring precipitation varied quite dramatically from village to village and the variations of water reserves later on in the backend heat of the summer would spread harvesting dates out markedly, as many parcels shut down for a period of time due to hydric stress in the areas where spring rains had not been all that generous. Some vines could not continue to ripen up their bunches in the hottest drought stretches of late July and the first half of August of 2018 and, due to a period of shutdown from hydric stress, needed to be picked a bit later as a result. However, other vineyards, where spring rains had been heavier did not have these same issues; as a result, some vineyards in the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise were picked at the end of August or the first few days of September, while others had to be picked a few weeks later, due to lagging maturity from lack of water reserves in the soils and their attendant hydric stress issues in the vines. My impression is that this spread of physiological ripeness was more an issue in the Mâconnais than it was in the Côte Chalonnaise in 2018, but I have yet to taste any meaningful number of samples of 2018s from the Côte Chalonnaise, so this is only an early impression based on a negligible number of samples. The winter leading into the growing season of 2018 had been wet and warm in both the Côte Chalonnaise and Mâconnais (as it was further north in the Côte d'Or), with plenty of rain, but not really very cold temperatures. 2018's flowering had arrived early in the spring, promising a large crop and this indeed proven to be the case. For those who were blessed with more rain over the months of May and June to further build up water reserves in the soil, ripening would not be a problem in the heat and drought of July and August- though they did have to contend with potential mildew issues during the wet spring, so vigilance was necessary to protect the vineyards for those who saw more late spring rainy weather.

It is still very early days for the shipping of 2018s from the two regions of the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise, so one is mostly seeing Mâcon-Villages level wines and the very first few *villages* bottlings from the Côte Chalonnaise right now in the market from this vintage. Within this rather narrow band of early arrivals, one can see that the wines offer nice, ripe, plump fruit that seems a bit more precise out of the blocks than did the equally ripe 2015s at a similar age. There are variations in acidity levels amongst the 2018s that I have tasted, which I presume can be traced back to how soon parcels could be picked at harvest time. Plots of vines that had not been quite as generously rained upon in the spring and hence, had lower water table reserves in second half of the summer, would have had to be picked a couple of weeks later than those that did not experience hydric stress issues, and my gut feeling is that the 2018s that have the better acidity levels are those that did not suffer hydric stress and could be picked earlier. The fruit tones of the 2018s, mirroring those of the best white wines further north in the Côte de Beaune, are really quite lovely, with very good ripeness and sense of sucrosity, but also with good undertow of soil tones and no lack of freshness or bounce. Where the acids are a bit higher, they seem likely to last longer, but the softer examples still exude plenty of charm and vibrancy today and are going to be very tasty bottles out of the blocks.

It seems to me that in 2018, where the wines made from earlier-picked parcels and those picked later will part company in their potential longevity, with the softer examples from the Côte Chalonnaise or Mâconnais likely to be at their best in the first couple of years after they are released; the examples with better acidity will have much longer lives in bottle. I did not have the opportunity this past November to get my customary, introductory window into the vintage of 2018 in the Mâconnais as I do in most years, as Dominique Lafon was returning from an event in Paris the day of my appointment here, and I only had a chance to chat with him for a short time during my visit to taste the Côte de Beaune wines at Domaine des Comtes Lafon this year. Normally, I will taste the entire range of the Lafon family's Mâconnais wines between the reds and whites from the Côte de Beaune in the cellars, but as I was being hosted for my tasting of the 2018s by Dominique's daughter, Léa Lafon, this November, we did not get a chance to run through the Mâconnais wines during the time of my visit. Dominique had just told me at the end of the tasting to get in touch with his New York importer to get samples of the range of 2018 Héritiers de Lafon Mâconnais wines, but naturally, I forgot until I started working on this article and the coronavirus pandemic was in full swing. Dominique's importer is still servicing retail wine shops in New York during the pandemic I believe, but I did not hear back from them when I contacted them about the 2018s.

*The following wines are listed geographically from north to south. This year, I have gotten my act together and listed the wines from the Côte Chalonnaise first, as they should be, as they lie further north than the Mâconnais. I did not ask for samples of Côte Chalonnaise red wines when I was first organizing bottles to be covered for this report back in February, and by the time I thought of adding them to the coverage in this article, the coronavirus pandemic had descended with all its force on the metropolitan New York area and I decided not to reach out to importers. The few red Côte Chalonnaise wines I have tasted of late will be included in the next issue of the newsletter, in my annual *In the Bottle Red Burgundy Report*. I will put together another article on these two lovely regions in about six months' time, as given the staggered release dates of Mâcon-Villages bottlings and the better vineyards of Saint-Véran, Pouilly-Fuissé, Pouilly-Vinzelles and the premier crus in the Côte Chalonnaise,*

*I seem to be missing many of the latter releases by only writing about these two regions once a year. Given how the wines from both regions seem to be getting better with each passing year, as more vigneronns in the south eschew machine harvesting and farm better, these are now some of the most exciting values to be found in the world of white Burgundy and I need to devote more time to their coverage. And given that premox still makes it an utter crapshoot to age a grand cru from the Côte de Beaune the ten to twelve years its terroir properly deserves, wines from the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise- which inherently drink at their peaks sooner- are more and more important in the grand scheme of things.*

### ***Rully Blanc***

#### **2018 Rully Blanc- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The Drouhin family's bottling of Rully Blanc is made from purchased grapes and must, from farmers they have worked with for many, many years. The wine is made from the production of 1.2 hectares of vines, so this is not a large production wine from the estate. It is barrel-fermented and aged in twenty percent new oak each year. I had a chance to taste this bottling in Beaune in November and was very happy to see another bottle in my samples for this article, as it was pretty closed down the first time I tasted it. Today, that is not the case, as it wafts from the glass in a fine blend of apple, lemon, a touch of fresh pineapple, chalky minerality, citrus zest and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, bright and complex, with a rock solid core, sound framing acids and very good backend minerality on the long and classy finish. This still has the broad shoulders and acid structure of most 2018s, but its spine of minerality adds lift on the backend. 2020-2030. **90.**

#### **2017 Rully "les Thivaux" Blanc- Domaine Michel Juillot**

The Rully "les Thivaux" from Domaine Michel Juillot is made from vines planted in 1979. It is half barrel-fermented in casks and demi-muids, with the other half fermented in three thousand liter foudres. The wine is raised for one year in cask, with ten percent of the barrels new. The 2017 les Thivaux offers up a beautiful bouquet of apple, lime blossoms, a touch of fresh almond, lovely minerality, white flowers and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and focused, with zesty acids, a lovely core of fruit, great backend mineral drive and a long, poised and complex finish. This is quite possibly the finest example of Rully I have ever tasted! 2020-2030+. **92.**

### ***Mercurey Blanc***

#### **2017 Mercurey "les Vignes de Maillonge"- Domaine Michel Juillot**

I really like Laurent Juillot's wines and I have been foiled now two springs in a row from finally getting the opportunity to visit the domaine and meet him in person. Next year will be different! His 2017 Mercurey "les Vignes de Maillonge" is a *villages* level bottling, but these are old vines, with the parcels having been planted in 1963, 1958 and 1928! The wine is barrel-fermented and raised for twelve months in a combination of barrels and *demi-muids*. The 2017 version is a gorgeous wine, with the nose wafting from the glass in a classy blend of pear, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, lemon zest and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core and grip, superb balance and a long, zesty and wide open finish of serious, old vine pedigree. Fine juice. 2020-2035. **90.**

### **2017 Mercurey “Clos des Barraults” Premier Cru- Domaine Michel Juillot**

The 2017 Clos des Barraults Blanc from Laurent Juillot is an excellent wine, with its Premier Cru status most evident in its more complex and precise expression of minerality. The bouquet is superb, offering up scents of apple, white peach, chalky minerality, a hint of acacia blossom, lemon oil, white lilies and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, superb backend mineral drive, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. There is more mid-palate depth here than in the very good Vignes de Maillonge, despite this being relatively young vines (twenty-six years of age) and the above being very old vines. This is first class white Burgundy and a veritable steal that puts to shame many an example of Meursault or Puligny AC at half the price! 2020-2040+. **92.**

### **2017 Mercurey “En Sazenay” Premier Cru- Domaine Michel Juillot**

The Mercurey “En Sazenay” Blanc from Monsieur Juillot is not particularly old vines, as the two parcels here were planted in 1985 and 2000. The wine is raised in twenty percent new oak and is simply outstanding in 2017, delivering a superb aromatic constellation of apple, pear, almond, acacia blossoms, chalky soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, bouncy and full, with a succulent core, lovely soil signature, a zesty girdle of acidity and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and flat out delicious finish. The Clos des Barraults may age a bit longer than the En Sazenay, but they will deliver equal levels of pleasure at their apogees. 2020-2035+. **92.**



## **Givry**

### **2017 Givry Blanc- Domaine des Moirots (Christophe Denizot)**

Christophe Denizot's Givry Blanc is produced from a north-facing parcel of seventy year-old chardonnay vines in the *climat* of Champ Pourrot. The wine is barrel-fermented, with twenty-five percent of the casks new. The 2017 version is very pretty, delivering a nose of pear, *crème patissière*, spring flowers, a nice touch of soil and a stylish framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and succulent at the core, with good balance and grip, bright acids and a long, vibrant and youthful finish. This is not the most complex glass of Côte Chalonnaise, but it hits all the right notes in its more limited register and is very easy to drink! 2020-2030. **89.**

## **Montagny**

### **2017 Montagny "le Vieux Château" 1er Cru- Domaine des Moirots (Christophe Denizot)**

The Montagny "le Vieux Château" premier cru from Christophe Denizot is made from twenty year-old vines. He barrel-ferments seventy percent of the cuvée, with the rest fermented in cement tanks, which allows the Kimmeridgian limestone in the vineyard here to shine front and center in the wine. The 2017 offers up a stylish bouquet of apple, pear, chalky minerality, almond and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and more complex than the youthful nose suggests today, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral drive, zesty acids and impressive length and grip. This is still a puppy and deserves a year or two in the cellar to let the bouquet blossom and catch up with the palate's complexity, but it is so tasty right now that I can imagine it is not going to be all that easy to age! 2020-2030. **90+.**

## **Mâcon-Villages**

### **2018 Mâcon-Villages "la Crochette"- Domaine Jacques Charlet**

Domaine Jacques Charlet is managed by the Barbet family of Domaine des Billards fame in Saint-Amour. Their Mâcon-Villages bottling is produced from fruit purchased from several families whom they have worked with for many decades, with about half the production hailing from the appellation of Viré-Clessé. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks and the 2018 version offers up a ripe and vibrant nose of peach, apple, toasty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite deep at the core, with good soil signature, fine focus and bounce and a long, succulent finish. This has the ripeness of 2018, while still staying light on its feet. A good example. 2020-2027. **88+.**

### **2018 Mâcon-Villages- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 2018 Mâcon-Villages from Maison Joseph Drouhin is happily sealed under natural cork here in the US and is really quite good in this vintage. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of apple, white peach, toasty soil tones, apple blossoms and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary in personality, with a lovely core of fruit for its level, sound acids and fine length and focus on the well-balanced finish. I like this a hair better than the Saint-Véran this year. 2020-2027. **88+.**

### **2018 Mâcon-Bussières "les Clos"- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

This is one of the cooler sites in the Mâconnais and it has done very nicely in the warmer summer of 2018. The bouquet is bright and classy, delivering a blend of apple, peach, gentle toastiness, chalk, just a whisper of vanillin oak and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, crisp and full-bodied, with a good core, fine soil signature, sound acids and good bounce and grip on the wide open and succulent finish. A fine example. 2020-2030. **90.**



**2018 Mâcon -Lugny “les Crays”- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The Drouhin family’s Mâcon -Lugny “les Crays” is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel prior to bottling and sees no oak. Their 2018 version is nicely ripe and quite expressive aromatically, wafting from the glass in a mix of nectarine, apple, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and juicy on the attack, with a fine core, good soil signature and a long, bright and wide open finish. Like many 2018 whites, the acids here frame the wine nicely, but are fairly low in comparison to other recent vintages, which will allow the wine to shine best in its youth. 2020-2025. **89.**

**2018 Mâcon -Vergisson “Sur la Roche”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize**

The 2018 Mâcon -Vergisson “Sur la Roche” from Jacques and Natalie Saumaize is a very complex and classy example of Mâcon, offering up a vibrant nose of pear, apple, a touch of nuttiness, orange blossoms and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and balance, good soil signature and a long, complex and bouncy finish. This does not have quite the dimension of the estate’s excellent Saint-Véran or Pouilly-Fuissé bottlings, but it has old vine intensity of flavor, the same sense of precision and really quite nice acidity for the vintage. Lovely juice. 2020-2030. **89.**

**2017 Mâcon-Villages- Domaine des Tourterelles (screwcap)**

Though the Gaillard family has been farming in the Mâcon region around the village of Viré since 1946, they only started to begin estate-bottling at Domaine des Tourterelles in 2014. Valentin Gaillard is the young proprietor here, as his father, who was the managing director of the local cooperative where the family sold their production, decided he wanted to leave a family winery to his son and so they got rolling together in 2014. Consequently, the 2017 Mâcon-Villages from Domaine des Tourterelles is only their fourth vintage of estate bottled wine, produced from fifty-five year-old vines on chalky-clay soils sitting with a southeasterly exposition at four hundred and fifty meters of elevation. The wine is a touch reductive when first opened and needs some aeration to blossom, but once it does, it offers up a bright and nicely mineral nose of apple, just a whisper of fresh pineapple, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a lovely core from the old vines, bright acids and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is first class Mâcon-Villages- let’s get future vintages of this wine sealed up under natural cork as soon as possible, as I have the feeling it will age long and gracefully for its level if given a proper closure (and this would probably rank two points higher under cork)! 2020-2024? **88.**

**2010 Mâcon “la Roche Vineuse” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Olivier Merlin**

I cannot remember if 2010 was generally a botrytis year or not in the Mâconnais, but this wine certainly has its fair share and the noble rot has compromised the wine’s ability to age gracefully. Today, it is very tropical and simplistic, offering up scents of pineapple, orange peel and a bit of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tropical and a bit hot and stewy on the backend, with a good core and still a sound girdle of acidity, but little endearing complexity. There is no retained freshness here, despite the wine still having good acids. Not my cup of tea. 2020-2030. **84.**



### ***Saint-Véran***

#### **2018 Saint-Véran- Maison Joseph Drouhin (screwcap)**

This is the US market's version of the wine, which is sealed under screwcap. To my knowledge, the wine's composition is exactly the same as the bottling found in other markets, which are sealed under natural cork. The wine shows just a bit of reduction when opened and needs some vigorous swirling to start to stretch its wings, but eventually does so to offer up a classic nose of apple, pear, toasty soil tones, a touch of nuttiness and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, sound framing acids and lovely length and grip on the succulent finish. This is a bit broader-shouldered in 2018 than in other recent vintages, but still has lift and charm. 2020-2023. **88.**

#### **2018 Saint-Véran “en Crêches”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize**

The 2018 Saint-Véran “en Crêches” from the Saumaize family is their younger vine bottling from this appellation (they have a Vieilles Vignes cuvée that is made from vines in excess of fifty years of age), but the vines here are still between ten and thirty years-old, so it is not comprised solely of younger vine fruit. The 2018 version is very stylish on the nose, wafting from the glass in a vibrant mix of apple, a hint of tangerine, chalky soil tones, citrus zest, spring flowers and a bit of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely wide open in personality, with a good core, a fine base of soil, bouncy acids and good length and grip on the complex finish. Good juice. 2020-2033. **89+.**

**2017 Saint-Véran “Madame Noly”- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine & Pascal Rollet)**

The Saint-Véran “Madame Noly” from Domaine de la Chapelle is made from a 1.23 hectare parcel of vines that was planted between 1955 and 1960. Only ten percent of the cuvée is barrel-fermented, with the rest fermented and raised in stainless steel. The 2017 Madame Noly is very lovely and quite floral on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, a nice touch of almond, fruit blossoms, a hint of Meursault-like geranium and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full-bodied, with a lovely core of old vine fruit, good soil signature, bright, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This is first class Saint-Véran that will age very gracefully. 2020-2035. **91.**

**2017 Saint-Véran “la Côte Dorée”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils**

The 2017 Saint-Véran “la Côte Dorée” from the Guerrin family is the new name for the bottling that was called “Côte-Rôtie” up through the 2016 vintage, but has had its name changed starting in 2017. The wine is made from forty-five year-old vines, on a steep, south-facing vineyard that has a very thin layer of limestone topsoil before one reaches the Mother Rock. The wine is barrel-fermented and sees fifteen percent new oak during its *elevage*. The 2017 la Côte Dorée offers up a fine bouquet of pear, apple, chalky soil tones, a touch of acacia blossom and a suave base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a fine core and complexity, bright acids and superb length and grip on the very refined finish. This is simply superb Saint-Véran! 2020-2035+. **92+.**

**2017 Saint-Véran- Maison Roche de Bellene**

The 2017 Saint-Véran from Maison Roche de Bellene is a pretty example of its appellation. As I mentioned last year in my note on the 2017, the vines for this bottling are forty years of age and it is fermented with indigenous yeasts and is raised in older barrels. The 2017 version offers up a bright bouquet of white peach, apple, toasty soil elements and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and succulent, with good focus and grip and a long, tasty finish. This is not particularly complex, but it is a good, solid effort. 2020-2025. **87.**

**2017 Saint-Véran “La Vieille Vigne des Crêches”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize**

This is the old vine cuvée made from fifty-plus year-old vines by the Saumaize family. It is entirely barrel-fermented and aged in twenty percent new oak each year. The 2017 La Vieilles Vignes des Crêches offers up an excellent bouquet of pear, apple, fruit blossoms, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones and a nice touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and still nascently complex finish. This is still tightly-knit and deserves another year or two in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to emerge; it is excellent example of the appellation. 2021-2035. **91+.**

**2016 Saint-Véran- Domaine Saumaize-Michelin**

Roget Saumaize and his wife, Christine Michelin, run this domaine of ten hectares in Vergisson. The family has been farming organically for two decades and have been biodynamic since 2005. Their Saint-Véran bottling is produced from two parcels, one in the village of Davaye and the other on the far side of the Roche de Vergisson. The wine is half fermented and raised in stainless steel and the other half in older barrels. The 2016 version is a lovely wine that is starting to show some lovely secondary layers of complexity in its bouquet of apple, peach, a touch of hazelnut, acacia blossoms and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and focused, with a very good core, sound soil signature and a long, well-

balanced and fairly powerful finish for Saint-Véran. Do recall that the 2016 vintage produced very concentrated wines in the Mâconnais and this lovely example of Saint-Véran shares that vintage character. 2020-2025. **89.**

### ***Pouilly-Fuissé and Pouilly-Vinzelles***

#### **2018 Pouilly-Fuissé- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The Pouilly-Fuissé bottling from Joseph Drouhin has been made for many, many years from fruit and must contracted for from the same group of growers, much like the family's excellent Beaujolais Cru bottlings in villages like Saint-Amour, so there is a consistency to this wine from year to year. The wine is raised in a mix of stainless steel tanks and oak barrels, with the 2018 offering up lovely aromatic complexity in its bouquet of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, fresh almond, gently musky floral tones and a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with very good acids for the vintage, lovely balance and a long, succulent and classy finish. Usually I give a slight nod to the *maison's* superb example of Pouilly-Vinzelles over their Pouilly-Fuissé, but at least out of the blocks, I am in the Pouilly-Fuissé camp in 2018! Fine juice. 2020-2030. **90.**

#### **2018 Pouilly-Vinzelles- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 2018 Pouilly-Vinzelles shows its ripeness a bit on both the nose and palate this year, giving it a slightly tropical veneer to go along with lovely limestone mineral drive. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, a hint of tangerine and pineapple, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and almost plush at the core, with good minerality, sound framing acids and a long, succulent and wide open finish. This is very tasty, but I like the extra bit of cut in the Bussièrès this year. 2020-2030. **89.**

#### **2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “aux Bouthières”- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine & Pascal Rollet)**

The 2017 aux Bouthières from Catherine and Pascal Rollet is one of their very old vine cuvées, as the vines that go into this bottling are more than seventy years of age. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised meticulously in a combination of new, one year and two year-old casks prior to bottling. The vineyard of aux Bouthières lies to the southeast of the Roche de Solutré and due north of the village center of Pouilly, with a classic soil foundation of chalk and clay over a substrata of white marl. The 2017 version is exceptional, wafting from the glass in a very refined blend of apple, white peach, a touch of hazelnut, a beautiful base of soil, gentle floral tones, fresh nutmeg and a lovely framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and elegant in personality, with a rock solid core, lovely transparency and grip, impeccable balance and a long, zesty and complex finish. I love the seamless balance of this wine, which augurs a long and rewarding life in bottle and I would not hesitate to tuck this wine away in the cellar for a decade or two! Superb juice. 2020-2045. **93.**

#### **2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Vieux Murs” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Jacques Charlet**

The les Vieux Murs bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé from the Barbet family is composed of a roughly fifty-fifty blend of fruit from the villages of Fuissé and Solutré. The vines are fifty years of age and are fermented one-third each combination of stainless steel tanks, older cask and new barrels. The 2017 version shows a fine combination of the generosity of fruit from Fuissé and the mineral drive from Solutré, as it offers up scents of white peach, apple, a touch of nuttiness, fruit blossoms, a nice base of soil and refined, buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely spine of acidity, a very good core of pure fruit and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is fine juice. 2020-2035. **91+.**

### **2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Crays”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils**

The vineyard of les Crays is one of the premier parcels at the feet of the Roche de Vergisson, and was my favorite bottling from André Forest way back in the day. It is a steep, south-facing vineyard with very little top soil, and the Guerrin family maintains forty-five year-old vines here. They barrel-ferment the wine with indigenous yeasts and age it in twenty percent new oak, in a combination of two hundred and twenty-eight liter and four hundred liter barrels. Their 2017 les Crays is stellar- a touch more new oaky than Monsieur Forest’s version from the 1980s, but with that same inimitable *terroir* front and center in the wine. The bouquet offers up a superb blend of pear, apple, almond, chalky minerality and a lovely foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a rock solid core of fruit, an excellent girdle of acidity and fine backend mineral drive on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is great juice that is certainly approachable today, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2020-2040. **93.**

### **2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “Les Creuzettes”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize**

Jacques Saumaize, along with his wife Nathalie and their son, Anthony (who started full-time at the domaine with the 2012 vintage) run this fine, small domaine in the town of Vergisson. Their wines are barrel-fermented, made from very old vines, and never more than twenty percent new wood is used for any bottling. The 2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Creuzettes” is excellent, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of apple, a hint of tangerine, almond, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a discreet foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, complex and full-bodied, with a great core of fruit, superb soil signature, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and youthful finish. This is clearly built to age gracefully and very much reminds me stylistically of the wines from André Forest, whose utterly classic examples of Vergisson Pouilly-Fuissé I first started selling back in the 1985 vintage! 2020-2040. **93.**

### **2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vers Cras”- Domaine Saumaize-Michelin**

Roget Saumaize and Christine Michelin make fully ten different bottlings of Pouilly-Fuissé, all of which are barrel-fermented and aged in older casks. Their Vers Cras single vineyard bottling is the only one that is not from vines in their home village of Vergisson, as this parcel of vines in the commune of Solutré. This vineyard is not quite as high in elevation as those in Vergisson (three hundred versus three hundred and seventy meters), but it is still up fairly high and has an excellent soil foundation of coral limestone. The domaine’s parcel of vines here are forty-five years of age. The 2017 Vers Cras offers up a superb bouquet of apple, white peach, chalky minerality, a touch of citrus peel, discreet, buttery oak and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and shows a lovely core of fruit, with fine soil signature, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a very good bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé that will age very nicely and could really do with a year or two in the cellar to properly blossom. 2020-2035. **91+.**

### **2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Crays”- Domaine Saumaize-Michelin**

The les Crays bottling from Domaine Saumaize-Michelin is one of their oldest vine bottling, as their vines here range from sixty-five to ninety years of age. Les Crays is situated right at the base of the Roche de Vergisson, with a due south exposition and a strong vein of iron running through the topsoil, over the Mother Rock of limestone. The couple’s 2017 les Crays is really a beautiful bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of pear, apple, a very complex base of chalky soil tones, a touch of almond, white lilies and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and beautifully transparent down to

its minerality, with gorgeous fruit tones in the core, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and classy finish. There is a touch more structural tension here from the Vergisson altitude than the in the very good Vers Cras. This is a beautiful example from one of my absolutely favorite vineyards in Pouilly-Fuissé. 2020-2035. **92.**



*Looking at the Roche de Vergisson (and the Roche de Solutré in the distance) from the north.*

### **2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “Pentacrine”- Domaine Saumaize-Michelin**

The Pentacrine bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé from Roget Saumaize and Christine Michelin is a blend from several different vineyards in the village of Vergisson. It is fermented and raised in used *demi-muids* during its *elevage*. The 2016 Pentacrine offers up impressive depth and a lovely muskiness in its bouquet of apple, pear, almond, acacia blossoms, a lovely base of soil and a nice framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with very good soil signature, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This has a touch more concentration than the 2017s I tasted here, but it is relatively light on its feet for the 2016 vintage and really is a tasty bottle. 2020-2028. **90+.**

### **2016 Pouilly-Vinzelles- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 2016 Pouilly-Vinzelles from Maison Joseph Drouhin is a lovely wine that shows plenty of generosity and ripeness in its bouquet of apple, pineapple, chalky soil tones, spring flowers, a touch of vanillin oak and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and wide open structurally, with perhaps a hint of botrytis, a good core, fine soil signature



and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. I may be wrong about the touch of botrytis here, as 2016 was a concentrated and fairly tropical vintage in the Mâconnais, so the pineapple elements could just be a reflection of the vintage, without any noble rot. In any case, this is a very tasty bottle that is impressively precise and light on its feet for the vintage, and is now drinking at its apogee. 2020-2025+. **91.**

**2008 Pouilly-Fuissé “Petits Croux”- Domaine Guffens-Heynen**

I know I am dating myself, but the first vintage of the wines from Jean-Marie Guffens which I drank and sold was the 1985, and I very much liked what Monsieur Guffens was doing at his family domaine back in the second half of the 1980s, when I was fortunate to drink them with some frequency. So, I had pretty high expectations for this wine, but alas, it was not meant to be. It has held up pretty well for a more than ten year-old bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé, with reasonable freshness, but is not particularly complex at this point in its evolution. The bouquet offers up a slightly tropical blend of pear, pineapple, salty soil tones, a touch of sweet corn and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and still reasonably plump at the core, with sound acids, little complexity and a slightly hot, chunky finish. I would like to think that those bottlings back in the late 1980s would have stood the test of a dozen years in the bottle better than this 2008 Petits Croux, but perhaps that would not have been the case. At least this wine still has plenty of life in it, but it is not trending in the right direction. 2020-2030. **86.**

## THE SUPERB 2018 VINTAGE FROM DOMAINE CLOS DE LA CHAPELLE



As readers are well aware, the relatively new estate of Domaine Clos de la Chapelle has become one of my absolute favorite producers in the Côte de Beaune in less than ten years. For the second straight year, my spring trip to visit the domaine was disrupted, this time by the global coronavirus pandemic. The talented team here, led by proprietor Mark O'Connell, has relocated to larger cellars in the village of Bligny-lès-Beaune since I last had a chance to taste *sur place* here (the cellars were previously located in the center of Beaune next to Maison Champy), and though 2018 was the second vintage that they were able to finish in their new and more spacious surroundings, I am yet to have a chance to see the new cuverie and cellars. As was the case last year, Mark very graciously offered to send me samples of the finished 2018s that I had been scheduled to taste in the cellars in March, and had them whisked out of Bligny before the global lockdown really came into full force. I was extremely curious to see the domaine's take on the vintage of 2018, as Mark and his team aim for elegance and purity in their wines and one had to walk a tight rope in the torrid summer of 2018 to realize those qualities in the resulting wines. Happily, after letting the samples settle in from travel for a full month (I cannot overemphasize how difficult it was to keep my hands off of these bottles and allow them to fully recover from their overseas voyage!), I was delighted to find that Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

has certainly crafted as elegant, refined and soil-driven examples of the 2018 vintage as one is likely to find anywhere in the Côte d'Or. These are very clearly some of my favorite red wines of the entire vintage in Burgundy!

Mark O'Connell is very able assisted in the cellars at the Domaine Clos de la Chapelle these days by Technical Director for the domaine, Coralie Allexant-Manière, who prior to coming on board for the 2017 vintage, had previously spent the previous five years patrolling the cellars at Domaine Méo-Camuzet. Mark O'Connell is still the head winemaker here, as he has been since the first vintage of 2010, but with Coralie overseeing the wines on a day to day basis, everything is in very good hands in the cellars, and this is very much in evidence in their beautiful range of 2018s. As I have mentioned in the past, the domaine's vineyards had been farmed organically for the last several years of their being the foundation of Domaine Boillot (the previous small estate that owned the Clos de la Chapelle *monopole* in Volnay and several of the other parcels now part of the new domaine) prior to Mark purchasing the estate, and they are now all in the process of conversion to biodynamique farming. The 2018 *vins rouges* from the domaine are very refined examples of the vintage, coming in between thirteen and fourteen percent octane, as the vineyard team here was out in the vines on August 30<sup>th</sup> to start bringing in the pinot noir before the heat pushed up sugar levels. In fact, of the eight red wines produced by the domaine, seven of the parcels were cleared of their bunches on the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of August, with only the Beaune premier cru of Champs Pimont picked on the first day of September. Almost (all?) of the 2018 reds here come in listed at 13.5 percent octane, and I would guess that they fall within 13.5 and 13.7 for the most part, with perhaps only the Champs Pimont inching closer to the fourteen percent threshold.

Like several other of the very successful red wine domaines in the Côte d'Or in 2018. Mark and Coralie took a very gentle approach to extraction with their pinot noir in this vintage, declining to do any punch-downs at all during the first six or seven days of fermentation, and then relying far more on pumping over the juice over the cap, rather than *pigeage* during the remainder of the fermentation, so as to extract as gently as possible. That this was a very successful strategy is evident in the beautifully suave texture of the tannins of the 2018s from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle. As Mark O'Connell commented, "it seems now with global warming that every year is a balancing act at harvest time in Burgundy, as we look for phenolic ripeness in the pinot noir bunches and still keep the sugars where we want them to be, as we do not want to make wines here that are too ripe" and "these days, it feels like the window is getting smaller and smaller when we can pick and get physiological ripeness and still keep alcohols down." Happily, the domaine has never been a proponent of using high percentages of new oak, with premier crus usually raised in twenty percent new oak and the Corton "Bressandes" and Corton-Charlemagne in approximately one-third new casks, so in the riper years like 2018, there is little concern here with leeching in too many oak tannins. And, indeed, the new oak treatment in the domaine's 2018s is truly graceful.

Regarding the 2018 red wines here, the flagship Volnay premier cru bottling of Clos de la Chapelle was again destemmed, as it has been every year since the first vintage of 2010. The use of whole clusters for the other premier crus and the Corton "Bressandes" in 2018 was reined in a bit from the 2017 vintage, with Mark O'Connell commenting that "as you know, I do prefer slightly more whole cluster for those wines, but given that we were below optimum on the

phenolic profile I did not want any undo green influence in the fermentation.” Consequently, most of the other 2018 premier crus here range from ten to twenty-five percent whole clusters, with the Corton having the highest at twenty-five percent, and the Taillepiés and Grands Epenots having the most whole clusters of the remaining premier cru reds. Mark noted that with the 2018s, “our protocol is to decide cuvée by cuvée based on how the stems smell after destemming the first batch”, but “in the future, if this vegetative cycle continues- i.e. early sugar ripening and delayed phenolics, we may look to cut out that main stem so that we can have more clusters in the tank.” The cellar protocol has worked beautifully with the red wines here in 2018, as each and every wine exudes a beautifully pure and sappy expression of fruit, plush textures on the attack, good undertow of soil elements and suave, but classic structural chassis to carry the wines for many decades in the cellar.

The white wines of the 2018 vintage from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle are also very strong this year and should not be overlooked in an effort to latch onto some of the bottles of the domaine’s stellar red wine lineup! They are ripe, pure and nicely plush wines on the attack, recalling again (as is the case with so many of the best 2018 white Burgundies) the vintage of 1992 in its youth, with sound framing acids, wide open and generous personalities and plenty of underlying soil signature. All three wines come in listed at 13.5 percent on their labels and I would guess that they lie somewhere between 13.5 and 13.8 percent alcohol this year, which is far from over the top (particularly in the context of the 2018 vintage). The Beaune “Reversées” Blanc is already drinking beautifully, and though I do not expect it will be a particularly long-lived 2018 white Burgundy, it is already quite delicious and is highly unlikely that any bottles will still be around a decade down the road to see how well it will age, as it is going to be very difficult to defer gratification with that charming wine. The fine premier cru vineyard of Sous Frétilles in Pernand-Vergelesses (which gets my vote as one of the two or three finest white Burgundy value *terroirs* to be found anywhere in the Côte d’Or these days) is a bit more structured than the Reversées and could do with a few years in the cellar to blossom, but again it exudes enough youthful charm that it is going to be hard not to drink it in the blush of youth. The domaine’s Corton-Charlemagne has turned out beautifully in 2018 and will delight tasters for the next couple of decades. It will not be as long-lived as the stellar 2017 version here, but it will offer a couple of decades of outstanding drinking before it starts to peer over the far edge of its plateau of peak maturity. The 2018 vintage has turned out beautifully at Domaine Clos de la Chapelle, and if you are yet to really discover these wines, this would be a very good vintage to get started, as time is a wasting and one day, they are going to be as hard to find as some of the long-established, “big names” of the Côte d’Or.

### ***Vins Rouges***

#### **2018 Beaune “Champs Pimont”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The vines in Champs Pimont were the last to be harvested by the team at Clos de la Chapelle, as the harvesters cleared this parcel on September 1<sup>st</sup> of 2018. The wine offers up a bright and sappy bouquet of red and black cherries, a bit of chocolate, spit-roasted *pigeon*, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil, discreet new wood shading, spices and a delicate balsamic overtone in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and balance, ripe, buried tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a bit broader-shouldered than the fine 2017 version, but it has

fine backend sappiness and is very well-made and will drink well for many decades to come. But, give it some time in the cellar to let its tannins soften up a bit. 2028-2055+. **90.**

#### **2018 Beaune “les Teurons”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The 2018 Teurons from Mark O’Connell and his team at Clos de la Chapelle is a beautiful wine, with its one day earlier picking seemingly giving it just a touch more precision and purity than the Champs Pimont (that is how fast the sugars were climbing at the outset of September of 2018). The bouquet is precise and really pretty, wafting from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with superb soil signature, ripe, fine-grained tannins, sound acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, suave and complex finish. This is a simply stellar bottle of young Beaune! 2028-2060. **92+.**



*The exceptional Volnay premier cru Monopole vineyard of Clos de la Chapelle has excelled in 2018.*

#### **2018 Volnay “en Carelle”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

These nice old, sixty year-old vines have done very nicely in the torrid summer of 2018. The wine offers up beautiful depth and purity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, plums, bitter chocolate, a gorgeous base of soil, gamebird, a hint of lavender, discreet vanillin oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with a superb core of ripe fruit, good soil undertow, ripe tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is the sole Volnay in the domaine’s lineup where one can sense

the ripeness of the vintage a bit on the backend (though not at all on the nose), but the wine never loses its fine sense of balance. It comes in listed at 13.5 percent and I would guess that it is probably just a touch higher. That said, it is still an excellent wine. 2026-2055+. **91.**

**2018 Volnay “Clos de la Chapelle”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

Ten years ago, I thought my cosmology of Volnay vineyards was pretty well-established, but a decade of this domaine’s *monopole* bottling of the premier cru of Clos de la Chapelle has certainly given it a place on my summit of Volnay’s Mount Olympus! The 2018 Clos de la Chapelle is an absolutely beautiful wine and perhaps the finest yet from the estate, as it delivers a stellar aromatic constellation of black plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, a gentle touch of meatiness, a complex base of soil, woodsmoke, fresh nutmeg, hints of the black truffles to come, crushed violets and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and nicely plush at the core, with a full-bodied and impeccably balanced format, with fine-grained tannins, superb focus and grip and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is a supremely elegant example of a sappy and soil-driven 2018 and flat out great juice! 2028-2065+. **94.**

**2018 Volnay “Taillepieds”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The Domaine Clos de la Chapelle farms a small parcel of sixty-five year-old vines in Taillepieds, lying between those of Domaines de Montille and Marquis d’Angerville. Their 2018 Taillepieds is an exhilarating example of this great *terroir*, offering up a pure, youthful and bottomless bouquet of black cherries, purple berries, raw cocoa, black tea, a gorgeous expression of soil, smoked duck, discreet floral tones and a suave base of new oak. On the palate the wine is very deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a stunning synthesis of sappy black fruit and mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins and a very long, pure and very promising finish. This is a proper example of Taillepieds and will need plenty of time in the cellar, but it is going to be absolutely brilliant once it is ready to drink! 2033-2090. **93+.**

**2018 Pommard “Chanlins” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The domaine’s parcel of vines in Chanlins are closing in on their ninetieth birthday now, and these old vines have delivered a superb premier cru in 2018. The bouquet is pure and precise, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of red plums, cherries, *pigeon*, a very complex base of soil tones, a hint of nutmeg (from the whole clusters), gentle herb tones, woodsmoke and a discreet foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great soil undertow, fine-grained tannins and impeccable focus and grip on the long, very well-balanced and oh, so promising finish. This comes in listed at 13.5 percent and is a properly-structured young Pommard, but with the Chanlins vineyard’s inherent elegance already very much on display. All it needs is some time alone in the cellar to properly blossom! The Volnays here are always the slightly flashier wines out of the blocks, but make no mistake, this is a brilliant wine in the making! 2031-2090. **93.**

**2018 Pommard “Grands Epenots”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The 2018 Grands Epenots from Clos de la Chapelle is another quite svelte example of the vintage, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up very impressive purity and brightness in its youthfully complex bouquet of red and black cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, gamebird, very refined soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and pure, with lovely depth at the core, fine-grained tannins, excellent soil signature and a very long, poised and classy finish. This is an outstanding example of Grands Epenots in the making! 2033-2090. **93.**



### **2018 Corton “Bressandes”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The 2018 Bressandes from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is another stellar bottle in the making. The bouquet is deep, nascently complex and very pure, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, Corton spice tones, spit-roasted venison, a superb base of soil tones, a touch of cocoa powder and an understated base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack for young Corton, with a lovely core of fruit, great soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and outstanding length and grip on the seamlessly balanced finish. This is a great bottle of Bressandes- all it needs is time in the cellar. 2033-2090. **94.**



### ***Vins Blancs***

#### **2018 Beaune “Reversées” Blanc- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The 2018 Beaune “Reversées” Blanc from Clos de la Chapelle is an excellent example of the vintage, with a fine tension between its ripe, but pure fruit and its undertow of soil. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a generous blend of pear, apple, acacia blossoms, chalky soil tones, a touch of orange zest and a suave foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and light on its feet, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the succulent and bouncy finish. I can see no reason to not wade right into this wine, as it is drinking splendidly right out of the blocks! 2020-2030+. **90.**

**2018 Pernand-Vergelesses “Sous Frétilles”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The 2018 Sous Frétilles from Clos de la Chapelle is older vines than the Reversées and this shows both in the mid-palate intensity and in the backend mineral drive here. The bouquet is pure and flat out lovely, delivering a complex constellation of pear, pink grapefruit, a superb base of limestone minerality, bee pollen, vanillin oak and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, sound acids and very good length and grip on the long, ripe and vibrant finish. I would opt to give this a year or two in the cellar, just to let it stretch its wings a bit more, as there is more in reserve here. 2022-2035. **91+**.

**2018 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

I love Mark O’Connell’s version of Corton-Charlemagne, as I find it one of the classic expressions of the Pernand side of the hill. His 2018 version is nicely ripe, but still with both its feet firmly planted in the deep, limestone soil of the hillside, offering up a superb, complex bouquet of pear, golden delicious apple, lemon, incipient notes of *crème patissière*, acacia blossoms, beeswax, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and impeccably balanced, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature, bright acids and excellent focus and lift on the long, poised and complex finish. Back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, one of the best examples of Corton-Charlemagne was made by Domaine Tollot-Beaut and this 2018 from Clos de la Chapelle reminds me very strongly of the 1992 Tollot-Beaut when it was first released! 2022-2045. **94**.

**RECENTLY-TASTED SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE WINES**  
**PART THREE- APRIL 2020**



*The October sun going down over the vineyards in Bierzo.*

The last issue's coverage of the beautiful wines of Spain and Portugal ran out of time while I still had well over one hundred samples remaining from the Iberian Peninsula. I had been tasting at a brisk clip trying to get everything tasted and written up before the end of February, but the last week of the month saw another ten cases of Spanish wines roll through the door and I knew I would never be able to get through all the bottles in time to fit them into Issue 85. So I dutifully went to work again on what was left pending for Issue 86, and as you will be able to see from the notes that follow, it was not out of laziness that I did not attempt to get everything tasted for the last issue, as I did indeed have a very formidable pile of samples from Spain and Portugal still awaiting me when I sent out the last issue! Subsequent to the aforementioned ten cases arriving, I had one last shipment of Spanish wines arrive on my stoop prior to the slowdown of the entire world because of the Coronavirus pandemic, so though this is the third report on the wines from the Iberian Peninsula since October of last year, it is still chock full of truly superb and highly recommended wines. The breadth and depth of the last three reports fully underscores just how successful the current wine renaissance in both Spain and Portugal has been in the last decade or two and there are seemingly new producers and cuvées popping up every few weeks from these two countries that offer compelling wines and often, great values as well. And this is in addition to so many of the long-established great producers in the two countries not losing a step in recent times and crafting wines every bit as profound as the ones

that made their reputations two or three generations ago! So, despite having covered these two regions in some detail in two out of the last three newsletters, I am pleased to offer dozens and dozens more wines below that merit serious attention by those in search of wines of immense complexity, fine aging potential and unique and compelling expressions of *terroir*.

The current wine renaissance in both Spain and Portugal is founded in several factors that have coalesced to bring forth as fine a range of wines from these two countries as we have probably ever seen in their deep histories of fine wine production. In both countries, first and foremost has been the arrival of a younger generation of wine producers who have very strong ideas about the importance of *terroir* in the world of wine and a desire to reclaim and redefine this in their own wines. One can see this everywhere in regions like Galicia, where young and talented *vignerons* such as Laura Lorenzo or the extremely talented team at Envinate continue to push the quality and refinement of their wines to ever higher levels, rediscovering lost vineyards of old vines and giving superb wine making skills to farmers in the region who have cultivated their terraced parcels of old vines for many years, but never had the technical skills in the cellars to match their farming expertise and now have these young winemakers to give full expression to their exceptional *terroirs*. In this region, one also sees very talented producers such as Fernando González of Adega Algueira, whose family has been making excellent wines for more than a generation, also keep pace and find wider global audiences for their excellent wines and adding further inertia forward in the region.

Beyond the influx of this new and very talented generation of winemakers sprouting up all over the Iberian Peninsula, we also see the rise of excellent wine-producing regions who had been lost in the sands of times in these two countries and are now finding a global audience for their excellent wines. To cite but one example, the Sierra de Gredos region just outside of Madrid, with its stony, high altitude and mountainous vineyards is witnessing a glorious rebirth, much of it because of the young and talented team of 4 Monos Viticultores and their marvelous wines. There are plenty of old vines and great *terroir* to be found in the Sierra de Gredos mountains, and I suspect that a decade down the road, the number of great wines being produced here will have grown exponentially. There are also regions that rethinking their traditional wines a bit, not to produce more modern, new oaky international styles of wines, but searching for a new course that synthesizes respect for their superb *terroirs* and finds wines that can express this in a more refined manner that will appeal more to the contemporary tastes of lovers of *terroir*-defined wines. For example, we are seeing more dry table wines being produced in the Jerez today than ever before, taking advantage of old vines, great soil compositions, but charting a relatively new course away from the traditions of Sherry production to discover if the region can craft another style of wine of the same compelling quality and broaden its base of supporters. Or take a quick look at what the young and dynamic couple of Alberto Redrado and Violeta Gutiérrez are doing with their Bodegas Curii in Alicante, where they are taking old vine Garnacha in a new and totally exciting direction that echoes what Joe Heitz was doing with cabernet sauvignon back in the Napa Valley in the 1950s and early 1960s!

Across the border in Portugal, one sees the advent of newer regions such as the Alentejo really starting to come into their own after their first decade or two and the wines seem to be moving up another level in quality and complexity. I am long overdue now for a much deeper exploration of the lovely wines of the Alentejo sometime in the near future, as I have not tasted

here with anywhere near the depth and frequency of late that the quality of the wines deserves (and have not visited the region in nearly ten years)! And one is also starting to see some superb dry table wines coming out of the Douro region as well, after some early growing pains where the wines were, at least to my palate, a bit ponderous, over-oaked and international in style; I tasted an example from Luis Seabra here that made me finally understand the potential for dry table wines out of this region, with its use of indigenous yeasts for fermentation, all older casks for *elevage* and moderate alcohol level. It was an excellent and eye-opening wine for me. Beyond these, the Dão and Bairrada regions are two others that I would really like to get to know better in the coming months, as what I am tasting from these two areas have been excellent, and I have little doubt that I have only barely dipped my toe in the waters of what is going on here. To cite just a couple of examples in this context, the cooperative of Caves São João's 1994 and 1995 "Quinta do Poço do Lobo" bottlings of variety of Arinto that I tasted for this report (the current releases!) were both superb and offer stunning quality and value for dry white wines with more than two decades of bottle age already on them!

Beyond the realm of still wines on the Iberian peninsula, there are also massive and profound changes afoot in the world of Spanish sparkling wine, with many of the very best producers in Spain opting out of the Cava D.O. over a concern for its lack of quality control (and perhaps its dominance by a couple of mega-brands) and charting their own course with an association of quality-minded producers. There is the new formation of a small Penedès growers' association called Corpinnat, who have dropped out of the Cava D.O. to pursue much higher and more stringent quality standards and push sparkling wines from the Penedès region to elevated levels of quality from the standard, adequate bottle of mass-produced Cava. The rules for Corpinnat include all grapes having to be hand-harvested, farmed organically and eighteen months is the minimum that wines must be aged on their fine lees before they can be released. There is also another new D.O., called Classic Penedès, that was formed in 2012 to again promote much higher quality sparkling wines that would much more fully speak of the *terroir* of the best vineyards used for sparkling wines in the region. This was probably an inevitable byproduct of the Spanish wine authorities opening up the use of the Cava D.O. to regions outside of Penedès, which was done about a dozen years ago (if memory serves me correctly), and the new D.O. of Classic Penedès is an attempt to differentiate the very finest sparkling wines in the region and gather them under an umbrella of quality, removed from the oceans of rather indifferent bubbly also allowed to call itself Cava. Amongst the tighter quality controls of the D.O. of Classic Penedès are longer aging requirements for the wines on their fine lees (fifteen months minimum is necessary for the basic level of Classic Penedès, versus only nine months for Cava), again, certified organic farming practices and vintage-dating for all wines. And most importantly for lovers of *terroir*, the new D.O. of Classic Penedès allows the printing of single vineyards on the labels of the wines, that was expressly prohibited under the Cava D.O.

This is not to imply that there are still not a significant number of old school Cava producers who continue to make superb sparkling wines under the strictures of the old Cava D.O. The article I wrote several years ago about the "Six Percent Club" of Cava producers who grew their own grapes and sold exclusively wines they make from their own vineyard production is still accurate today, and there remain plenty of very, very fine Cava producers within the D.O. But, with the advent of both the Corpinnat and Classic Penedès growers' organizations, there is a serious stirring of even higher quality aspirations here that signal another Spanish wine region

readying for a renaissance. Several wines from these two new sparkling wine associations are covered below, and I am sure that there are many more beyond what I have already tasted that merit attention. So, things are (or were, prior to our global pandemic) moving briskly in the world of high quality Spanish sparkling wines and I have the feeling that we are only witnessing the tip of the iceberg today and wines from these two new associations will move quality even higher for the best sparkling wines of Spain, which when one looks at the wines from the “Six Percent Club” were probably already the finest values to be found in the world today.

### ***Cava, Corpinnat and Clàssic Penedès***

#### **Biutiful Cava Brut Nature NV (Isaac Fernandez Selección)**

The Biutiful Cava non-vintage Brut Nature is composed of a fairly unique blend of eighty percent Macabeu and twenty percent Chardonnay. It was aged for a year and a half *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and has less than a gram of residual sugar. The wine offers up a bright and stylish nose of lemon, tart pear, salty minerality, dried flowers and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and beautifully balanced, with frothy *mousse*, good mineral drive and a long, vibrant and fairly complex finish. This is a very well-made example and a superb value. 2020-2030+. **89+**.

#### **Biutiful Cava Brut NV (Isaac Fernandez Selección)**

While the non-vintage Brut bottling of Biutiful is made from the same *cépages* as the Brut Nature above (eighty percent Macabeu and twenty percent Chardonnay), Señor Fernandez uses slightly older vine Macabeu for the Brut Nature (fifty-five year-old vines versus forty year-old vines for the Brut NV). The wine is aged the same eighteen months on its fine lees and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is bright and pretty, offering up notes of pear, white flowers, wild fennel and a nice base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with pinpoint bubbles, excellent backend mineral drive and a long, complex finish. The Brut Nature is a bit more elegant in profile, but this has more mid-palate volume and the *dosage* is very well done and buried in the undertow of minerality here. Fine juice. 2020-2030. **89**.

#### **Biutiful Cava Brut Rosé NV (Isaac Fernandez Selección)**

The Biutiful Cava non-vintage Brut Rosé is made entirely from Garnacha, with these high altitude vineyards ranging from forty to fifty years of age. The wine ages for eighteen months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. It is a delicate, pale salmon color and delivers a lovely nose, with quite delicate fruit tones of wild strawberries and nectarine, coupled to lovely minerality, dried flowers and a hint of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has a lovely core, with pinpoint bubbles, good focus and grip, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the finish. This is not quite as delicate on the palate as the nose, as the Garnacha provides good, broad shoulders and plenty of personality. This is an excellent food Cava and the good mineral and acid foundation here absolutely devours the *dosage*. Fine juice. 2020-2030+. **89**.

#### **Marie Casanovas Cava “Brut de Brut” Reserva NV**

The current release of Marie Casanovas Cava “Brut de Brut” non-vintage Reserva was disgorged in September of 2019 and spent fifteen months aging *sur latte*. It is composed of a blend of forty percent Parellada and thirty percent each of Xarel-lo and Macabeu and is non-*dosé*. It offers up a bright and classic bouquet of lime peel, salty minerality, quinine, lemongrass and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full, with a good



core, lovely mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and light on its feet finish. This is very good Cava. 2020-2035. **89+**.



### **2017 Júlia Bernet “Cuvée Ú” Brut Nature (Corpinnat)**

Xavier Bernet’s “Cuvée Ú” bottling of Brut Nature is produced entirely from Xarel-lo that hails from his own, organically-farmed vineyards that are planted on very chalky soils. The wine is aged for two years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, October of 2019. The wine offers up impressive aromatic complexity in its mix of lemon, tart pear, *fleur de sel*, chalky minerality, bread dough and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and snappy, with a rock solid core, pinpoint bubbles, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is a deep, young and fairly powerful example of Corpinnat, which is already very tasty, but which is also built to age and will be even better three to ten years down the road! It is not the more typical, ethereal style of Cava, but rather a deeper and more structured wine that really demands food to show at its best. Quite impressive. 2020-2040+. **90+**.

### **2017 A.T. Roca “Clàssic Penedès” Rosat Reserva Brut Nature (Agustí Torelló Roca)**

The 2017 A.T. Roca “Clàssic Penedès” Rosat Reserva Brut Nature is made from a fifty-fifty blend of Macabeu and Garnaxta, with the wine taking its pale salmon color from nine to twelve hours of skin maceration for the Garnaxta portion of the blend. The wine was disgorged in November of 2019 after twenty-two months of aging *sur latte*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a really lovely blend of tangerine, strawberry, a hint of rhubarb, chalky soil tones, dried

flowers and a whisper of brown spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with snappy acids, fine balance and grip, frothy *mousse* and very good length on the finish. This is a lovely bottle of sparkling Rosat that will be even better with a bit of bottle age and clearly has the structure to keep nicely for a minimum of ten to fifteen years. Fine juice. 2020-2035. **90+**.

**2016 Júlia Bernet “Exsum” Brut Nature (Corpinnat)**

The 2016 Exsum Brut Nature from Xavier Bernet is made entirely from a very rare variation of Xarel-lo called Xarel-lo Vermell, which has pink skins (much like Pinot Gris has darker skins). The resulting wine has just the faintest whiff of salmon color to it and was disgorged in October of 2019, after more than thirty months on its fine lees. It offers up a refined bouquet of apple, wheat bread, dried flowers, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of orange peel and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a much more wide open personality than the 2017 Cuvée Ú, a good core, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the poised and very well-balanced finish. This is really lovely. 2020-2035. **91**.

**2016 A.T. Roca “Clàssic Penedès” Reserva Brut Nature (Agustí Torelló Roca)**

The 2016 A.T. Roca “Clàssic Penedès” Reserva Brut Nature is comprised of a *cépages* of fifty percent Macabeu, thirty percent Xarel-lo and twenty percent Parellada. It is fermented with indigenous yeasts and spent twenty-six months aging on its fine lees prior to its disgorgement in April of 2019. The bouquet is bright and refined, wafting from the glass in a blend of lemon, tart orange, complex, chalky soil tones, a touch of fresh-baked bread, white flowers and a bit of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and vibrant, with excellent balance and grip, a lovely core, frothy *mousse*, superb complexity and a long, classy and zesty finish. This is an exceptional sparkling wine! 2020-2040. **92**.

**2016 A.T. Roca Pedregar “Clàssic Penedès” Brut Nature (Agustí Torelló Roca)**

The single vineyard bottling of Pedregar from Agustí Torelló Roca is made from a blend of roughly eighty-five percent Garnaxta and fifteen percent Macabeu, with the Macabeu co-planted in the vineyard with the Garnaxta. The wine is barrel-fermented in old casks in a Blanc de Noirs style and then aged for thirty months on its fine lees under natural cork prior to disgorgement, which in this case was in May of 2019. The wine possesses a delicate salmon color and offers up a superb nose of apple, a touch of fresh apricot, rye bread, salty soil tones, dried flowers and just a hint of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, deep and full, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is first class sparkling wine, which clearly is made for the table. 2020-2040+. **92**.

**2015 A.T. Roca Esparter “Clàssic Penedès” Brut Nature (Agustí Torelló Roca)**

The 2015 single vineyard bottling of Esparter from Agustí Torelló Roca hails from his highest elevation vineyard, which also has the highest concentration of limestone in the soils. The wine is entirely made from Macabeu that was planted in 1968, so these vines are closing in on their fiftieth birthday. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and the wine is aged under natural cork for forty months prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is precise and classy, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of lemon, tart pear, chalky minerality, white flowers, sourdough bread and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and refined,

with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is stellar juice! 2020-2040. **93.**

#### **2014 Júlia Bernet “R-130” Brut Nature (Corpinnat)**

The 2014 Júlia Bernet Brut Nature from Xavier Bernet is composed entirely of very old vine Xarel-lo that is grown on limestone soils at four hundred meter elevation at the feet of the d’Ordal Mountains in northern Penedès. The wine spent four and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in October of 2019. It offers up a superb bouquet of lemon, breadfruit, *fleur de sel*, chalky minerality, a touch of bread dough, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with frothy *mousse*, a fine core, impressive focus and backend bounce and a long, minerally and very refined finish. This is first class Corpinnat! 2020-2040. **92.**

#### **Rías Biaxas Blanco**

##### **2019 Albariño “Nessa”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Biaxas) screwcap**

The 2019 Nessa Albariño from Adegas Gran Vinum is very pretty and expressive right out of the blocks, offering up a vibrant bouquet of pear, spring flowers, salty soil tones and a bit of wet stone minerality as well. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with really an ample core for an entry level Albariño, bouncy acids and fine length and grip on the youthful, succulent finish. This is really good- only wish it was under a natural cork, as you already have to give it a bit of air to undo the reductive nature of the screwcap. But, with a bit of swirling, there is plenty of personality here. 2020-2024. **89+.**

##### **2019 Albariño “Esencia Diviña”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Biaxas)**

The 2019 “Esencia Diviña” from Adegas Gran Vinum had also just landed in the US prior to the release of this article, so it was quite enjoyable to compare it to the 2018, which I covered in the last issue. Like the 2019 Nessa bottling, this is still a young and exuberant example of Albariño, but with plenty of undertow of complexity to come with a few more months in bottle. The bouquet is floral and beautifully ripe and precise, jumping from the glass in a mix of pear, lime, a touch of wild fennel, a good base of soil and a potpourri of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with an excellent core, good backend mineral drive, snappy acids and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Tasting this right on the heels of the very good 2019 Nessa just further underscores how the texture here under natural cork is superior to screwcap, as there is more roundness, while not sacrificing any of the cut and grip. This is lovely Albariño and an outstanding value! 2020-2030+. **91.**

##### **2018 Albariño- Alberto Nanclares (Val do Salnés- Rías Biaxas)**

Alberto Nanclares produces his eponymous bottling of Albariño from a handful of different parcels, planted in the classic pergola style and with the vines ranging from thirty to sixty years of age. He ferments half of this wine in an aged French oak *Tina* and the other half in stainless steel tanks, with the wine eventually blended and bottle after a year or so of aging on its fine lees (in both containers). The 2018 version is a superb bottle of Albariño, offering up depth and precision in its aromatic constellation of pink grapefruit, a hint of pear, beautiful minerality, dried flowers and just a hint of ocean breeze in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb girdle of acidity, lovely mid-palate depth,

impeccable balance and a long, poised and vibrant finish. This is first class Albariño! 2020-2035+. **93.**

**2017 Albariño- Lagar de Pintos (Val do Salnés- Rías Baixas)**

Year in and year out, I really like this bottling of Albariño from Marta Castro, and the 2017 Lagar de Pintos is another lovely wine. The bouquet here is youthfully complex, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of tart orange, grapefruit, ocean breeze, gentle leesy tones, lemongrass and a fine base of wet stone minerality. On the palate the wine is bright, saline and full-bodied, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is first class Albariño that will age very well for the next ten to twelve years, but is already drinking very nicely indeed! 2020-2035. **92.**

**2017 Albariño “Parje Mina”- Alberto Nanclares (Val do Salnés- Rías Baixas)**

The Parje Mina Albariño from Alberto Nanclares and Silvia Preto is one of their single vineyard bottlings, from a parcel in Meaño that is planted on sandy, granitic soils. There are only a thousand liters of this bottling, which is raised in a combination of a single, aged five hundred liter French barrel and a special, five hundred liter stainless steel tank. The wine is aged nine months on its fine lees, with *battonage* practiced for the first two months and then the wine left to rest undisturbed until racking and bottling. The 2017 Parje Mina is a stellar example of Albariño, offering up a deep, complex and vibrant bouquet of fresh lime, green apple, a touch of tart orange, lemongrass, wet stone minerality and a touch of oceanic brininess in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful in profile, with a lovely core, great transparency and grip, zesty acids and a very long, nascently complex and superb finish. This is obviously very easy to drink already, but it is a puppy and really should have three to five years in the cellar to allow it to blossom fully! Stellar juice. 2020-2040. **93+.**

**2017 Vimbio Branco- Adega do Vimbio (Martin Crusat- Rías Baixas)**

The 2017 Vimbio Branco is composed of a blend of mostly Albariño, mixed with small amounts of Loureiro and Caiño Branco. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks, on the fine lees, but gentle *battonage* is only practiced for the first three months of the *elevage*, after which the wine is left alone until bottling, without fining and minimal SO<sub>2</sub>. The 2017 version is a lovely wine, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of pear, lime peel, a hint of green olive complex soil tones, spring flowers and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with excellent mid-palate depth and soil signature, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. The soils here are primarily clay, so the Albariño shows more weight and broader shoulders than Albariños grown closer to the ocean, while the Loureiro and Caiño Branco add a bit of exoticism to both the aromatics and flavors grapes like Verdejo and Treixadura. This is lovely wine. 2020-2030. **91.**

**La Tinaja de Aránzazu “Barro & Vino”- Alberto Nanclares**

*I should note that I believe this is a special blend of several vintages, as there is no vintage on either the front or back labels, but I could not reach the importer to get more information on the bottle prior to publishing this issue, I am not certain of this; my background data on the vineyard blend was gleaned from a merchant’s website in Spain for a vintage-dated version of this cuvée, and my assumption is that the winery has begun a solera project for this wine and that is what I received a sample of for this report that is composed of more than a single vintage.* The La Tinaja de Aránzazu “Barro & Vino” from Alberto Nanclares and Silvia Preto is composed entirely of Albariño, from a barrel selection done by the couple of one cask

from the Parje Mina vineyard in Cambados and one cask from the Finca Inxertal vineyard in Sisán. The vines range up to ninety years-old for this bottling. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in older casks, but there are only two of these- one is two hundred liters in size and the other is two hundred and twenty-five liters. It sees three months of *battonage* during its nine months of *elevage* on its fine lees. The wine offers up a deep and complex nose that shows lovely evolution in its panoply of bread fruit, apple, sea salt minerality, gentle leesy tones, dried flowers and lime peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complete, with a superb core of fruit, tertiary complexity from age, still lovely acids and impressive length and grip on the still racy finish. This is a gorgeous bottle of fully mature Albariño that still has the structure and grip to cruise along for many, many years! 2020-2030+. **94.**

### ***Monterrei***

#### **2018 Godello- Fraga do Corvo**

The 2018 Godello from Fraga do Corvo is a really pretty wine, with the inherent elegance that one finds from this variety planted in Monterrei very much in evidence on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of pear, lemon zest, acacia blossoms, white soil tones and just a whisper of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, bouncy acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is quite tasty and a fine value! 2020-2025+. **90.**

#### **2017 Mencía- Fraga do Corvo**

The 2017 Mencía from Fraga do Corvo is a pretty ripe wine, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and reflecting the torrid growing season of 2017 in Galicia. But, the wine stays nicely fresh on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of sappy black cherries, pomegranate, graphite, a bit of roasted meats, dark soil tones, tree bark, woodsmoke and a hint of Cornas-like medicinal tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and plush on the attack, with a full-bodied and broad-shouldered format, a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature and a long, complex and ripely tannic finish. This is a big-boned beauty, but impeccably balanced and will age long and gracefully. It is another superb value from Fraga do Corvo! 2020-2045. **91.**

### ***Rueda***

#### **2018 Verdejo “Nosis”- Buil & Giné**

The 2018 Verdejo “Nosis” from Buil & Giné is sealed under an artificial cork, so I am not sure how long it will last under this closure, but it has the depth and balance to age quite nicely and I wish it were bottled under a natural or agglomerated cork, so I would have a better feel for its potential longevity. In any event, today it is drinking very nicely (with a bit of air), offering up a classic nose of lime, tangerine, a hint of green olive, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely plump at the core, with good mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is a touch reductive when first opened and needs a bit of aeration, but once it blossoms, it is a first class example of Verdejo! 2020-2025+? **91.**



### ***Ribeiro Blanco***

#### **2017 Casal de Armán Blanco**

The 2017 Casal de Armán Blanco has a *cépages* of ninety percent Treixadura and five percent each of Godello and Albariño. The wine is fermented and aged for nine months in stainless steel tanks. The 2017 version is pretty ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent octane in this warm summer and offers up a very pretty nose of apple, nectarine, white flowers, a touch of green olive and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and zesty, with a lovely core, very good soil signature and fine lift and bounce on the complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is very good juice. 2020-2025+. **89.**

#### **2016 Casal de Armán “Finca Misenhora” Blanco**

The Casal de Armán “Finca Misenhora” Blanco is a single vineyard bottling that is composed of a blend of ninety percent Treixadura and five percent each of Godello and Albariño. The terraced vineyard is planted on crumbling granite and slate soils, interspersed with sand and is four hectares in size. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks on its fine lees, with frequent *battonage* at the outset of its *elevage*. The 2016 Finca Misenhora offers up a deep and complex bouquet of pear, lemon peel, a whisper of green olive, complex soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely soil signature, bright acids and superb length and grip on the classy finish that closes with a note of beeswax. 2020-2026. **91.**



#### **2014 Viña de Martin “Escolma” Blanco- Luis Rodriguez-Vazquez**

Luis Rodriguez’s Escolma Blanco is a selection of (mostly) his oldest vines of Treixadura, which are planted on granite hillside vineyards and which he only produces in top vintages. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a range of older French barrels prior to bottling after eleven months; Señor Rodriguez then gives the wine an additional three years of bottle aging in his cellar prior to release, so the 2014 is the current vintage of Escolma! The wine is beautiful on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a complex blend of lemon, pink grapefruit, pear, a beautiful base of stony minerality, orange zest, a touch of paraffin and an exotic topnote of Brauneberger-like mossy botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with laser-like focus, a great core, superb transparency and grip and a very, very long, complex and utterly seamless finish. This is utterly brilliant wine! 2020-2030+. **94.**

#### ***Ribeiro Tinto***

##### **2017 Casal de Armán Tinto**

The 2017 Casal de Armán Tinto is composed of a blend of one-third each of Brancellao, Sousón and Caiño, with the vineyards planted on a range of granite, slate and sandy soils. It is made entirely from estate grown fruit and sees a bit of a “cold soak” prior to fermentation and aging in stainless steel tanks. The 2017 comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a fine bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, a hint of tree bark, complex soil tones and a bit of coffee bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature and just a bit of backend tannin adding grip to the long and classy finish. This is already very tasty and has the structure to also age very well over at least the next ten to fifteen years. It is an outstanding value! 2020-2035+. **90+.**

##### **2017 Xanledo- Viñedos de Gabián (Pepe Periero)**

Pepe Pereiro’s Xanledo bottling is composed of a blend of Brancellao and Caiño Longo. It is fermented with indigenous yeasts in a combination of open top oak vats and stainless steel tanks, with forty days of skin maceration, and then aged in a variety of older French casks, ranging from two hundred and twenty-five liters up to seven hundred liters for ten months prior to bottling. The 2017 Xanledo is a beautifully cool and refined wine, tipping the scales at twelve percent octane and offering a vibrant, black fruity aromatic constellation of cassis, pomegranate, a touch of tree bark, pepper, beautiful dark soil tones, chicory and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with excellent intensity of flavor, modest tannins and a long, transparent and impressively complex finish. This is a refined middleweight that is loaded with personality! 2020-2035. **91.**

#### **2015 Chánselus Castes Tintas- Bernardo Estévez**

The Chánselus Castes Tintas from Bernardo Estévez is made from a field blend that includes Mencía, Mouratón, Garnacha Tintorera, Merenzao and other indigenous red varieties from Ribeiro. The grapes are foot-trodden, fermentation is done with indigenous yeasts and the wine is aged in old, three hundred and six hundred liter French casks for ten months prior to bottling. The 2015 version comes in at a ripe 13.5 percent and offers up a lovely, black fruity nose of cassis, pomegranate, tree bark, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones and a touch of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with lovely transparency, a sappy core and fine focus and grip on the moderately tannic, complex and gently warm finish. This is a

very tasty bottle that is nicely light on its feet for its ripeness level. It could do with a few more years to let its backend tannins fall away more, but it is not too difficult to drink now, particularly with the right food. The only thing that keeps its score down a touch is that trace of backend alcohol, but that is the nature of the 2015 vintage. 2023-2045. **89.**

### **2013 Eidos Ermos Tinto- Luis Rodriguez-Vazquez**

Luis Rodriguez's Eidos Ermos bottling is his young vine Tinto bottling, being comprised of Caiño, Brancellao, Souson and Ferrol, all planted on a steep, granite hillside. The wine is meant to be drunk young, being fermented in stainless steel and raised in a combination of older French casks and stainless. The 2013 was released back in 2015 and I was happy to find a bottle in my cellar that I had tucked away to see how it would age. It has done so very nicely and now offers up a lovely, very pure bouquet of black cherries, chicory, a dollop of fresh herb tones, a lovely base of stony soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and vibrant, with a perfectly respectable core (particularly for young vines), lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish that closes with notes of stone and bitter cherry. Good juice that still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2020-2030. **91.**

### ***Ribeira Sacra Blanco***

#### **2017 Camino Da La Frontera Blanco- Datterra Viticultores (Laura Lorenzo)**

The Camino De La Frontera Blanco is another wine from Laura Lorenzo that is made from very, very old vines. This ancient parcel, which is well over one hundred years of age, is owned by Angel Mayor, and is principally a blend of Verdejo and Malvasia, with just a bit of Puesta en Cruz also planted here. The wine is completely destemmed, sees about two weeks of skin contact and then is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised for eleven months in five hundred liter chestnut casks. The 2017 delivers beautifully bright and precise aromatics in its mix of lime, pear, wild fennel, complex soil tones, citrus zest, just a hint of green olive, incipient notes of paraffin and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with excellent focus and grip, a lovely core, fine soil signature, bright acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a beautiful wine. 2020-2035. **93.**

#### **2017 Erea Da Vila Blanco- Datterra Viticultores (Laura Lorenzo)**

Laura Lorenzo's Erea Da Vila Blanco is composed from a field blend of primarily Godello, inter-planted with a smaller percentages of Doña Blanco and Colgadeira. The vineyard is somewhere between eighty and one hundred and twenty years of age, but no one is exactly sure of its year of plantation. It is in the Quiroga-Bibei sub-region of Ribeira Sacra, which lies on the frontier with Valdeorras. Laura includes ten percent whole clusters in this wine, which she barrel-ferments with indigenous yeasts and then raises for nine months in older, two hundred and twenty-five liter barrels prior to bottling. The 2017 offers up a beautifully refined bouquet of lemon, pear, beeswax, wild flowers and a complex base of stony soil tones. The lemon element is already starting to show the first signs of getting "candied" like mature examples from Vincent Dauvissat and Bernard Raveneau do with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and complex, with a full-bodied format, great core of fruit, lovely soil signature and a long, poised and perfectly balanced finish of seamless elegance and lift. The Godello portion of the blend is quite evident on the nose, but on the palate, the other two varieties make their presence known beautifully. This is a very unique blend of grapes and a simply outstanding bottle. 2020-2030+. **93.**

### **2017 Gavela Da Vila Blanco- Datterra Viticultores (Laura Lorenzo)**

The Gavela Da Vila Blanco from Laura Lorenzo is made entirely from old vine Palomino, grown on granitic soils in the *Val do Bibei* section of Ribeira Sacra. The wine is fermented in thousand liter chestnut vats and raised in the same vats for eleven months prior to bottling, without clarifying, cold stabilization or filtration and only modest SO<sub>2</sub> is added at the *mise*. The 2017 Gavela Da Vila is a beautiful wine, offering up fine aromatic complexity in its blend of tart orange, walnut, a touch of green olive, lanolin, dried flowers, orange peel and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, lovely acids and grip and a long, soil-driven and beautifully balanced finish. This is about as fine an example of Palomino as I have had the pleasure to taste! 2020-2030+. **93.**



### ***Ribeira Sacra Tinto***

### **2018 Tabernario- Datterra Viticultores (Laura Lorenzo)**

The Tabernario is a new bottling from Laura Lorenzo, which is the byproduct of the bad weather that she experienced in certain of her vineyards in 2018, as she lost most of the crop in the *Val de Bibei* vineyards that usually produce her bottlings of Gavela, Erea and Azos. She combined what was left of her Mencía and Palomino from these vineyards with Alicante Bouschet and Mencía from vineyards over in Amandi, to create enough production for a blended bottling called Tabernario. The wine is fifty percent whole clusters and at twelve percent, nicely

low octane in 2018. It offers up a complex and very refined bouquet of sweet dark berries, tree bark, coffee bean, pomegranate, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and juicy, with a fine core, suave tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and very nicely balanced finish. This wine opens up dramatically with a bit of aeration, putting on mid-palate weight and really adding backend length and grip. It is superb. 2020-2030+. **92.**

**2017 Portela Do Vento Tinto- Dattera Viticultores (Laura Lorenzo)**

The Portela Do Vento bottling from Laura Lorenzo is composed of a blend of Mencía and Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Bouschet) that hail from vineyard sources both in Quiroga-Bibei and Amandi. The 2017 comes in at a cool twelve percent alcohol and offers up cassis, tree bark, a nice touch of leafy tones (from the Alicante Bouschet), coffee grounds, graphite, cigar smoke and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and complex, with a good core, lovely transparency and grip, modest tannins and a long, focused and balanced finish. This is made for early drinking and is already very tasty, but it has the balance to age quite gracefully as well. 2020-2035. **90.**

**2017 Azos Da Vila Tinto- Dattera Viticultores (Laura Lorenzo)**

The Azos Da Vila cuvée from Laura Lorenzo is from an extremely old vineyard planted in the village of Manzaneda, with the vines ranging from eighty to one hundred and twenty years of age. It is a field blend consisting of Mencía, Mouratón, Garnacha Tintorera, Merenzao and others. Laura de-stems the bunches and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in open top, old French tanks prior to aging in a combination of used two hundred twenty-five and five hundred liter French barrels for eleven months prior to bottling. The 2017 Azos Da Vila is beautifully complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, roasted meats, chicory, delicate spice tones, a complex base of soil, gentle autumnal tones, cloves and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a very, very long, tangy and elegant finish. I love the combination here of the classic rusticity from the field blend and the very refined aesthetic sensibilities of Señorita Lorenzo! This is a stunning wine that will age brilliantly! 2020-2050. **94.**

**2017 Miñato da Raña “Tinto Rústico”- Alberto Nanclares (Miño)**

The 2017 Miñato da Raña “Tinto Rústico” from Alberto Nanclares is produced from fruit farmed by Roberto Regal that Señor Nanclares purchases to produce a Ribeira Sacra red. Readers may recognize Roberto’s name, as he is the consulting winemaker and viticulturist for a number of very good, small estates on the Miño River, such as Toalde, Diego de Lemos, Ora et Labora, as well as making several of his own wines from old vine parcels. Alberto Nanclares’ bottling, which hails from the vineyard of A Raña where the vines are more than one hundred years of age and planted on granite. The wine is made from a field blend, with the grapes foot-trodden, fermented with indigenous yeasts and one hundred percent whole clusters. It is aged in an old, five hundred milliliter French cask for nine months prior to bottling. The 2017 is a superb wine, offering up a complex bouquet of dark berries, pomegranate, tree bark, granite, woodsmoke and a potpourri of wild botanical touches in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a good core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and lovely intensity of flavor on the long and complex finish. This is classic Miño red- lighter on its feet, but loaded with personality and complexity. It is approachable now,

though there is a bit of backend tannin, but it is still a puppy and I would opt to tuck it away for another three to five years and let it blossom properly. Fine juice. 2020-2040. **92.**

### ***Valdeorras Blanco***

#### **2019 Godello “Montenovo”- Valdesil**

The newest release from Valdesil is their 2019 Montenovo, which is their youngest vine cuvée, produced from vines ranging from five to twenty years of age. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel and bottled with a touch of CO2. The 2019 version is a bit riper than most past vintages, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offering up a nose that is still quite fresh and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, a hint of banana, salty soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has plenty of depth at the core, with sound framing acids and a nice touch of backend soil on the long and youthful finish. There is not a ton of cut or grip here, but the flavors are nicely delineated and for drinking over the next year, there will be plenty of pleasure to be found. It really does not seem as ripe as its back label purports, but I suspect it will be pretty short-lived by Godello standards. 2020-2022. **88.**

### ***Valdeorras Tinto***

#### **2016 Via XVIII- Bodegas y Viñedos Somoza**

The 2016 Via XVIII from Bodegas y Viñedos Somoza is composed of a traditional field blend of Mencía, Garnacha Tintorera and Mouratón. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in a combination of four and five hundred liter, older French barrels for nine months prior to bottling. The 2016 version is excellent, offering up a peppery bouquet of dark berries, tree bark, chicory, stony soil tones, pepper, fallen leaves (from the Garnacha Tintorera) and a botanical topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, youthfully complex and soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and low fat finish. This is still tightly-knit and could use a few more years in the cellar to blossom properly, but it is very nicely balanced and will be a fine drink in due course. If you choose to drink it now, decant it for half an hour first, as it really opens up nicely with some air. 2022-2040. **90.**

#### **2015 Mencía “A Portela” - Alberto Orte**

The 2015 Mencía “A Portela” from Alberto Orte is made from vines planted between 1976 and 1990 and planted at an elevation of five to seven hundred meters above sea level. The soils here are classic Valdeorras, with more clay intermixed with the granite and slate foundation. The wine sees a short “cold soak” prior to fermentation, with the elevage comprised of one year in stainless steel tanks, followed by eight months in cask. The 2015 A Portela delivers an excellent aromatic constellation of dark berries, lavender, tree bark, graphite, spiced meats, a hint of pepper and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very complex, with a superb core of fruit, tangy acids, moderate, ripe tannins and excellent soil signature and grip on the long, well-balanced and classy finish. Mencía in Valdeorras always is a bit less transparent than in Ribeira Sacra, due to the higher clay content in the soil, but I like to think of top examples (such as this!) as Galicia’s version of Cornas, while Ribeira Sacra gives us endless variations of Mencía in the guise of Côte-Rôtie. This is a terrific wine and a great value! 2020-2045+. **92+.**

## ***Bierzo Tinto***

### **2018 Vindemiatrix Viño Tinto- La Senda (Diego Losada)**

The Vindemiatrix Viño Tinto from Diego Losada's La Senda winery is roughly a blend of eighty percent Mencía and ten percent each of the white grapes of Palomino and Doña Blanco. The grape varieties are co-planted in the vineyard and Señor Losada ferments them together as well in cement tanks, which he also uses to age the wine until bottling. The 2018 version is a beautiful expressive wine on the nose, offering up scents of pomegranate, dark berries, a beautiful base of soil tones, chicory, graphite, plenty of smokiness and a hint of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and intensely flavored, with superb transparency and grip, modest tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Diego Losada bottles this with a minimum of SO<sub>2</sub>, which may affect how long it ages, but for at least the next decade, this is going to be fine, fine juice! 2020-2030. **91.**

### **2018 "1984" Viño Tinto- La Senda (Diego Losada)**

While Señor Losada's Vindemiatrix bottling is made from a fairly young vineyard, his 1984 cuvée is all old vines, and composed entirely of Mencía. He sources the grapes for this bottling from three different vineyard sources in the southwest sector of Bierzo, with the vines ranging from seventy to ninety years of age. The vineyards are planted on the classic blend of clay and slate in the region, sitting at an altitude of six hundred and fifty meters above sea level. The wine includes some whole clusters and is barrel fermented in older casks and aged in smaller, aged barrels as well for eight months prior to bottling. The 2018 is simply gorgeous on the nose, jumping from the glass in a blend of pomegranate, black cherry, graphite, slate minerality, espresso, a bit of bonfire and a topnote of sarsaparilla. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and loaded with personality, with a fine core of fruit, great focus and grip, lovely backend mineral drive and a long, suavely tannic, complex and tangy finish. Like all of Señor Losada's wines, this is bottled with only a bit of SO<sub>2</sub>, so I do not have any feel for how long it will last in bottle, but it will deliver immense pleasure for at least the next decade. This is so impressively light on its feet for a wine of such immense intensity of flavor and complexity! 2020-2030+. **92+.**

### **2017 El Aqueronte Viño Tinto- La Senda (Diego Losada)**

The El Aqueronte Viño Tinto from La Senda is a single vineyard bottling of old vine Mencía, with the vines ranging from sixty to ninety years of age. The soils here are a combination of clay, limestone, slate and quartz. Diego Losada uses some whole clusters here and ferments the wine in old chestnut casks and ages the wine in chestnut vats as well for ten months, prior to bottling, without fining or filtration. The 2017 El Aqueronte is a beautiful wine on the nose, wafting from the glass in an utterly refined blend of pomegranate, sappy black cherries, cola, complex minerality, a touch of tree bark, woodsmoke, brown spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, great backend mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins and great length and grip on the long, complex and tangy finish. This is stunning Mencía! 2020-2040+. **94.**



### ***Txakoli***

#### **2018 Bengoetxe- Etxeberria Zubizaretta y Otro (Getariako-Txakolina)**

The 2018 Bengoetxe from Etxeberria Zubizaretta y Otro is nicely ripe in personality, though the wine only comes in at twelve percent octane. It offers up a bright and complex nose of tart orange, breadfruit, gentle smokiness, salty soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and wide open finish. Good juice. 2020-2025. **89.**

### ***Rioja Blanco***

#### **2017 Rioja “Barrel Fermented” Blanco- Viña Otano (Bodegas Union Viticultores Riojanos)**

The 2017 Rioja “Barrel Fermented” Blanco from Viña Otano is made from a blend of seventy-five percent Viura and twenty-five percent Tempranillo Blanco. Both grapes hail from the same vineyard, with the vines ninety years of age! The wine is fermented in new French cask and then raised in the same barrels for four months of its elevage. The 2017 version comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and delivers a fine, youthful nose of lemon, salty soil tones, fresh almond, white flowers and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, young, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and balance and a long, vibrant and promising finish. This is still quite a primary wine and more complexity will emerge with some bottle age. Fine juice. 2020-2045. **90.**

#### **2017 Rioja “Solarce” Blanco- Bodegas Casa La Rad**

The Solarce Blanco bottling from Bodegas Casa La Rad is composed of a unique blend of fifty percent Chardonnay, thirty percent Malvasia and ten percent each of Viura and Tempranillo Blanco. The grapes are all grown in organically-farmed vineyards. The chardonnay here is barrel-fermented and aged six months in new French casks, with the other varieties fermented and aged in stainless steel. The 2017 Solarce offers up a complex bouquet of pear, lemon, salty soil tones, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, and a long, zesty and gently new oaky finish. It is hard to get used to a white Rioja being half chardonnay, but the wine has good Rioja soil tones and is really quite well made. 2020-2040. **90+.**

#### **2016 Rioja “Casa La Rad” Blanco- Bodegas Casa La Rad**

The single vineyard bottling of Blanco from Casa La Rad also employs fifty percent Chardonnay in its *cépages*, with the balance made up of thirty percent Malvasia and twenty percent Viura. The vineyard sits at six hundred and sixty to seven hundred and fifty meters and has chalky soil tones. All of the varieties are barrel-fermented in five hundred liter barrels and then aged in two hundred and twenty-five liter French casks, all of them new. The 2016 version delivers a very refined nose of pear, chalky soil tones, a hint of fresh almond, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, a nice foundation of soil tones, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. The new oak here is done very elegantly, but, at least out of the blocks, the wood covers up the soil signature a bit and it will be interesting to follow the wine in the cellar and see if more Rioja soil elements arrive with bottle age. 2020-2040. **90+.**

#### **2010 Rioja “Gran Reserva” Blanco- Viña Otano (Bodegas Union Viticultores Riojanos)**

The 2010 Rioja “Gran Reserva” Blanco from Viña Otano is all from the same, ninety year-old vineyard, with the blend here ninety-five percent Viura and five percent Garnacha

Blanca. It was fermented in stainless settle (both alcoholic and malolactic fermentations) prior to aging for thirty months in cask, with the mix of oak eighty-five percent French and fifteen percent American wood. It is starting to really blossom nicely on the nose at ten years of age, wafting from the glass in a blend of lemon, breadfruit, salty soil tones, dried flowers, incipient notes of orange peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, still a fine girdle of acidity and a long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. This is first rate Rioja Blanco! 2020-2045. **93.**



### ***Rioja Tinto***

#### **2019 Rioja “Placeres Sensoriales”- El Viño Pródigo**

The 2019 Rioja “Placeres Sensoriales” from El Viño Pródigo is a ripe wine, coming in at just over fourteen percent, but also sappy and vibrant on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a mix of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of Rioja spice, chicory and a bit of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and easy-drinking, with a good core of fruit, just a wisp of backend tannin and good length and grip on the juicy finish. This is made for easy, early quaffing, and the 2019 is “mission accomplished”. 2020-2025. **87.**

#### **2018 Rioja- Bodegas Akutain**

The 2018 straight Rioja bottling from Bodegas Akutain is a nicely cool example of the vintage, coming in at 12.5 percent octane. It is composed primarily of Tempranillo, with just a

bit of Garnacha, and see no oak during its *élevage*. The 2018 offers up a youthful nose of black cherries, black raspberries, a touch of clove-like spice, a good base of soil, celery seed and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, a bit of backend tannin and a long, still quite primary finish. This wine has a touch of backend greenness from only moderate physiological ripeness that may put off some tasters, but I do not mind it all that much and think it will be a tasty bottle with a bit of bottle age. 2022-2040. **87+**.

#### **2017 Rioja “Solarce” Tinto- Bodegas Casa La Rad**

The *cépages* of the 2017 Rioja “Solarce” Tinto from Bodegas Casa La Rad is sixty percent Tempranillo, thirty percent Garnacha and five percent each of Maturana and Cabernet Sauvignon. The grapes are farmed organically and the wine’s malolactic fermentation takes place in five hundred liter oak casks. It is aged for eight months in two hundred and twenty-five liter, new French oak barrels prior to bottling. The wine comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a black fruity bouquet of black cherries, cigar wrapper, Rioja spices, a good touch of soil, cedary French oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off good mid-palate depth, with firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, youthful finish. This is a very well-made wine, but it is young and is not showing a lot of Rioja personality in its adolescence. I suspect that more will emerge with bottle age. 2027-2045+. **88+**.

#### **2016 Rioja “Crianza”- Bodegas Akutain**

The Crianza bottling of Rioja from Akutain is composed primarily of tempranillo, with just a bit of garnacha added into the *cépages*. It is aged for twenty-one months in used, American barrels prior to bottling, and then given an additional year of bottle aging prior to release, so this is really closer to a Reserva than it is a typical Crianza. The 2016 delivers a lovely and classic bouquet of cherries, raspberries, gentle spice tones, a fine base of soil and a nice touch of toasted coconut from the older American barrels. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and generous on the attack, with a good core, a bit of ripe tannin and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is quite tasty out of the blocks, but there is sufficient depth and structure here to age nicely and tucking it away in the cellar for three to five years will really pay dividends! Fine juice. **90**.

#### **2016 Rioja Tinto “Casa La Rad”- Bodegas Casa La Rad**

The 2016 Casa La Rad bottling of Rioja Tinto is produced from a fairly unique *cépages* of forty percent each of Tempranillo and Garnacha and ten percent each of Graciano and Maturana. It is a single vineyard bottling from the eponymous Casa La Rad vineyard, with the wine barrel-fermented and aged in new French casks for fourteen months prior to bottling. The wine offers up a youthful and very promising bouquet of raspberries, cherries, cloves, a touch of *garrigue*, cigar wrapper, good soil tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and complex, with a full-bodied format, an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature and a long, ripely tannic and spicy finish. This comes in listed at fourteen percent octane, but seems just a touch riper to my palate, but it is well-balanced and should blossom with bottle age into a very serious wine! 2026-2055+. **92**.

#### **2015 Rioja Reserva- Viña Otano (Bodegas y Viñedos Union Viticultores Riojanos)**

The 2015 Rioja Reserva from Viña Otano is composed of eighty percent-five Tempranillo, ten percent Graciano and five percent Mazuelo. It spends eighteen months in barrel, in a mix of both French and American oak. The 2015 Reserva offers up an aromatic constellation

of black cherries, cigar ash, some spiced meats, a nice touch of soil, gentle oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and focused, with a lovely core, good soil signature and a long, suavely tannic and complex finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and has a bit of backend warmth, but in all other respects, it is a very good bottle of Rioja. 2020-2045. **90.**

#### **2014 Rioja Gran Reserva- Viña Otano (Bodegas y Viñedos Union Viticultores Riojanos)**

The 2014 Rioja Gran Reserva from Viña Otano is comprised of a *cépages* of eighty percent Tempranillo, fifteen percent Graciano and five percent Mazuelo. It is aged for two years in cask in a combination of French and American oak barrels and kept in the cellars an additional three years for bottle aging prior to release. The 2014 Gran Reserva is a pretty ripe wine at 14.5 percent octane, but carries its alcohol quite well, delivering a fine, youthful nose of cherries, raspberries, clove-like spices, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil and a nice touch of oak, with both coconutty tones from American wood and cedar from French wood in evidence. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already getting a touch velvety on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins and impressive length and grip on the complex and ever so slightly warm finish. I would love to see this wine a half point lower in octane, but it is beautifully made and even at 14.5 percent, it is a really fine example of Rioja! 2020-2045+. **92.**

#### **2012 Rioja “Reserva”- Bodegas Akutain**

The 2012 Rioja “Reserva” from Bodegas Akutain is again, mostly tempranillo augmented by a bit of garnacha. The wine is raised in older American oak barrels for two years and ten months prior to bottling and then given at least a year of bottle aging in the cellars prior to release; the 2012 is the current vintage in the market, so one can see that the one year of bottle aging is a minimum for this wine! The wine is utterly classical in personality and flat out stunning on the nose, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of red plums, cherries, a touch of cocoa powder, fresh nutmeg, lovely soil tones, toasted coconut and just a hint of the traditional Rioja nuttiness to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and already starting to get velvety on the attack, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and a long, suave and complex finish. There is still a bit of backend tannin here to carry this wine far into the future, but good luck trying to keep your hands off of it right now, as it is already flat out delicious! Great juice. 2020-2050+. **92+.**

#### **2004 Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Akutain**

The 2004 Rioja “Gran Reserva” from Bodegas Akutain is an aromatically very beautiful and refined wine that is just singing at age sixteen. The bouquet revels in its old school Rioja origins, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of red and black raspberries, toasted coconut, Rioja spice tones, a complex base of soil, cigar smoke and a touch of Rioja nuttiness just starting to come to the fore in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and just beginning to get velvety on the attack, with a good, but not great, core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and quite tangy finish. The acids here are just a touch shrill, but the wine has lovely complexity. Very good juice that is very tasty today, but still has room to grow with further bottle age. 2020-2060+. **92+.**

## ***Ribera del Duero***

### **2016 Garmón Tinto- Bodegas Garmón**

The 2016 Garmón Tinto is composed entirely from Tempranillo, with the vineyard age ranging from a robust thirty years-old all the way up to one hundred year-old vines! The wine is aged for sixteen months in French oak barrels prior to bottling, with the 2016 vintage tipping the scales at 14.5 percent octane. It delivers a beautiful, youthful bouquet of black cherries, plums, cocoa powder, cigar wrapper and a nice base of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a plush core, fine balance and grip, suave tannins and just a bit of backend heat poking out on the long and classy finish. This is really good, with a sense of restraint that is not easy to present at 14.5 percent octane. I would love to see it a touch lower in alcohol, but this is very well-made wine. 2026-2055. **92.**

### **2015 Viña Pedrosa Reserva- Bodegas Hermanos Perez Pascuas**

The 2015 Viña Pedrosa Reserva is as superb as I have come to expect from this family bodegas, which to my mind, is one of the very finest in all of Ribera del Duero. The wine is ripe in the style of the 2015 vintage, coming in at 14.5 percent octane, but also pure, precise and perfumed on the nose, wafting from the glass in a sophisticated blend of plums, black cherries, Cuban cigar, a nice base of soil, a hint of violet and a suave base of nutty French oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and focused, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, suave, buried tannins and just a whisper of heat poking out on the long and complex finish. I would love to see this just a touch lower in octane, but this is the nature of the 2015 vintage, and the Viña Pedrosa Reserva is really impeccably balanced for the vintage. 2025-2045+. **92.**

## ***Toro***

### **2018 Malvasia- Bodegas y Viñedos San Román**

The 2018 Malvasia from Bodegas y Viñedos San Román is produced from sixty year-old vines, which are farmed organically and are ungrafted, as the soils in the El Pinar vineyard are quite sandy. The wine is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts in five hundred liter casks and aged for ten months prior to bottling. The 2018 comes in nicely balanced at thirteen percent octane and offers up a nascently complex bouquet of lemon, green olive, tart pear, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great focus and grip, excellent backend mineral drive and a long, zesty, bone-dry and very serious finish. This is still a young wine and it will very clearly improve with further bottle age, though it is already very easy to drink! It is the first white wine I can ever recall tasting from Toro and it is far beyond my expectations! 2020-2035+. **93.**

### **2017 Prima- Bodegas y Viñedos San Román**

The 2017 Prima from Bodegas y Viñedos San Román is not composed entirely from Tempranillo (as most wines are in Toro), but rather from a blend of eighty-five percent Tempranillo and fifteen percent Garnacha. The vineyards here are farmed organically, with some parcels already in conversion to biodynamic methods. The wine offers up a deep and ripe bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, pretty spice elements and a nice mix of French and American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows nice spice tones from the Garnacha in the blend, with a fine core, ripe, buried tannins and just a bit of heat poking out on the long and nascently complex finish. This is listed at 14.5 percent

octane and the bit of backend alcohol is the only element here that keeps the score down a hair, as it is a very well-made wine that just hails from a torrid and drought vintage, but at least the physiological ripeness here is excellent. 2025-2045. **89+**.

### **2016 San Román Tinto- Bodegas y Viñedos San Román**

The 2016 San Román Tinto, which is the winery's flagship bottling, is comprised from one hundred percent old vine Tempranillo, with the vines ranging from sixty to more than ninety years of age, with all of these vineyards certified organically-farmed. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a combination of three-quarters French oak and one-quarter American casks, with both two hundred and twenty-five and five hundred liter barrels utilized. Only twenty-five percent of the oak is new. The wine offers up a superb bouquet, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, black plum, Cuban cigar, a touch of anise, clove-like spice tones, a fine base of soil and a very refined foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively transparent for its octane level (it is listed at 14.5 percent, but carries it seamlessly and seems cooler in the mouth), with a great core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance and a very long, ripely tannic and very classy finish. This is one of the best young examples of Toro I have tasted in ages, but one would expect this from a winery founded by Mariano Garcia (of Vega Sicilia fame) and now run by his two sons, Alberto and Eduardo Garcia! 2030-2055+. **94**.

### ***Campo de Borja***

#### **2018 Garnacha "Vendimia Seleccionada"- Legado del Moncayo**

The 2018 Garnacha "Vendimia Seleccionada" from Legado del Moncayo is produced from a parcel of forty year-old vines, grown at an elevation of seven hundred-plus meters above sea level. The soils here are stony over a layer of iron-infused clay, and the wine is aged seven months in older French casks prior to bottling. The 2018 version is ripe at 14.5 percent octane, but quite pure on the nose, offering up scents of raspberries, *garrigue*, a good base of soil, pepper, a bit of roasted meats and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, moderate, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex, peppery and gently jammy finish. This is a very good example of Garnacha and a great bargain at \$15 a bottle here in the US! 2020-2030+. **88**.

### ***Calatayud***

#### **2018 Garnacha- Acentor**

The 2018 Acentor Garnacha is produced from vines in excess of fifty years of age. Like the Legado del Moncayo version, the soils here are clay and iron, with plenty of stones. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in a combination of older French and American barrels for seven months prior to bottling. The 2018 vintage here delivers a fine bouquet of red and black raspberries, bonfire, grilled meats, a bit of pepper, a good base of soil and a bit of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, complex and focused finish. This is fine juice and, once again, really a stellar value! 2020-2035+. **88+**.



## ***Penedès***

### **2017 Cantallops Xarel-lo d'A. T. Roca (Agustí Torelló Roca)**

This still Xarel-lo bottling from Agustí Torelló Roca hails from the Cantallops vineyard in the Costers de l'Ordal section of Penedès. It lies next door to the Esparter vineyard (where Agustí makes one of his superb single vineyard sparkling wine bottlings), and shares the same elevation, northerly exposition and chalky soil base. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a combination of used French barrels and cement eggs for nine months prior to bottling. The 2017 Cantallops Xarel-lo offers up a lovely and refined bouquet of pear, chalky soil tones, acacia blossoms, a hint of lemongrass and a very discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, excellent backend mineral drive, bright, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This is the single finest bottle of still Xarel-lo I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2020-2030+. 92+.



### **1970 Torres “Gran Coronas” Black Label Gran Reserva**

The 1970 Torres Black Label Gran Reserva was fully mature the last time I tasted it, which was back in the late 1980s! I bought a bottle at auction a couple of years ago as I was curious to see if it was still holding up, given that more than thirty years had passed since I last drank a bottle. Back in this era of the early 1970s, the Coronas Black Label was not composed entirely of cabernet sauvignon (as later vintages would be) and the cépages of the 1970 is

seventy percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent tempranillo and ten percent monastrell. The wine continues to cruise along nicely on its plateau of maturity, offering up a mellowed and complex bouquet of desiccated cherries, sweet cigar wrapper, a touch of orange peel, lovely soil elements, nutty overtones, brown spices and a nice touch of toasted coconut from the American oak casks in which it was raised. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with lovely tertiary complexity, still a good core of sweet fruit, melted tannins and a long, tangy and very nicely balanced finish. This is a touch more delicately-styled than I remember it from thirty years ago, but the wine is still drinking beautifully and has most emphatically not yet started its descent down the far side of its plateau. Lovely juice. 2020-2035+? **91.**

### ***Priorat***

#### **2014 Joan Giné Tinto- Buil & Giné**

The 2014 Joan Giné Tinto from Buil & Giné is composed of a blend of forty-five percent Garnaxta, forty percent Cariñena and fifteen percent Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a ripe, deep and nascently complex nose of black cherries, roasted meats, a touch of chocolate, gentle spice tones, a fine base of slate and a suave, discreet foundation of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite nicely balanced for its octane level, with a good core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and just a bit of backend heat poking out on the long and still youthful finish. I would like this just a touch lower in alcohol, but that is the blessing and the curse of Priorat's sunny climate; this is a very well-made example. 2024-2045+. **91.**

### ***Montsant Blanco y Tinto***

#### **2018 Brisat Blanc de Montsant- Terroir Sense Fronteres**

The Brisat de Montsant Blanco from Dominik Huber's Terroir Sense Fronteres is composed of a blend of seventy-five percent Garnaxta Blanco and twenty-five percent Macabeu. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and raised for six months in tank prior to bottling. Half the cuvée undergoes a five to seven day period of maceration on the skins. The 2018 comes in listed at a cool twelve percent octane and is a touch reductive when first opened, but with a bit of aeration offers up a complex bouquet of pear, bread fruit, a touch of lemon peel, paraffin, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, good framing acids and impressive focus and grip on the long and light on its feet finish. Good juice. 2020-2023. **89.**

#### **2018 Negre de Montsant- Terroir Sense Fronteres**

Dominik Huber's Negre de Montsant is produced from seventy-five percent Garnaxta and twenty-five percent Cariñena. The wine is entirely whole clusters and fermented and raised for six months in stainless steel tanks. The 2018 Negre de Montsant is a very civilized thirteen percent octane and offers up a nose of dark berries, hung game, a nice touch of spice, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, precise and ripe, with a full-bodied personality, good depth at the core and a long, moderately tannic finish. This tastes a bit north of thirteen percent, as there is a bit of backend heat on the finish, but it has depth and complexity and is a good bottle. 2020-2035. **88.**

#### **2018 Vèrtebra de la Figuera de Montsant- Terroir Sense Fronteres**

The 2018 Vèrtebra de la Figuera de Montsant is composed all of old vine Garnaxta (vines fifty to eighty years of age) planted on top of La Figuera Mountain. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and one hundred percent whole clusters in a cement tank and then aged in the

same for six months prior to bottling. The 2018 Vèrtebra delivers a bright and classic bouquet of raspberries, roasted meats, *garrigue*, a lovely base of soil, a touch of orange rind and a spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, excellent transparency and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and chewy finish. This is first class Garnaxta! 2026-2045. **92.**

### **2017 Tinto- Syndicat La Figuera**

The 2017 Tinto from Syndicat La Figuera is made entirely from Garnaxta, planted in the high elevation, chalky soils found in the town. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement vats and ages in these same vessels for nine months prior to bottling. The 2017 a ripe wine, coming in at 14.5 percent octane and offering up a deep and complex bouquet of black raspberries, chicory, woodsmoke, a bit of tree bark, cola, a complex base of soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced for its octane, with a fine core of fruit, plenty of complexity and backend personality, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and gently warm finish. This is very well-made wine and carries its alcohol very well, but it is a big boy. 2020-2040+. **90.**

### ***Sierra de Gredos***

#### **2016 Albillo Real- 4 Monos Viticultores (Sierra de Gredos)**

The Albillo Real from 4 Monos Viticultores hails from three very old vineyards in the village of Cadalso de los Vidrios, with the average age of the vines here nearly one hundred years of age! The wine is whole cluster, fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for ten months in older three and five hundred liter casks. The 2016 Albillo Real offers up a fine and complex nose of lemon, orange peel, salty minerality, dried flowers and a bit of walnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent backend mineral drive, fine balance and grip and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is a terrific bottle that is starting to really drink well at four years of age, but has at least another decade of life ahead of it, and perhaps decidedly more than that! 2020-2030+. **92.**

#### **2016 Cien Lanzas Cenicientos- 4 Monos Viticultores (Viños de Madrid- Sierra de Gredos)**

The Cien Lanzas bottling hails from the high altitude village of Cenicientos, where the soils are a combination of sand, pink granite and gneiss. It is mostly Garnacha from old vines, with just a bit of Cariñena and Garnacha Blanco included in the blend. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and is one hundred percent whole clusters; elevage is done in older three hundred and five hundred liter barrels for one year prior to bottling. The 2016 Cien Lanzas is pretty ripe at 14.5 percent octane, but offers up lovely purity and transparency in its nose of raspberries, smoked meats, stony soil tones, clove-like spices, wild fennel and a touch of sweet stems in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a lovely core of ripe red fruit, moderate, well-integrated tannins and fine focus and complexity on the long and gently warm finish. I love the aromatic and flavor complexity here, but wish it was just a touch lower in octane, and I find the bit of backend alcohol distracting on the finish. Add three points if higher octane is not an issue for your palate. 2020-2040. **90.**

## ***Cebreros***

### **2018 Las Cabañuelas- Viñedos Del Jorco**

The Las Cabañuelas bottling from Viñedos Del Jorco is composed entirely from bush-trained Garnacha vines planted on granite in the Sierra de Gredos Mountains. Cesar Ruiz, Flequi Berutti and Nacho Jimenez are the partners in Viñedos Del Jorco, and their Las Cabañuelas bottling is produced from purchased grapes. The wine is one hundred percent whole clusters and fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement tanks. The 2018 version is nicely light ruby in color and offers up a classic nose of raspberries, blood orange, pepper, *garrigue*, stony soil tones and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a good core of fruit, tangy acids, moderate tannins and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is gently chewy today, but quite approachable. It will be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age. 2020-2035+. **90+**.

### **2018 El Jorco- Viñedos Del Jorco**

The El Jorco bottling from Viñedos Del Jorco hails from their very old, 2.5 hectare vineyard that the winery purchased in 2016; this vineyard of bush-trained Garnacha, with the oldest parcel having been planted in 1915! The wine is fermented in old wooden vats and aged ten months in neutral French casks. The 2018 El Jorco delivers fine aromatic complexity in its nose of dark berries, grilled meats, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, espresso and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and peppery, with an excellent core of fruit, firm, buried tannins and a long, soil-driven and quite complex finish. This reminds me of some of those great old school, black fruity examples Châteauneuf du Pape from the decade of the 1970s. 2025-2055. **92**.

### **2016 Las Enebradas- Viñedos Del Jorco**

The Las Enebradas bottling from Viñedos Del Jorco is their oldest vine Garnacha bottling, made from a very small parcel of venerable vines planted at one thousand meters of elevation. They partner with the owner of this one hundred year-old vineyard, who will eventually bequeath them the vines when his time is up. The wine is handled differently in the cellars than the Las Cabañuelas or El Jorco, as this wine is fermented forty percent in old French casks and sixty percent in amphora, followed by twelve months' *elevage* in old French casks. The 2016 Las Enebradas offers up an excellent nose of raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, fresh rosemary, lavender, stony minerality, a touch of meatiness and a nice sense of salinity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with an excellent core, ripe tannins and impressive length and grip on the balanced and complex finish. This is dynamite and quite low octane Garnacha! 2024-2045. **93**.

## ***Sierra de Salamanca***

### **2018 Rufete Blanco “El Helechal” - Viñas Serranas**

This single vineyard bottling is produced entirely from the Rufete Blanco grape variety in the D.O. of Sierra de Salamanca, the mountainous region west of Madrid (and further west of Sierra de Gredos), right on the border with Portugal. The vineyard is still fairly young, but these bush vines sit at an elevation of six hundred and fifty meters and are farmed biodynamically. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised for ten months in older, three hundred liter French casks. The 2018 El Helechal is already golden in color and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of dried apricot, breadfruit, beeswax, a touch of walnut, a lovely base of soil

and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with fairly low acidity, but almost a touch of backend tannin (from its week of skin contact during fermentation), with fine focus and grip, a good core and a long, complex and quite classy finish. I do not have a real sense of how long the wine will age, as the acids are fairly modest, but there is a bit of tannin and the wine is very well-balanced, so perhaps it has a decade of life ahead of it? This is a completely new style of wine to me and it is most impressive. I can imagine it being great at the table with a dish such as paella. 2020-2030? **90.**

**2018 Rufete Sierra Francia “Ciclón” - Viñas Serranas**

Ciclón is the entry level bottling of Rufete from Cesar Ruiz’s Viñas Serranas winery. The wine is made from a mix of different vineyards in the Sierra de Salamanca Mountains, with the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and then aged in a combination of older French casks and stainless steel tanks. The 2018 Ciclón comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up a very pretty bouquet of dark berries, bitter cherry, stony soil tones, a touch of tree bark, discreet botanicals and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and intensely flavored, with fine transparency, moderate tannins and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This closes with a nice note of cherry skin bitterness that reminds me a touch of Emidio Pepe’s Montepulciano when it is young. This is a serious bottle in the making, which is quite drinkable today with a bit of air, but which will be even better with at least a few years in the cellar. 2020-2030+. **90+.**

**2018 Rufete Sierra Francia “Fuente Grulla” - Viñas Serranas**

The Fuente Grulla bottling of Rufete from Viñas Serranas is a single vineyard bottling from a parcel of bush vines planted at six hundred and fifty meters elevation on a soil base that is primarily schist, with limestone and sand laced through. This was the first vineyard in the region replanted after phylloxera had passed, but as record keeping was sketchy, no one is quite sure how old these vines are, but probably closing in on their centenary. The 2018 bottling includes twenty percent whole clusters, is fermented in stainless with native yeasts and raised for ten months in used, three hundred liter French oak barrels. The Fuente Grulla is a touch riper than the Ciclón in this vintage, coming in listed at thirteen percent and delivering a fine, youthful aromatic blend of bitter cherry, pomegranate, a tree bark, stony soil tones, coffee bean, discreet botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and soil-driven, with a lovely core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is not a big wine, but it is loaded with complexity and mineral drive, while staying impressively light on its feet. Rufete is a completely new grape to me and I really, really like what I am tasting from Cesar Ruiz! 2020-2040+. **92+.**

**2018 Rufete Sierra Francia “Renvivas” - Viñas Serranas**

The Renvivas bottling is from another very old vineyard of Rufete, planted in 1930. These are also bush vines sitting at six hundred and fifty meters of elevation, with a due south exposition on a base of schist, limestone and sand, with the vines having been farmed without any chemicals for their entire lifetimes. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and aged in older French casks prior to bottling. The 2018 Renvivas offers up a lovely bouquet of dark berries, chicory, woodsmoke, a hint of tree bark and a fine, complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, pure and full-bodied, with excellent transparency and core, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is first class juice and impressively light on its feet. 2020-2040+. **93.**



### ***La Mancha***

#### **2018 Pago de la Jaraba Tinto- Pago de la Jaraba**

The 2018 Pago de la Jaraba Tinto is composed of a blend of seventy percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and ten percent merlot. It is aged for one year in all new French oak barrels prior to bottling and comes in at 13.5 percent octane in this vintage. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, La Mancha spice tones, a fine base of soil, cedary wood and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, very nicely balanced finish. For many years, I have thought of La Mancha as the D.O. with the most similarities to Rioja and this wine certainly shows this to quite a degree. This is approachable today, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age. Fine juice and an excellent value! 2020-2035+. **90.**

#### **2018 Viña Jaraba- Pago de la Jaraba**

The 2018 Viña Jaraba bottling from Pago de la Jaraba has a slightly different *cépages* from the above, as here the blend is eighty percent tempranillo and ten percent each of cabernet sauvignon and merlot. The wine is also aged in a mix of oak, with only twenty percent of casks made from French wood and eighty percent American oak, so the style here is even more old school Rioja-like than the above. The 2018 offers up a lovely bouquet of raspberries, cherries, clove-like spice tones, a good base of salty soil tones and a touch of toasted coconut elements from the predominance of American oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and nicely



transparent, with a solid core of fruit, modest tannins and a long, youthful and tangy finish. This is still quite primary and could do with a few years in the cellar to allow more complexity to emerge, but it is certainly already quite tasty. Good juice. 2020-2030+. **88.**

#### **2017 Fatum Blanco- Manuel Manzaneque Suarez**

The 2017 Fatum Blanco is composed of a very unique blend of sixty percent Macabeu, thirty-five percent Airen and five percent Sauvignon Blanc. The grapes are from organically farmed vineyards and the wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks, with four months of the *elevage* done on the fine lees. The wine offers up an impressively complex nose of pear, lime blossoms, a hint of green olive, salty soil tones and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered, with a fine core of fruit, vibrant acids and very good length and grip on the complex and well-balanced finish. This is a fairly big wine for a Spanish white wine, but with plenty of personality and bounce. I cannot think of anything similar I have tasted, but the unique combination of grapes really works nicely here! Good juice and an absolute bargain! 2020-2025. **89.**

#### **2017 Fatum Tinto- Manuel Manzaneque Suarez**

The 2017 Fatum Tinto has a *cépages* this year of eighty percent Tempranillo and twenty percent Bobal (a grape I really like and feel is quite underrated). The grapes hail from organically-farmed vineyards, are fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in stainless steel prior to bottling. The 2017 comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a stylish nose of cherries, raspberries, clove-like spice tones, a bit of cigar smoke and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This has plenty of robust personality and is an absolute steal at \$13 a bottle here in the US! 2020-2030. **88.**

#### **2017 Mil Cepas Cencibel “Viño de Parcela”- Manuel Manzaneque Suarez**

The 2017 Mil Cepas “Viño de Parcela” from Manuel Manzaneque Suarez is a single vineyard wine that hails from a plot of forty year-old Cencibel vines, cropped at only fifteen hectoliters per hectare (less than half of Chambertin!). The wine is aged for fourteen months in “one wine” French barrels prior to bottling. The 2017 is quite refined on the nose, offering up scents of cherries, a touch of dark berry, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil, chicory and just a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with good soil signature, fine-grained tannins and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is very good juice. 2020-2040. **91.**

#### **2017 Viña Jaraba- Pago de la Jaraba**

The 2017 Viña Jaraba shares the same *cépages* as the 2018 version, and is also the same 13.5 percent octane. However, the wine has had an additional year of bottle age now and is also quite different in personality, offering up a complex nose that is quite a bit more black fruity than the 2018, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, cigar ash, lovely soil tones, a touch of dried eucalyptus, La Mancha spice tones and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with nicely integrated tannins, tangy acids and fine bounce and grip on the impressively complex finish. Good juice. 2020-2035. **89.**

#### **2016 Mil Cepas Bobal “Viño de Parcela”- Manuel Manzaneque Suarez**

The 2016 Bobal single parcel bottling from Señor Manzaneque Suarez is made from vines that are fully eighty years of age, planted on a parcel of gravel and sand. The wine was

fermented with fifteen percent whole clusters and indigenous yeasts and aged for fourteen months in second fill French casks. The wine is a touch riper than the 2017 Cencibel bottling, coming in at a full fourteen percent, but offers up impressive purity in its aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, cassis, a bit of spiced meats, cola, a fine base of soil, just a whisper Emidio Pepe-styled botanicals and gentle cedary wood tones. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and full-bodied, with a lovely core of sappy black fruit, fine focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is approachable today, but will be even better with a few years in the cellar to let the backend tannins soften up a bit more. It is a superb wine and really underscores just how good Bobal can be! 2023-2045+. **92.**

#### **2014 Viña Jaraba “Reserva”- Pago de la Jaraba**

The 2014 Viña Jaraba “Reserva” shares a similar blend with the Pago de la Jaraba bottling: seventy percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and ten percent merlot. The varieties are separately fermented in cement tanks and then blended and aged in a combination of seventy percent American casks and thirty percent French casks for one year, prior to bottling and then given further bottle aging in the cellars prior to release. The wine offers up a very complex nose of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of clove-like spice, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil tones and a nice mix of both cedar and coconutty oak tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, good transparency and grip, suave, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is already starting to show some nice velvety textural elements on the attack and is quite Rioja-like (albeit not quite as elegant in profile). It is a ridiculously good value, as it retails here in the US for \$16 per bottle! 2020-2040+. **90+.**

#### ***Valencia***

##### **2018 Cabernet Sauvignon- Casa l’Angel**

The 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon from Casa l’Angel hails from a single vineyard parcel called Finca El Poblet, which sits at an elevation of six hundred meters above sea level. The grapes are picked by hand and the wine is given a short, three month elevage in used French barrels prior to bottling. It offers up a ripe and stylish bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a good base of soil and a bit of tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and juicy at the core, with good focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tasty finish. This is not the most complex example of cabernet sauvignon one can find, but it hits all the right notes and at \$14 a bottle here in the US, it is a fine value. 2020-2035. **87+.**

#### ***Alicante***

##### **2016 Bodegas Curii Tinto- Uvas Y Vinos Alberto & Violeta**

The 2016 Curii Tinto is another outstanding wine from Alicante’s most talented winemaking couple, Alberto Redrado and Violeta Gutiérrez. The wine is entirely produced from the local brand of Garnacha, here in Alicante called Giró. The couple uses whole clusters, the grapes are foot-trodden and fermented with indigenous yeasts, and then aged for one year in older French barrels, followed by a second year in older American oak casks, prior to bottling without fining or filtering. The 2016 vintage comes in at 14.5 percent octane and delivers a beautifully complex bouquet of raspberries, cherries, a touch of red currant, exotic spices, dried eucalyptus, lovely soil tones and just a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively transparent, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, ripe, suave

tannins and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is simply a stunning wine! 2020-2045+. **93.**

**2014 Elo Monastrell- Alberto Orte (Yecla)**

This is a single vineyard bottling of Monastrell from a high altitude parcel in Yecla called *El Alterón*, which sits at seven hundred and seventy meters above sea level and was planted in 1973 on its own rootstock. The grapes are harvested early to keep the octane level down, so the 2014 comes in at an even thirteen percent. The wine is one hundred percent whole cluster and is aged in two and three year-old, five hundred liter French casks for its first year of *elevage*. It is then racked into cement tanks for further aging, prior to bottling and then given an additional eight months of bottle aging prior to release. The 2014 Elo offers up excellent aromatic complexity in its blend of bitter cherry, dark berry, chicory, bonfire, a bit of roasted meats and a fine base of chalky soil tones and a gentle touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, fine balance and grip and a long, moderately tannic and nicely chewy finish. This is very good Monastrell. 2023-2045+. **90.**

***Tierra de Cádiz***

**2019 El Muelle de Olasso Blanco- Luis Perez**

The El Muelle de Olasso Blanco from Luis Perez is composed primarily from the Palomino Fino grape, with a bit of Pedro Ximénez co-planted in the vineyard. Eighty percent of the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel tanks, with the other twenty percent of the blend seeing the grapes dried on straw mats for six to eight hours and then fermented and aged in large, hundred year-old *foudres* that had previously been used to age Fino Sherries, under just a bit of *flor* for four months before the two components are blended. The 2019 El Muelle offers up a deep and complex bouquet of lime, tart orange, chalky soil tones, a bit of *fleur de sel* and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very complex, with an excellent core and soil signature, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long finish. This has stellar backend energy and lift and is truly an exceptional wine! 2020-2030. **93.**

**2018 La Escribana Blanco- Luis Perez**

The single vineyard bottling of La Escribana Blanco from Luis Perez is composed entirely of Palomino Fino. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and then aged on year in eighty year-old Sherry casks. Señor Perez will fill the casks to varying levels, depending on his perception of the vintage, with riper years leaving more headspace in the casks so that a *flor* can develop during the *elevage*. The 2018 version shows some of this *flor* influence in its bouquet of orange peel, nutty overtones, a hint of honeycomb, chalky, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and fresh, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and gently Fino-like finish. This white wine has one foot in the wine camp and one in the Sherry camp and is a fascinating combination. 2020-2025. **89.**

**2017 El Triángulo Tinto- Luis Perez**

The El Triángulo Tinto bottling from Luis Perez is composed entirely of Tintilla de Rota, from a south-facing vineyard near the ocean. The grapes are harvested at night. It is fermented in a combination of stainless steel tanks and open top wood fermenters, aged five months in five

year-old French *barriques* and then another fifteen months in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling. The 2017 El Triángulo offers up a deep, black fruity nose of cassis, cigar ash, coffee grounds, woodsmoke and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and lighter on its feet than the nose suggests, with a rock solid core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This is a bit chewy today for drinking, but give it four to five years in the cellar and it should start to blossom nicely. 2025-2045. **88+**.

### **2015 Atlántida Tinto- Alberto Orte**

The Atlántida Tinto from Alberto Orte is a single vineyard bottling of the Tintilla grape, hailing from a one hectare parcel that was planted in 1992 and is organically farmed. The soils here are the pure chalk of Jerez, known locally as *Albariza*. The wine includes ninety percent whole clusters, is fermented in older oak vats and spends the first year of its *elevage* in five hundred liter, one wine French casks. It is then raked for another sixteen months of barrel aging, this time in two hundred and twenty-five liter barrels that are three to four years old. The 2015 Atlántida is nicely ripe at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a bit of coffee grounds, lavender, dried eucalyptus, chalky soil tones and just a whisper of oak from the older casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with a good core, ripe tannins and just a whisper of backend heat poking out on the long, complex and very satisfying finish. This is a very good wine. 2023-2045. **91**.



### ***Canary Islands Blanco y Rosado***

#### **2018 Benje “Las Arenas” Blanca- Envínate (Tenerife)**

The 2018 Benje “Las Arenas” Blanca from Envínate is composed entirely of old vine Listán Blanco, grown in this high altitude, volcanic vineyard of Las Arenas where the soil is jet black. The 2018 Las Arenas is an outstanding wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex constellation of breadfruit, lemon peel, a gorgeous base of volcanic soil tones, dried flowers, a hint of rosemary, wild fennel and just a whisper of exotic spiced meats in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and still quite youthful, with excellent depth at the core, bright acids and excellent balance and grip on the long, refined and nascently complex finish. This is already tasty, but it is still a puppy and will be far more complex once it has blossomed with a few more years in the cellar. Fine juice. 2020-2040. **92+**.

#### **2018 Los Loros Blanco Sobre Lias- Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez (Valle de Güímar)**

The 2018 Los Loros Blanco Sobre Lias from Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez is composed entirely of Listán Blanco, grown high up the slopes of Mount Teide at nine hundred meters above sea level. The wine offers up a bright and complex bouquet of lemon, sea salt, a touch of nutskin, citrus peel, volcanic soils and a resinous topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, sound acids and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This tastes like it will age very well indeed and should offer even more complexity with a bit of bottle age. 2020-2035. **91+**.

#### **2018 Los Loros Albillo Criollo- Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez (Valle de Güímar)**

The 2018 Los Loros Albillo Criollo from Juan Francisco Fariña is one of his younger vine cuvées, and is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks, with four months *elevage* on its fine lees. The wine offers up a vibrant nose of lemon, rhubarb, volcanic soil tones and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, a sound girdle of acidity and impressive balance and grip on the long and bouncy finish. This is not Señor Fariña’s most complex white wines, but it is flat out delicious! 2020-2030+. **91**.

#### **2018 Los Loros Siete Lomas- Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez (Valle de Güímar)**

The 2018 Siete Lomas from Juan Francisco Fariña delivers fine aromatic complexity in its bouquet of pink grapefruit, rhubarb, salty minerality, lemongrass and a bit of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still tightly-knit, with a good core, fine soil signature, impressive balance and a long, complex and very classy finish. 2020-2030. **90**.

#### **2018 Trenzado Blanco- Suertes Del Marqués (Valle de la Orotava- Tenerife)**

The Trenzado bottling hails from a number of old vine parcels in the cooler Valle de la Orotava, with most vines over one hundred years of age. Jonatan Garcia Lima is the proprietor here and farms all of his old, braided vines organically and meticulously by hand. The vines are ninety-five percent Listán Blanco and five percent unknown, co-planted varieties. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in concrete tanks and aged nine months in older, five hundred liter French barrels prior to bottling. The 2018 Trenzado is a bit tight when first opened, but with coaxing, eventually offers up scents of lemon, salty minerality, dried flowers, citrus peel and a touch of green olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, focused, full-bodied and nicely tensile on the backend, with a fine core, excellent backend mineral drive and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This tastes like it will age long and beautifully. 2020-2035+. **91**.

#### **2018 Vidonia Blanco- Suertes Del Marqués (Valle de la Orotava- Tenerife)**

The Vidonia Blanco from Jonatan Garcia Lima is made from three parcels of braided Listán Blanco vines, all more than one hundred years of age. The wine is fermented with

indigenous yeasts in old, five hundred liter casks and aged ten months in the same barrels. The 2018 offers up a superb and very precise bouquet, wafting from the glass in a mix of lemon, pear, sea salts, lovely minerality, discreet floral tones, wild fennel and just a whisper of vanillin oak from the older casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with an excellent core of fruit, superb backend mineral drive from the volcanic soils, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long finish. Like the *Trenzado Blanco*, this wine will age very nicely, and I would be inclined to give it a couple of years in the cellar to let some of its secondary layers emerge before drinking it with abandon. Fine juice. 2022-2035+. **92.**

**2018 La Araucaria Rosado- Dolores Cabrera Fernandez (Tenerife)**

The 2018 La Araucaria Rosado from Dolores Cabrera, like her red wine bottling of La Araucaria, is made from Listán Negro vines that are more than one hundred years of age. The wine is made by twelve hours of skin contact, after which the must is racked off to stainless steel tanks for fermentation and aging. The 2018 Rosado is fairly dark in color and offers up a very complex bouquet of cherry skin, a touch of white pepper, watermelon, sumac, volcanic soil tones and a beautiful array of dried flowers and gentle herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full and quite vinous in style, with a lovely core, fine backend mineral drive and a long, zesty finish of impressive grip and lift. This is first class Rosado for the table! 2020-2030. **92.**

***Canary Islands Tinto***

**2018 Ikewen- Bien de Altura (Carmelo Peña Santana) (Gran Canaria)**

The 2018 Ikewen from Carmelo Peña's Bien de Altura winery is a lovely wine in the making. Señor Peña's goal is to recover old vines that have been abandoned previously, and his Ikewen bottling hails from one of these vineyards, which sits high on the northeast shoulder of the peak of volcano, Pico de las Nieves on Gran Canaria. It is made from a field blend that is composed of vines that are anywhere from eighty to one hundred years of age, and mostly Listán Negro, with a bit of Listán Preto and white grapes also co-planted here. The wine macerates for forty days with forty percent whole clusters, prior to being pressed to finish its fermentation and eight months of aging in stainless steel tanks. The wine is fairly pale in color, but long on aromatic personality, offering up scents of desiccated cherries, bonfire, botanicals, volcanic soils, a touch of citrus peel, tree bark and chicory. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and tangy, with lovely transparency and intensity of flavor, modest tannins and a long, vibrant, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a lovely, soil-driven middleweight. 2020-2040. **91+.**

**2018 Migan "Parcela Tio Luis" Tinto- Envínate (Tenerife)**

The 2018 Migan "Parcela Tio Luis" Tinto from Envínate is beautifully low fat and soil-driven, coming in at an even twelve percent octane in this vintage. The wine offers up lovely aromatic complexity out of the blocks, with the botanical elements of old vine Listán Negro currently to the fore in its combination of bitter cherry, pepper, tree bark, volcanic soil tones and a myriad of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with fine intensity of flavor, tangy acids, moderate tannins and excellent backend mineral drive on the long, complex and very well balanced finish. This wine dramatically opens up if given a bit of aeration right now, so if you are inclined to drink it on the early side, then decant it for half an hour before serving. Fine juice. 2020-2050. **93.**



### **2018 La Araucaria Tinto- Dolores Cabrera Fernandez (Tenerife)**

The La Araucaria Tinto bottling from Dolores Cabrera hails from her one hundred-plus year-old Listán Negro vines that grow at an elevation of four hundred and fifty meters in the San Antonio vineyard. The wine is completely destemmed and undergoes alcoholic fermentation in stainless steel, prior to being racked into old Burgundy casks for its malolactic fermentation and *elevage*. The wine is bottled unfinned and unfiltered and the 2018 version delivers a fine nose of black fruit, volcanic soils, tree bark, a myriad of Canary Islands botanicals, chicory and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core, good soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. I love the backend lift and vibrancy here. 2024-2055. **93.**

### **2018 Sortevera Tinto- José Angel Alonso Ramos y Jonatan Garcia Lima**

Sortevera is a new collaboration between viticulturist José Angel Alonso Ramos and winemaker Jonatan Garcia Lima (from Suertes Del Marqués). José Angel previously worked with the team at Envínate and the vineyards that form the foundation for Sortevera will be recognizable to Envínate fans: Amogoje and Margalagua (the 2017 Parcela Margalagua is reviewed below). Both vineyards are planted to old field blends. The wine is fermented with native yeasts and aged ten months in older, five hundred liter French oak. The 2018 offers up a refined bouquet of bitter cherry, a touch of blood orange, gentle botanicals, volcanic soil and white pepper. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with a lovely core, suave, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a lovely wine. 2020-2050. **92+.**

### **2018 La Solana Tinto- Suertes Del Marqués (Valle de la Orotava- Tenerife)**

La Solana is a one and a half hectare plot of extremely old, ungrafted Listán Negro vines, trained in the traditional braiding system known as Trenzado. They range from eighty to one hundred and fifty years of age! The wine includes fifty percent whole clusters, is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement vats and aged in older French barrels for eleven months prior to bottling. The 2018 La Solana offers up a youthful nose of bitter cherry, pepper, a touch of tree bark, volcanic soil tones and a lovely myriad of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy and fullish, with lovely transparency and grip, moderate tannins and fine focus on the long, still quite primary finish. This is tightly-knit right now, but it has good depth and should blossom nicely with a bit of bottle age. 2022-2045. **90+.**

### **2018 Cruz Santa Tinto- Suertes Del Marqués (Valle de la Orotava- Tenerife)**

The 2018 Cruz Santa Tinto from Suertes Del Marqués is produced from a grape that I am not familiar with, Vijariego Negra, which is fermented whole cluster, with native yeasts in small plastic vats and then aged for just over a year in older French casks. The 2018 version offers up fine aromatic complexity in its blend of dark berries, chicory, tree bark, botanicals, volcanic soils and a bit of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is bright and complex, with a full-bodied and quite soil-driven personality, modest tannins, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is very tasty out of the blocks and clearly will age gracefully as well. 2020-2040. **90.**

### **2017 Migan Tinto- Envínate (Tenerife)**

The straight Migan Tinto bottling from Envínate is composed entirely from Listán Negro “braided vines”, from two different vineyards. Sixty percent of the blend hails from the high volcanic vineyard of *La Habanera* and forty percent from the *San Antonio* vineyard, which lies a bit further down the slope and has more clay mixed in with its volcanic soils. The grapes are

foot-trodden for each parcel, with those from *La Habanera* one hundred percent whole clusters and almost all of the bunches from *San Antonio* are destemmed. The 2017 Migan Tinto is a svelte twelve percent octane and offers up a beautifully transparent bouquet of bitter cherry, blood orange, tree bark, a complex base of volcanic soil, chicory, gamebird, pepper and a complex, but discreet topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and stunningly transparent, with a sappy core of fruit, great mineral drive and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This has all of the stylistic sensibilities of a great Chambolle-Musigny, but firmly tied to Canary Islands' *terroir*. Simply superb juice. 2024-2055. **93+**.

#### **2017 Táganan “Parcela Margalagua” Tinto- Envínate (Tenerife)**

The Táganan “Parcela Margalagua” from Envínate is a very, very old vine field blend that grows on a precipitous, north-facing parcel of vines on Tenerife. Listán Negro and Listán Preto figure prominently in the blend here, but so do other varieties such as Baboso, Negramoll and several more. The vines are not trellised or even “braided”, but just grow wild along the ground, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. The wine is fermented in old, five hundred liter casks and raised in the same size barrels for just under a year prior to bottling. The 2017 Parcela Margalagua comes in at twelve percent alcohol and offers up a beautifully complex bouquet of bitter cherry, sarsaparilla, chicory, complex soil tones, gentle notes of fresh herbs and rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, great intensity of flavor and focus, modest tannins and a long, tangy and very complex finish. This is so light on its feet, yet packs depth and breadth of flavor complexity! 2020-2050. **94+**.

#### **2017 La Araucaria Tinto- Dolores Cabrera Fernandez (Tenerife)**

The 2017 La Araucaria Tinto bottling from Dolores Cabrera is excellent, offering up a pure and beautiful bouquet of cassis, dark berries, tree bark, woodsmoke, volcanic soils and a bit of upper register botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and old vine sappy at the core, with excellent focus and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is stellar Listán Negro in the making! It could do with at least a few years to let some of its backend tannins soften up a bit more, but it is already pretty tasty with the right food and not hard to drink at all in its relative youth. 2023-2055. **93**.

#### **2017 Los Loros Listán Negro- Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez (Valle de Güímar)**

The 2017 Los Loros Tinto from Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez is all Listán Negro. He destems the bunches here, ferments the wine in stainless steel tanks and ages it for seven to eight months in used Burgundy casks prior to bottling. The 2017 delivers a classic nose of dark berries, bitter cherry, tree bark, volcanic soils, a bit of pepper and a gentle topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and full-bodied, with superb soil signature, a fine core of fruit, modest tannins and bright, zesty acids adding bounce and grip on the long, complex and gently peppery finish. This is superb. 2020-2050. **92**.

#### **2017 La Bardona Tinto- Pablo Matallana (Lanzarote)**

Pablo Matallana made wines in Argentina and Priorat before returning to the Canary Islands, with his first vintage on the islands being the 2015, which he produced from a recovered vineyard on Tenerife. He then expanded to make a few wines on the neighboring island of Lanzarote, including this lovely 2017 La Bardona, which is made from primarily from old vine Listán Negro, co-planted with a bit of Listán Blanco. The grapes are destemmed, macerate for three days and then are fermented with native yeasts and aged for eleven months prior to bottling. The 2017 offers up a youthful nose of bitter cherry, tree bark, botanicals, a beautiful

base of volcanic soil tones and graphite. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very transparent, with good intensity of flavor, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the long, complex and moderately tannic finish. This is a lovely bottle that is quite approachable already, if one gives it thirty minutes in decanter, and will also age long and gracefully. Fine juice. 2020-2045. **91+**.

**2015 Listán Negro- Bodegas Viñátigo (Juan Jesus) Tenerife**

The 2015 Viñátigo Tinto from Juan Jesus is composed entirely from Listán Negro. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and aged in older French oak barrels for three months prior to bottling. The wine has been aging gracefully and now offers up a complex bouquet of desiccated black fruit, chicory, brown spices, volcanic soils, pepper, hints of cola and a lovely array of upper register botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, good soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is pretty ripe by the standards of Listán Negro, coming in at 13.5 percent octane in the 2015 vintage, which gives it good mid-palate volume, but it is not quite as structurally polished as a result. 2020-2035. **91**.



*Vineyards and summer flowers in the beautiful Alentejo region of Portugal.*

***Branco do Portugal***

**2019 Vinho Verde “Dócil”- Dirk Niepoort**

The 2019 Vinho Verde “Dócil” from Dirk Niepoort is composed entirely of Loureiro, grown on granite. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and given five months aging on its fine lees in tank, prior to bottling. It does not go through malo. The 2019

version is bright and complex, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of lime, green apple, white flowers, a nice touch of brininess and a fine base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has a touch of CO2 for bounce on the backend, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. This is very good Vinho Verde. 2020-2028. **91.**

#### **2017 Branco do Talha- Fitapreta (Alentejo)**

António Macanita's Branco do Talha is an amphora-fermented white wine produced from the local grape varieties of Roupeiro and Antão Vaz. The 2017 version comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and delivers a complex bouquet of desiccated pear, citrus peel, dried flowers and a nice, almost dusty clay tone from the amphora. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, lovely influence from the amphora and a long, zesty and very nicely balanced finish. This is really very good. 2020-2025. **90.**

#### **2016 Encruzado “Reserva”- Quinta de Saes (Dão)**

The 2016 Encruzado “Reserva” from Alvaro Castro's Quinta de Saes is produced from vines that average twenty years of age now, planted on granite soils flecked with clay and sand. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel tanks and ages for nine months in the same tanks prior to bottling. The 2016 version needs some air to blossom (it starts out a touch musty, but is bottled with an agglomerated cork, so it cannot be corked), but once it aerates a bit, offers up a fine nose of lime, breadfruit, tart pear, lovely, stony minerality and a wide array of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with lovely soil signature, bright acids and very good length and grip on the focused finish. There is a closing note of stone dust here on the backend that is quite attractive. Make sure to give this wine at least twenty minutes to blossom, as it needs all of it to shake off its initial mustiness and really start to hit on all cylinders. Once it opens, it is excellent! 2020-2030+. **91.**

#### **1995 Arinto “Quinta do Poço do Lobo” Colheita- Caves São João (Beiras)**

Caves São João's 1995 Arinto “Quinta do Poço do Lobo” is truly an exceptional wine that is approaching its apogee of peak maturity at age twenty-five and drinking with beautiful complexity and elegance. The bouquet offers up a classy blend of orange peel, gooseberry, fresh apricot, salty soil elements, a bit of lemongrass and incipient notes of buttered almonds. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core and lovely soil signature, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is a touch more high-toned than the 1994 version (see below), without quite the same mid-palate depth, but also more lift and bounce on the backend. To my palate, it is comparable in quality to the lovely 1994, but differently styled, a bit lighter and not quite as mature today. 2020-2035+. **92.**

#### **1994 Arinto “Quinta do Poço do Lobo” Colheita- Caves São João (Beiras)**

The 1994 Arinto “Quinta do Poço do Lobo” Colheita is a beautiful old wine, fully mature and still vibrant and balanced on both the nose and palate. The color is starting to resonate golden tones, but the nose is bright and classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of fresh apricot, orange zest, salty soil tones, a touch of sweet corn and a topnote of buttered almonds. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and bone dry, with a fine core of desiccated fruit, lovely soil signature and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is just lovely, with still a hint of

Arinto's tannins showing on the backend. A classic food wine to go with poultry or pork, particularly some of those black pigs from Portugal! 2020-2030. **92.**

### ***Tinto do Portugal***

#### **2018 Twisted Tinto - Dirk Niepoort**

As I noted back in October, with my note on the 2017 vintage, Dirk Niepoort's "Twisted" Tinto is made from a complex 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 2018 Twisted Tinto comes in a bit lower in octane than the 2017, listed at 13.5 percent and offering up scents of dark berries, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones and leather. On the palate the wine is deep, broad-shouldered and full, with a fine core of fruit, a solid chassis of chewy tannin and a long, youthful finish. This needs bottle age to blossom, but should be a good bottle in due course. 2028-2045+. **89.**



#### **2017 Xisto Ilimitado Tinto- Luis Seabra (Douro)**

The 2017 Xisto Ilimitado Tinto from Luis Seabra is composed of a "field blend" of six different grapes, hailing from three different vineyards across the region, with the approximate percentages here being thirty percent Touriga Franca, twenty percent each of Tinta Amarela and Tinto Roriz, ten percent each of Tinta Barroca and Rufete and five percent each of Malvasia

Preta and Donzelinho. The wine is one hundred percent whole clusters, with one-third of the blend foot-trodden and fermented in stone *lagars* and the remainder in stainless steel- with both portions utilizing solely indigenous yeasts. It is aged for a year in older casks and then assembled and allowed to settle in for an additional five months in tank prior to bottling. The 2017 version comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a fine nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee grounds and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and impressively light on its feet, with a good core, fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is a very, very good wine that could do with at least four or five years in the cellar to soften up properly. 2025-2045+. **91.**

#### **2015 Baga au Sol- Fitapreta (Alentejo)**

The Fitapreta version of Baga is fermented with indigenous yeasts and sees no oak during its *elevage*. The 2015 is properly ripe at fourteen percent, but it is not the big, strapping and coarse wine that Baga so often produces (at least in its youth). The nose offers up a complex blend of baked plums and black cherries, cigar smoke, hung game, chocolate and saddle leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with an excellent core, chewy, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Baga (like Touriga Nacional in Alentejo) is not my favorite, stand-alone grape variety and I prefer it as part of a blend, but this is a very well-made version that seeks to rethink the grape a bit and keep it out of the reach of youthful rusticity. But, that said, this is certainly the finest, one hundred percent Baga wine I have ever tasted! 2020-2040. **90.**

#### **2015 Tinto “Estagio Prolongado Reserva”- Quinta de Saes (Dão)**

The 2015 Estagio Prolongado Reserva from Quinta de Saes is comprised of seventy percent an ancient field blend of various, unknown indigenous grapes, combined with fifteen percent each of Touriga Nacional and Alfrocheiro. The wine is raised for a year and a half to two years in used French oak *foudres*, prior to bottling. The 2015 version comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and delivers excellent aromatic complexity in its nose of dark berries, black cherries, a very complex base of soil tones, bonfire, espresso, lovely spice tones and incipient notes of meatiness. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and soil-driven finish. This is superb and classic Dão in the making! 2023-2055. **92.**

#### ***And One Lone Argentinian Cabernet Sauvignon***

#### **2016 Alto 3 Cabernet Sauvignon “Reserve”**

I have no idea where this sample came from, but it somehow found its way into a box of Spanish samples and since I opened it before reading the label, I figured I would include the note on the wine here, rather than wait for a future feature on the southern Hemisphere. The wine is sealed with a plastic cork, but is fresh as a daisy and quite good, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a deft framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely precise, with a good, solid core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, ripe and nicely balanced finish. This comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and that seems pretty accurate, so there is a bit of ripeness here, but it is also nicely light on its feet at the same time. Good juice that will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2023-2045. **89.**



**THE 2017s FROM NICOLAS POTEL'S  
DOMAINE DE BELLENE AND MAISON ROCHE DE BELLENE**



As I mentioned last year in my article on Nicolas Potel's 2016s, it is hardly common when a Burgundian producer and his US importer send bottled samples to a journalist, but last spring I was fortunate to receive two cases of the recently-released 2016s from Nicolas Potel's Domaine de Bellene and Maison Roche de Bellene. This year, my selection was not quite as extensive of the 2017s than had been the case for the 2016s, where I felt quite pampered with a lot of superb premier cru bottlings, but this was probably my own fault, for when the US importer for these wines, Loosen Brothers contacted me very early in the new year about sending samples of the 2017s, I was so buried under samples that I simply had nowhere to properly store the wines until I could taste them. So, I begged for some time to chip away at the mountain and when the wines were shipped in late February, I had room at the inn, but had probably missed out on many of the really good premier cru bottlings I had tasted from the previous vintage. Consequently, this report on Monsieur Potel's is not as broad as it was for the 2016 vintage, but there are still some very good examples covered and it seemed foolish not to publish this now, while the wines are still in the market. Last year I wrote up the history of the Potel family in Burgundy for inclusion in the article, and as it is still germane to these 2017s, I have included it

again this year for those who may not know the family background of this important Burgundian family.

The Potel family's history in Burgundy has been something of a roller coaster in the last quarter century. Nicolas' father, Gérard Potel, was the very, very highly-respected *Régisseur* of Domaine de la Pousse d'Or in Volnay for all of his career, having taken over the reins at this important estate in the 1964 vintage. During *Père Potel's* tenure at Domaine de la Pousse d'Or, this was unequivocally one of the greatest domaines in all of Burgundy and his exemplary track record produced hundreds of brilliant wines down through the years. But, Monsieur Potel was an employee at Domaine de la Pousse d'Or, and when new owners came in during the mid-1990s, Gérard Potel was eventually forced out at the domaine. His son Nicolas had been training at wineries in other countries during his father's last few vintages at Domaine de la Pousse d'Or (including several stints in Australia and one with Tom Dehlinger in Sonoma County, interspersed with *stages* back in Burgundy with people like Christophe Roumier and Thierry Matrot), so when he returned to Burgundy full-time in 1996 after his *stages* abroad and at other Burgundy domaines, it was with the goal to start a *négociant* business with his father. However, Gérard Potel passed away suddenly of a heart attack the following year, without having been able to get anything going with Nicolas. Nicolas Potel was still able to start slowly on his own, with many of the very top *vignerons* in the region offering to sell him some of their grapes to help him in those early years, as the prevailing opinion in Burgundy was that the Potel family had been treated very badly during the endgame at Domaine de la Pousse d'Or. Nicolas was even able to buy some grapes from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti in those early days- that is how deep the sympathy went for him and his mother in the wake of Gérard Potel's sudden passing.

It was an incremental process in those early years for Nicolas, but people liked the wines of Maison Nicolas Potel and slowly his *négociant* business was able to grow nicely from the late 1990s through the first few years of the new century. But, the recession of 2002 and 2003 hit him hard, as he was rather extended (producing more than a hundred different, small batch wines by this time), so he brought in investors in the middle of the decade for Maison Nicolas Potel, selling a majority interest in the business, but staying on as managing winemaker. His new partners were the Cottin brothers of Maison Labourée-Roi, a much larger *négociant* firm, but the brothers and Nicolas did not necessarily share the same vision for the business and eventually, Nicolas was dismissed in 2009. To make matters even tougher on him, he no longer had the right to use his own name on his wines, as that was copyrighted to the business that was now owned by the Cottin brothers! He was forty years of age when his parting ways with the Cottin brothers and Maison Nicolas Potel came to pass and he had to start all over again from scratch! Persistence being a serious strength of Nicolas', he started a new venture, Maison Roche de Bellene for his new *négociant* firm, and as opportunity allowed, Domaine Roche de Bellene for parcels of vines he was able to buy along the way and start building up his own small domaine as well.

In addition to his *négociant* bottlings produced today under the Maison Roche de Bellene label, Nicolas also has his relatively new estate vineyard cuvées produced under his Domaine de Bellene label (it is easy to distinguish between the two, as if you look at the photo at the start of the article, the estate-bottled wines have a drawing of the domaine on the label and are sealed with wax, instead of an aluminum capsule), which originated when one of the growers he was

buying fruit from decided that he would prefer to retire and have Nicolas take over the farming of his vineyards. These parcels, which originally totaled 13.85 hectares, were situated primarily in Savigny-lès-Beaune, Beaune and Saint-Romain to begin with (if memory serves me correctly) and became the vineyard foundation of the Domaine de Bellene in 2005. These original parcels include a dazzling array of top flight premier crus in both Beaune and Savigny. A few more prime plots of vines have been added to the domaine over the years to this original purchase, including a twenty-one *ares* parcel in the Vosne-Romanée premier cru of les Suchots, fourteen *ares* in Nuits St. Georges “les Chaignots”, just under a third of a hectare in Vosne-Romanée *villages* level parcel of les Quartiers de Nuits (with these very old vines planted in 1927!) and a touch more than two hectares of sixty-nine year-old vines in Nuits St. Georges AC (which produce one of Nicolas’ finest domaine bottlings, his Nuits St. Georges “Vieilles Vignes”). Beyond his work running the *négociant* business of Maison Roche de Bellene and his Domaine de Bellene, Nicolas Potel has also developed a collection of aged Burgundies that he sources from various cellars in the region. This is called his Bellenum Collection, which has witnessed small releases of various wines under this label all the way back to the 1959 vintage under this project. As the businesses have grown, Nicolas has been working with Sylvain Debord, who handles both oversight of the vineyards and the winemaking for both the *négociant* business and Domaine de Bellene.



*Nicolas Potel outside the front door of his Domaine de Bellene in Beaune.*

The 2017 samples from Monsieur Potel’s present labels are generally very good examples of the vintage, which is one of my favorites in recent years for both red and white Burgundy. As the Maison Roche de Bellene bottlings are *négociant* wines, there is obviously

some variation in their quality, as is the case even at the very finest *négociant* houses such as Joseph Drouhin, Bouchard Père et Fils and Louis Jadot. I have to imagine that some of the really stellar examples from the Maison Roche de Bellene side of the business that I tasted from the 2016 vintage were also stellar in 2017, but because I had no place to put the samples early in the year, I did not receive those wines again in 2017. I only tasted a small handful of his own domaine-bottled wines, the Domaine de Bellene, from the 2017 vintage, but again, given how fine some of these were in the 2016 vintage, I have to imagine the bottlings I really liked from 2016 would once again be fine examples in the superior vintage of 2017.

### ***Maison Roche de Bellene Vins Blancs et Rosé***

#### **2018 Bellenos Rosé of Gamay Noir (screwcap)**

The 2018 Bellenos Rosé of Gamay Noir is quite pale in color and offers up a bright, easy-going bouquet of white cherry, rhubarb, a touch of orange peel and white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and succulent at the core, with a sound acids and good length and bounce on the well-balanced finish. This is not particularly complex by any stretch of the imagination, but it hits the right notes. 2020-2023. **87.**

#### **2017 Bellenos “Cuvée Blanc”**

The 2017 Bellenos “Cuvée Blanc” is composed of chardonnay sourced in the Beaujolais region. It offers up a bright and vibrant nose of apple, lemon, chalky soil tones and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a plump core, good length and grip and a succulent finish. This is far more complex on the nose than the palate today, but perhaps the palate will catch up with a bit of bottle age. It is not bad. 2020-2025. **86.**

#### **2017 Bourgogne Chardonnay “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene (screwcap)**

As I mentioned last year, the Bourgogne Chardonnay “Vieilles Vignes” from Maison Roche de Bellene is made from vines that average fifty years of age, from vineyards in both the Côte de Beaune and Côte Chalonnaise. The 2017 version is sealed under a screwcap and offers up a bright bouquet of apple, spring flowers, chalky soil tones, citrus zest and a bit of toastiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, bouncy acids and good length and grip on the finish. There is no signs of reduction issues yet and this is a very tasty example for current drinking. 2020-2025. **87+.**

#### **2017 Beaune “les Perrières” Blanc Premier Cru- Domaine Bellene**

The 2017 Beaune “les Perrières” Blanc Premier Cru from Domaine Bellene is composed from young vines, as they were only planted in 2013. The wine is raised entirely in new oak in this vintage, offering up a bright and complex nose of pear, apple, spring flowers, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, nice soil signature, zesty acids and good length and grip on the gently woody finish. This is quite good and no doubt, once these vines are well-established, it will be one of the best Beaune Blanc bottlings made in the commune. 2020-2030+. **89.**

#### **2017 Meursault “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene**

The 2016 version of old vine Meursault AC from Monsieur Potel was one of my favorites of his *villages* level offerings last year, and the 2017 is a good follow-up. If memory serves me correctly, these vines range from fifty to sixty years of age and the wine sees twenty percent new oak during its *elevage*. The 2017 offers up a classic nose of pear, a touch of passion fruit, white flowers, hazelnut, chalky soil tones and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a lovely core, excellent backend

mineral drive and a long, promising and zesty finish. Again this year, this is one of the best AC whites in Monsieur Potel's lineup. 2020-2040+. **90+**.

**2017 Puligny-Montrachet "Champ Gain"- Maison Roche de Bellene**

The 2017 Champ Gain from Monsieur Potel is very classical in profile and one of the finest of his white wines that I had a chance to taste from this vintage. The bouquet is pure and quite precise, offering up scents of white peach, golden delicious apple, a good base of limestone soil, vanillin oak and a lovely topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, fine soil signature and lovely length and grip on the still youthful finish. This needs a year or three in the cellar to properly blossom, but will be quite good with a bit of bottle age. Right now it is a touch monolithic on the palate, but give it time for the flavors to catch up with the expressiveness of the nose and it will drink very well indeed. 2022-2045. **92**.

**2017 Chassagne-Montrachet "Vieilles Vignes"- Maison Roche de Bellene**

The Vieilles Vignes bottling from Chassagne from Nicolas Potel is from fifty-plus year-old vines and is raised in twenty percent new oak. The 2017 version offers up a stylish nose of pear, apple, good soil tones, a touch of acacia blossom and a nice, discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and fairly broad-shouldered in personality, with a good core and soil signature, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the slightly four-square finish. This tastes as if it is from vineyards with a fairly high percentage of clay in the soils, which gives the wine plenty of depth, but not the most delicate of footprints on the palate. Good, solid juice that should age nicely. 2020-2040. **88**.

**2017 Corton-Charlemagne- Maison Roche de Bellene**

The 2017 Corton-Charlemagne from Nicolas Potel's Maison Roche de Bellene hails from a parcel on the Aloxe side of the hill, with southeasterly exposition. The vines are forty years of age and the wine was raised in thirty percent new oak in 2017. It offers up a very refined young nose of pear, apple, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, acacia blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is young, full and nicely balanced, with a fine girdle of acidity, a good core and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. It is still early days for this example of Corton Charlie and it will need several years in the cellar to blossom. It should prove to be quite good once it is ready to drink. 2025-2050. **92**.

***Domaine Bellene and Maison Roche de Bellene Vins Rouges***

**2017 Bellenos Cuvée Rouge**

This is the entry level bottling from Nicolas Potel, which is comprised of a blend of gamay from Beaujolais and pinot noir from somewhere in the Côte d'Or. The 2017 Bellenos offers up a lovely nose of cranberry, cherry, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke and a good foundation of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and very well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, very modest tannins and a long, bouncy and quite impressive finish. This is very nicely crafted! 2019-2025+. **87**.

**2017 Bourgogne Pinot Noir "Vieilles Vignes"- Maison Roche de Bellene (screwcap)**

As I mentioned last year, the Bourgogne Rouge "Vieilles Vignes" from Maison Roche de Bellene is composed of fruit sourced from villages in the Côte Chalonnaise, Côte de Beaune and in the hills of the Côte de Nuits Villages appellation. The 2017 version is quite pretty, offering up a vibrant nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, juicy and complex, with good soil signature, only a wisp of backend tannin and good focus and grip on the long finish. The Côte Chalonnaise portion of the



blend shows through nicely here this year and the wine reminds me of a good example of Givry. 2020-2027. **88.**



**2017 Gevrey-Chambertin “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene**

The 2017 Gevrey-Chambertin “Vieilles Vignes” from Monsieur Potel is produced from vines that range from forty-two to seventy-two years of age. The wine sees twenty percent new oak during its *elevage* and the 2017 version is a stellar *villages*, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, plums, grilled meats, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, a delicate touch of fresh herbs and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very nicely transparent, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, moderate tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. Good juice. 2027-2050. **90.**

**2017 Chambolle-Musigny “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene**

As I mentioned last year, the old vine bottling of Chambolle *villages* from Nicolas Potel and his winemaker, Sylvain Debord, is produced from a small plot of vines that range from fifty to seventy years of age. The 2017 version is quite classic in its profile, offering up an aromatic constellation of musky red and black cherries, chalky soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of vanillin oak, roses and a delicate topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is bright, full and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, very fine backend mineral drive, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and quite classy finish. I really like the backend lift here. 2027-2050. **90+.**



### **2017 Nuits St. Georges “les Boudots”- Maison Roche de Bellene**

As I mentioned last year, Nicolas Potel busy fruit from a parcel of old vines in les Boudots, as he receives the production from a third of a hectare plot of seventy year-old vines in this excellent premier cru. The 2017 version, perhaps due to more generous yields, was only raised in twenty percent new oak this year (last year, because of the frosts in 2016, the wine saw fifty percent new wood) and is absolutely stellar on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a superb blend of cherries, plums, gamebird, raw cocoa, a superb base of soil, beautiful spice tones and a discreet foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and very elegant in personality, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature, excellent focus and grip, refined tannins and a long, tangy and impeccably balanced finish. This is not an overtly powerful example of Nuits St. Georges, but rather one that perfectly captures the inherent elegance of the 2017 vintage and the great *terroir* of les Boudots. Stellar juice. 2030-2075. **93**.

### **2017 Savigny-lès-Beaune “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene**

Last year I tasted the domaine bottling of Savigny-lès-Beaune “Vieilles Vignes” bottling from Domaine de Bellene, as Monsieur Potel owns just over a hectare here. This year I received a bottle of the *négociant* version, which is produced from forty year-old vines and was raised in ten percent new oak in 2017. The wine offers up a fine, youthful nose of red currants, cherries, vinesmoke, stony soil tones, *pigeon*, Savigny spice and a bit of new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nicely soil-driven, with a solid core, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This needs some time, but will be quite tasty when it is ready to drink. 2027-2045+. **88+**.

### **2017 Beaune “Cuvée du Cinquantenaire” 1er Cru V.V.- Domaine de Bellene**

The 2017 Beaune “Cuvée du Cinquantenaire” from Domaine de Bellene is composed of a blend of five different premier crus in Beaune: Pertuisots, Montée Rouge, Reversées, Bressandes and Clos du Roi. The vines range from thirty-five years of age to fully sixty and the wine is raised in twenty percent new wood. It offers up a lovely, transparent and classically red fruity nose of cherries, strawberries, woodsmoke, gamebird, a nice touch of soil, fresh thyme and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still quite adolescent, with fine soil signature, a good core, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This needs some bottle age to settle in, as right now, the constituent components have not really harmonized, but the wine is long and it may really blossom well with bottle age. 2029-2050. **88-90** (depending on how it eventually harmonizes).

## TRYING TO LEARN FROM THE PAST THIRTY YEARS OF EVOLVING WINE SERVICE PHILOSOPHY



While I have been drinking wine now for a bit longer than thirty-five years, it is only over the last three decades or so that I have really paid attention to how to properly serve wine for it to show to its best advantage. Back in my university days in the first half of the 1980s, when the wine light was first going on, I used to imagine myself as one day being a fiction writer with a recurring character who was a Private Investigator, and who, when the case got particularly befuddling in the middle of the book, would stop in to the nearest fine wine shop to his office and purchase a serious bottle of red wine to help him look at the case differently and eventually solve it. For some reason, back in those days, I always pictured my main character as springing for a bottle of the 1978 Robert Mondavi “Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon- why I do not know- but, this was always my recurring vision of how my private eye would properly bring things into focus. However, back in those aspiring fiction-writing days, I did not imagine my main character handling the wine properly, but rather, shuffling back out to the parking lot to his Saab Turbo convertible, putting the top down, pulling his corkscrew out of the glove compartment, and taking the first couple of slugs right out of the bottle before pulling out of the parking lot to get back to his office to work on the rest of the case and the bottle- now poured into a wine glass-

and relax his psyche enough to properly solve whatever conundrums had been obscuring a path to the truth. Clearly, I did not know much about sediment or decanting back in those early days!

As my wine drinking experience really began to grow, and I was able to drink more wines of the caliber of the 1978 Mondavi Reserve cabernet sauvignon, I began to really appreciate how important it was to treat wines properly ahead of serving. Undoubtedly, much of my early appreciation in this regard was fashioned by many of the more experienced and senior wine lovers that I was part of tasting groups with back in the second half of the 1980s, as many of these folks had been savoring great wines for many decades more than I had at this point and they were very gracious with sharing their sage advice, not to mention happy to direct the most junior member of our groups (me) to handle much of the decanting duties for our tastings. It was not that they were handing off the “donkey work” to me (at least not completely ☺), but rather, they intuitively knew that the best way to understand how important proper preparation of wines was to their ultimate enjoyment was to be “hands on” and do the decanting and other duties oneself. It was an educational experience that I have come to very much value as the decades have rolled away and I often thank them for their having shown me the light in this regard from very early on in my wine career. Having been a member of several wine tasting groups over the years, where many of the other participants had a wealth of experience with fine wine, has been an amazing benefit that has allowed me to understand the service of wine in a way that is not always universally shared. For several years now I have thought about writing a piece on this aspect of wine appreciation for the newsletter, and given this spring that I am “sheltering in place” rather than on the road tasting in cellars in Burgundy, Champagne and Germany, it seemed like a propitious moment to finally tackle this article.

As many readers may already know, part of my formative years in the wine trade here in the US was as a sommelier at a pair of very good restaurants in New York during the second half of the 1990s. The exigencies of wine service during this time, particularly during my days at Gotham Bar and Grill, where we would serve three to four hundred diners per evening and I was the lone sommelier on the floor, gave me the opportunity to refine my wine service techniques in several ways. Not that I was ever a particularly gifted sommelier in terms of service- having not come up through the ranks of servers in restaurants, as is the case with most sommeliers, but having spent my first decade in the wine trade in its retail branch- so, it was a running joke at both my sommelier stops on how much more I was costing the owners in linen service because I could seemingly never properly pour a bottle without dribbling at least a spot or two of wine on the table cloth! Gifted servers can deftly twist the bottle at the precise moment to ensure that the wine rolls back down the neck, but I always seemed to time it perfectly to get a few drops on the tablecloth out of each and every pour! But, as I vastly expanded the wine programs at both of my restaurant stops, I did start to master a few aspects of decanting that were not necessary outside of the frenetic world of restaurant wine service. One of these was to learn how to present a bottle with considerable sediment on its side, without upsetting the sludge, and then opening and decanting the bottle while it remained on its side, so that the sediment never moved and the maximum volume of wine was served pristinely from the decanted bottle of old wine.

While I am not a trained winemaker and only understand the basic fundamentals of wine chemistry through the prism of appreciating what ultimately finds its way into the glass, I have been able over the years, due to the generous patience of winemakers who I have gotten to know

well over time, to understand that the role of oxygen in winemaking is one of cautionary balance. It is necessary during the winemaking process to ward off permanent reduction, but at the same time, it must be kept far enough at bay to protect as much of a wine's freshness and vitality for a long life in bottle. In recent times, due probably to the wide adoption of screwcaps and their attendant new issues with reduction of bottled wines, the role of oxygen in its early days after bottling is now beginning to be better understood. Prior to screwcaps being widely used for finer wines, it was widely thought that wines sealed with corks were essentially closed under anaerobic seals from the moment of bottling, and oxygen egress into the bottle was due to eventual degradation of corks many years down the road. However, as reduction issues started to crop up with wines sealed under anaerobic screwcaps, new research was undertaken and one chemist and winemaker, Alan Limmer of New Zealand, was able a few years ago to conduct a study on the oxygen egress of natural corks in the first year or so after they are inserted into a bottle of wine and to understand the dynamics of discreet oxygen exchange between a wine and its outside environment during those first handful of months in the bottle. In short, it turns out that natural corks do allow some discreet oxygen transfer through their internal capillaries of the newly-inserted cork during the first twelve to eighteen months after bottling (depending on the unique capillary system of each cork), after which the cork comes up to one hundred percent humidity and essentially seals off those capillaries as conduits for oxygen exchange. And, as it turns out, this limited oxygen exchange during the first several months after bottling is vital to keeping a wine from going into reduction in the bottle. Dr. Limmer's research is truly groundbreaking in this regard.

While Alan Limmer's study started charting a new understanding of how wines begin their evolutionary process post-bottling, it is not necessarily germane to this article. It simply serves to underscore that though wine is quite an ancient art by our modern day standards, there is still much that is not yet understood about it and that many things that are "known" such as cork being in essence an anaerobic seal from the moment of bottling, are not necessarily true. In the realm of wine serving, at the other end of the tunnel from bottling, there are similar accepted traditions and beliefs that I feel are perhaps not as rock solid as conventional wisdom would have them and my experience has taught me to modify or ignore some of these as not techniques which allow a wine to show optimally. To cite but a single example, one of the most commonly-shared (and wrong-headed in my opinion) wine service philosophies is that "red Burgundy is best served from the bottle, rather than decanted, as the wine is too fragile for decanting to improve it." This still widely-held belief has been passed down for a long time in Burgundy-drinking circles. However, in my Burgundy-drinking experience, this has most emphatically not been the case and I am a staunch defender of the need to decant red Burgundy (and all pinot noir for that matter) prior to serving, regardless of its age. I might make an exception with a hundred-plus year-old bottle, if I was to cross paths with one again, but even dipping back as far as wines from the first few decades of the twentieth century, my experience has been that one is generally better off decanting a red Burgundy than pouring it directly from the bottle. And, for much younger wines, I am a very strident voice that red Burgundy must be decanted to have some true idea of the quality and nature of the young wine being served. I will go into the specifics of why I believe this is so a bit further below, in the section devoted to pinot noir and red Burgundy.

The last decade has seen a number of changes in the accepted wisdom of how wine should properly be served, brought about by things such as the wide adoption of screwcaps for

certain wines, the natural wine movement, and the faster pace of modern life in general. We have seen the growth of the shared belief that many white wines should now be decanted (a belief I share), that sparkling wines should be served in anything but a fluted glass (a belief I generally do not agree with, but this does depend on the size and diameter of the Champagne flute in question, for if the choice is a very narrow flute or a white wine glass, then I would opt for the latter, but understanding that it is the lesser of two evils) or even that many sparkling wines show best if decanted for an extended period of time prior to service (this is sheer madness in my opinion). We have also come to reconsider the proper temperature that wines are served at, as the old precepts of reds at room temperature and whites served cold directly from the refrigerator has certainly been properly called into question in recent times. It is a time of dynamic reconsideration of many previously accepted wine service standards, and with this in mind, I hoped it might be useful to share my general approaches to the service of a wide range of categories of different wines. Some are in complete lockstep with today's shared assumptions and some are quite far removed from today's "group think" about wine service.

At its most basic, wine service really comes down to a handful of variables that need to be considered to allow a wine to show at its optimum: temperature, amount of aeration, type of aeration and type of glass to serve the wine. Additionally, when we get to red wines of a certain age, we also have to deal with how we choose to handle the sediment the wine has developed over extended bottle age. There may be other considerations that I am overlooking, but these should serve as a foundation for crafting a standard criteria on how best to tackle wine service across a broad spectrum of different wine types. What I have done below is to try to address each of these factors within a given type of wine, as there can be wide variations on how each of these facets of wine service can be best applied to a given wine. What follows is certainly not gospel, but simply what I do myself after all these years of wine drinking and serving, and which I have found has generally allowed wines to show at their best when being served. I have only touched upon the concept of "how long" to age a given wine type, as this seems like it would make a good topic for a full discussion at a later date, so that discussion is limited below and remains on the back burner for a future article.

### ***White Still Wines***

In my younger wine drinking days, which date back to the very early 1980s, white wines were generally pulled out of the refrigerator, uncorked and poured immediately, so as to keep them as cool as possible to begin wine service. The bottles were often returned right after pouring to the fridge to keep them cold, or plunged into an ice bucket to do the same. However, in the last several years, many enthusiasts and professionals have begun to rethink both how cold a white wine should be served at and whether or not it should be decanted prior to service. In both these regards, I feel that the changes were much warranted and have benefited the wines to be served. While I do not generally decant most of my white wines, the one factor that I do take into account in this regard, is how acidic the wine is, both in terms of the inherent acid structure of the grape variety and of the given vintage being served. In general, higher acid white wines are the ones that I will look to decant more often than not. In terms of relative acidity, the age of the wine also comes into play. In general terms, I am more likely to decant a chardonnay from Chablis than I am one from California, as the former is more likely to be a bit hidden behind its girdle of acidity. However, I will always taste a white wine first before I decide whether or not I

wish to decant it (with a couple of exceptions, which I go into below), and let my palate be the judge as to whether or not I feel the wine needs decanting to show optimally.



Ironically, though it is generally the most high acid grape, I do not decant most of my Rieslings, though I do not know why this is the case. These days, I am more likely to decant a younger dry Riesling such as a Grosses Gewächs than I am an off-dry or sweeter example, and I have generally been quite content with how older Rieslings show when poured directly out of their bottle, though they almost all inevitably change rather dramatically in the wine glass over the first fifteen minutes or so after they have been poured. With other major white wine grape varieties, such as Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Godello, Albariño or the like, I am typically quite content with how the wine shows most times when just served from the bottle and I do not decant these wines with any great frequency. The notable exception to this might be young white Burgundy, which I often find structurally “tighter” in their youth than chardonnays from other regions and a half hour in decanter can often be beneficial for many of these wines if they are under five or six years of age. However, there are two types of white wines that I tend to almost religiously decant, and for far more extended durations, and those are wines made from Chenin Blanc and various blends of Rioja Blanco. Chenin Blanc is a grape that really demands aeration to show all of its underlying layers of complexity, so whether I am popping a three year-old Savennières or a fifty year-old Domaine Huët, the first stop after the cork has been pulled is into a decanter for me, and usually for a minimum of twenty to thirty minutes. Again, I taste the wine

after decanting it, to get a sense of its structural chassis at this point in its evolution, but with Chenin, it is almost always allowed to blossom with at least a half hour in decanter. I should note that Chenin Blanc can be a wine that often demands decanting, not only because of its good girdle of acidity, but also because the variety will frequently show a distinct “dustiness” or “mustiness” when it is first opened. This is particularly apparent when a Chenin is in its first decade or so of life, where it needs plenty of aeration for this dusty quality to blow off and the fruit to emerge from hibernation.

As I mentioned above. I also routinely decant white Rioja, and often for as long or longer than Chenin Blanc, as I find an hour or two in decanter is often perfect for allowing these wines to properly blossom and drink at their best. The poster child for the need of decanting white Rioja are the beautiful white wines made by López de Heredia, which are tasty if poured out of bottle, but which so dramatically blossom and show additional layers of complexity with extended aeration that it is, in my experience, absolutely foolhardy to not decant López de Heredia Rioja Blanco, almost regardless of the age. For example, the last bottle of the stellar 1964 López de Heredia Viña Tondonia Blanco that I drank benefited dramatically from a solid hour in decanter prior to serving! Two other white wines that I will almost always decant for at least half an hour prior to service are the Sancerres from François Cotat and Edmund and Anne Vatan- though this is not a practice I extend to most other examples of Sancerre. Both of these estates produce Sancerres that are quite structurally unique for Sauvignon Blanc, probably due to their fermentation and *elevage* in ancient, crystal-encrusted *foudres*, and I invariably find that the white wines from both estates improve if decanted prior to serving. I do return all of these white wines to the refrigerator once they have been decanted, as I do not wish to serve them too warm, but I do want them to be able to stretch their wings properly in decanter before serving.

When it comes to my preferred temperatures for serving still white wines, I am in the more modernist camp that they need to generally warm up a bit from refrigerator temperatures prior to being served. However, there is a trend out there these days of serving white wines at cellar temperatures (fifty-five degrees Fahrenheit) and, in my experience, this is generally a bit too warm for most white wines and I like to serve my white wines a bit cooler than this. What I will generally do is try to pull out bottles or decanters of white wines about fifteen minutes before serving (if it is not a blazingly hot day) and let them come up in temperature four or five degrees from the refrigerator’s temp. In our epoch, most refrigerators range from thirty-five to thirty-eight degrees Fahrenheit in temperature, and to my palate, this is just a bit too cold for still white wines. Letting white wines come up in temperature to forty-two to forty-four degrees will generally unlock extra elements of complexity in the wines, while still allowing them to retain their optimal balance and sense of vibrancy. What I find with white wines that are served at higher temperatures (such as cellar temp) is that the wines lose some of their sense of equilibrium and get a bit blowsy and unstructured on the palate, though the slightly warmer temperatures do not necessarily diminish the aromatic enjoyment of the wine. In restaurants (if they ever open again), where white wines generally come out very chilled, I almost always ask the server to leave the bottle on the table, rather than putting it in an ice bucket, as I would rather track the temperature of the wine myself and put it back on ice for a short time if it is getting too warm, rather than have to warm it up again from bone-chilling temperatures from too long plunged into that ice bucket.



## ***Rosé***

I generally will follow the same rules of thumb for most examples of Rosé as I would for the majority of the still white wines I discussed above. In terms of temperature, letting the wines warm up for ten or fifteen minutes from refrigerator temp will typically put them at an optimal serving temperature, and I would rather return the bottle to the fridge or put it on ice for a short time if it becomes too warm sitting on the table, rather than immediately putting it back in the chiller and then having to warm the wine up again prior to serving more to people at the table. Like white wines, there are a few Rosés that I feel demand decanting prior to serving, whereas the vast majority are just fine being poured directly from the bottle. Two of the Rosé exceptions that immediately come to mind as needing decanting prior to service are the Sancerre Rosé bottlings produced by the two Cotat cousins, Pascal and François. I am not sure of the reasons why these wines benefit so remarkably from decanting prior to service, but both Cotat cousins (each at their own domaine) make very long-lived and snappy examples of Sancerre Rosé and their wines do improve dramatically from having been decanted. Interestingly, I do not find that Pascal Cotat's Sancerre Blanc bottlings demand decanting, as is the case with his cousin François, but Pascal's Rosé is most emphatically better with decanting prior to service. I should also mention that I think of the aging curve of the Cotat family's two examples of Sancerre Rosé as more like fairly-structured red wines, and so I am never tempted to open a Rosé from either cousin until it is at least a decade out from its vintage! I cannot think of any other examples of Rosé that share these characteristics with the Cotat cousins' Rosés, but there may be some out there that I am unfamiliar with that fall into this category (or that I am simply forgetting while writing this piece).



The other aspect of wine service with Rosé that is important, at least to my mind, is the particular style of Rosé, as some can be quite a bit more “vinous” in style than others. Much of the wine world’s Rosé is a fun and juicy wine that can be at its best served as an aperitif or with a spread of different dishes served buffet style. But, there are some that are most emphatically “food wines” and are not really at their best served as aperitifs. I cannot really generalize in this regard, but when I taste Rosés that strike me as demanding cuisine to be at their best, I do try to mention this in my tasting note for the wines. Several of the very old vine Rosados I have tasted from the Canary Islands in recent times would fall into this category, or the Cotat cousins’ examples of Sancerre Rosé. One of my favorite settings to serve these more “vinous” or food-demanding Rosés is during the heat of summer, where I will serve them with grilled red meats in lieu of a red wine. I strongly recommend trying a bottle of Domaine Tempier’s Bandol Rosé or the like with a grilled steak or spare ribs, out on the patio as the mid-summer sun starts to finally sink towards the horizon and the temperatures start to ease up a bit and see what you think of Rosé with meats! It makes me think I have been transported back in time and have been invited to dine with Richard Olney at his home in Provence, dining *al fresco* on the patio and chatting happily with his myriad of interesting guests who always seem to have been gathered around his table, while Richard is inside flipping the Edith Piaf record over to the other side.

### ***Sparkling Wines***

When it comes to wine service for sparkling wines, I am probably way out of step with much of the current fashion and quite unrepentantly so! First and foremost, I am most emphatically still a fan of drinking sparkling wines out of Champagne flutes, rather than white wine glasses. To be clear, it must be a proper Champagne flute, with sufficient diameter to allow proper aeration of the wine and release all of the wine’s aromatic complexities, but there are dozens of examples of these types of flutes produced by serious crystal wine glass producers and I see no need to eschew their larger flutes to drink my sparkling wine out of a wine glass. The reason for this is quite simple: one of the key fundamentals of the quality of a given sparkling wine is how refined, tight and elegant is the texture of the *mousse* of the wine, and using white wine glasses (or even worse, red wine glasses) quickly dissipates the bubbles in the wine and makes this key ingredient in the wine far more transient than it need be. The magical cornerstone of sparkling wines is their bubbles, and the finer and more persistent that the bubbles are, the higher the quality of the wine in most cases. To use the apocryphal quotation often cited as hailing from Dom Pérignon himself, “I want to see stars” from the first to the last sip of my glass of sparkling wine and that means that retaining the *mousse* as long as possible is paramount. To do so requires selecting the proper stemware to allow those bubbles, put there so often by painstaking attention to detail and long aging, to last from the first sip until the bottle has been definitively and joyously drained.

To be clear, I would never choose to drink sparkling wine out of a very small, narrow Champagne flute. You know the kind- those that look like test tubes with a wine glass stem on the bottom and were probably designed with an eye towards not pouring too much bubbly per serving in a restaurant setting when the wine is being “sold by the glass”, but somehow have filtered their way out into general sparkling wine consumption as well. In restaurant settings where I am confronted with either flutes of this sort or white wine glasses for service, I will choose the white wine glass and just understand that the sparkling wine experience has already been compromised to some degree by the choice of a white wine glass over a properly large

flute. In a similar vein, I most emphatically do not swirl my glass when drinking Sparkling wines, as again, all this does is dissipate the bubbles that have been so painstakingly placed there by the winemaker. I am also pretty particular in wishing to drink my sparkling wines at slightly lower temperatures in general than I do white wines, as I am always seeking to find the point of the most seamless balance for a given wine at a given temperature. I am fortunate in having to taste so many samples of wines each day, so that I have the opportunity to play with variations of temperature quite often and I have come to the conclusion that sparkling wines generally show at their finest if just a few degrees colder than still white wines. Temperatures right out of the refrigerator are perhaps just a touch too cold, but they are closer to the point where I want to drink sparkling wines than still white wines, and I try to often serve sparkling wines only a couple of degrees higher than refrigerator temperatures. If I am serving five or six people out of a bottle of Champagne, then I will serve the wine right out of the fridge, as pouring sparkling wine is usually a two-fold process, as one has to allow the *mousse* to settle down again after it expands with the first pour in the glass, so that one generally has to pour each glass twice to offer a properly full glass of bubbly. Working through five or six glasses with the first pour, allowing the *mousse* to settle back down, and then pouring each glass again to top it off, is usually sufficient to allow the sparkling wine to warm just a touch and I find that it will often show beautifully with only this very minimal amount of time out of the refrigerator. For this reason, I will also routinely return the unused portion of a bottle of Sparkling wine to the fridge to stay cold, rather than place it on the table, as I would for a still white wine.

Another very new fashion for sparkling wine service that I am far from comfortable with is the idea of decanting sparkling wines. It was such a trend for a while that the well-respected Champagne house of Henriot was actually designing a decanter with a crystal company (if memory serves me correctly it was Riedel) to be given to sommeliers at high profile restaurants for use with one of their top vintage-dated bottlings. The decanter was beautifully designed, but I never would have actually used it for Champagne if I was still wearing my sommelier hat and had been given one of the decanters! If I understood Henriot's reasoning correctly, the idea behind the decanting of the *cuvée* in question was that it was still too young when first released and was not yet ready to drink, with a racy girdle of acidity that needed to be relaxed for the wine to start to show some of its secondary layering of complexity. While this was certainly true, I would never have willingly traded off the *mousse* of the wine by decanting it, and would have just tucked the wine away in the cellar for many more years and let the girdle of acidity lose some elasticity in that manner, rather than sacrificing those precious bubbles! I understand that in our modern, impatient world, many people do not have the patience to put wines such as this particular bottling from Henriot in their cellars for five to ten years and allow it to blossom fully, but if faced with drinking it with bubbles and a snappy spine of acidity, I would choose that acidity over a wine that had softened up a bit in decanter, but lost almost all of its bubbles!

### ***Pinot Noir and Red Burgundy***

As I mentioned in the introduction, I am a very strong advocate of decanting virtually every example of pinot noir or red Burgundy that I drink and believe that there are few red wine grape varieties that benefit more from proper aeration than pinot noir. While I have no specific evidence to support this impression, I have long felt that the tradition of not decanting red Burgundy is based far more on the historical realities of the economic levels of most Burgundians back in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, rather than in the

inherent structural aspects of the pinot noir grape. I have long felt that the region's relative lack of affluence (other than the economic comfort of a few large *négociants* and a very, very tiny handful of relatively wealthy estates such as Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and Domaine Leflaive) was the historical engine behind the region never developing a philosophy of decanting their red wines, as most Burgundians simply did not have all that much free cash on hand and the purchase of a decanter would have been an extravagance that few could justify in their inelastic annual budgets. However, if one looks not at the tradition, but at the structural aspects of pinot noir, I feel it becomes quite clear that decanting of this wine, whether it is young or old, is by far the more prudent approach to maximizing the enjoyment of a given bottle.

When pinot noir is young, its acidic structure is almost as important as its tannic structure, if not more so, and when drinking wines made from this grape, it is best to think about how to deal with its acidity to allow the wine to deliver all of its myriad layers of aromatic and flavor complexity. When young, pinot noir is often tight and somewhat masked behind its girdle of acidity, and working around this to allow the wine to blossom is really a necessity to see the true quality of the wine being served. I often read wine amateurs on bulletin boards write about how they were unimpressed with a given wine- say a fancy premier cru red Burgundy from the 2005 vintage (to cite just one example I paid cursory attention to a short time ago)- which the person writing about the wine felt was vastly overrated by the wine press in general because it was not showing much of anything when he opened it. Of course, he did not decant the wine and had to contend with all of the acidity of a top flight 2005 red Burgundy, which served to quite effectively mask much of the underlying nuances in the wine. I have absolutely no doubt that if he had opened the same wine (still woefully too young for primetime drinking, but that is another matter) and decanted it for thirty minutes before tasting it, he would have found a lot more nuance, depth and complexity than just opening it and pouring it directly from the bottle. Whenever I read "popped and poured" for pinot noirs, whether young or old, as part of an amateur's tasting note, I simply cringe.

For far older pinot noirs and red Burgundies, I understand some of the rationale that has evolved over time about trying to retain as much of the aromatic nuance in the now far more delicate wine by not decanting, but though the philosophical structure of preserving these elements by not decanting has been around now for a long time, I have never actually been impressed in point of fact by these differences. When very old pinot noirs are served (say fifty to seventy-five years or more of bottle age), I have invariably found that there is no diminution in the aromatic nuances presented by the wine if it is decanted right before serving. There are differences yes, but elemental ones of different scents presenting themselves as the more assertive, rather than qualitative ones where the non-decanted wine is inherently more aromatically complex than the one that has been decanted. To be sure, one ought to choose a proper decanter, as a classic "Captains' Decanter" with a very wide base that maximizes air surface for the wine is not one I would choose to pour a wine such as the 1966 Grands Echézeaux from Maison Joseph Drouhin into, but I would never, ever consider serving the wine directly from the bottle if I had available a properly smaller decanter to handle the service of the wine. I would decant it immediately before serving, taste it, and probably pour it fairly soon thereafter, but I would not just "pop and pour" without decanting. First of all, I would not want any of my guests to have to contend with the sediment in the bottle, which will become more agitated with each glass that is served. Certainly, the bottle cradles that are made to minimize the

agitation of the sediment during service are helpful to mitigate this effect to some degree, but they are most emphatically not superior to a gentle decanting right before serving.

Pinot noir is blessed by having fairly unobtrusive sediment, which may be another one of the reasons how a tradition of not decanting the wine evolved over the last century or so. But, it still “muddies” the enjoyment of the second half of the bottle served without decanting, and I really do not see the logic or intelligence of damaging the pleasure of the lower half of the bottle to ensure that the top half shows well (and again, in my experience, there is little qualitative difference between old pinot noir poured from the bottle and those decanted right before serving). I remember vividly a big weekend of Burgundy tastings that I was invited to back in my Burgundy-slurping early thirties, where our host was a very boisterous and persuasive champion of not decanting old Burgundies (he was an attorney by trade and well-versed in constructing a convincing argument). We were eight to ten tasters around the table for that series of tastings. When I suggested the very same line of reasoning as I have gone into above, he dismissed it as wrong-headed, so I politely then suggested that he serve himself last from each bottle of old red Burgundy that we were to drink, as he was the host, rather than first, as proper etiquette should see the guests served ahead of the host. We then proceeded to decant all of the remaining old bottles of red Burgundy consumed over that weekend of tastings!



### *Nebbiolo-Based Wines*

Perhaps no red wine demands proper decanting more than Nebbiolo- particularly its most powerful and refined examples from Barolo and Barbaresco. With Nebbiolo, the need to properly decant these wines is required for both the primary reasons for decanting: to remove the wine from its sediment and to allow proper aeration to unlock the underlying layers of complexity in the wine. Nebbiolo's sediment is probably one of, if not the, most bitter of all sediment, and even a wisp of it in an older example can mar the wine with backend bitterness and astringency. Sediment is simply the solid form of tannin, as the tannins in solution in the young red wine eventually bond with any stray oxygen molecules that find their way into the sealed bottle over the wine's life in the cellar, with the extra oxygen molecule that the tannins pluck out of solution attaching to its molecular chain and changing the tannin from a liquid to a solid, thus precipitating out of the wine as sediment. If one keeps in mind how astringent a young Nebbiolo can be on the backend, because of its youthful tannins, then avoiding sediment in the service of the mature wine becomes self-evident. But, it is not only to avoid the influence of Nebbiolo's sediment in the service of the wine that requires decanting, as this grape is also quite dependent on its acidity for structure and one has to also relax that girdle of acidity (which is always part of the structural equation when drinking Nebbiolo, no matter how many decades the wine has been resting in bottle) though proper aeration prior to serving.

There are many stories of seasoned Nebbiolo drinkers decanting an old bottle of Barolo or Barbaresco for many hours prior to serving, and for those with less experience drinking these wines in their grand old age, they are often treated as apocryphal. But, over the years I have come to be firmly planted in the long decanting camp for Nebbiolo. I do believe most emphatically that these old Nebbiolos, particularly the most structured examples from Barolo and Barbaresco, demand several hours of aeration before serving, even if they are forty or fifty or sixty years of age. I do not have as much experience with really older wines from the upper reaches of Piemonte, such as Valtellina or Gattinara to have a proper feel for how long they might demand in decanter, but my gut feeling is that it would be somewhat less than Barolo or Barbaresco, given that they do not start out life with anywhere near the same structural firmness. But, at least with Barolo and Barbaresco, I now have a solid base of experience with the wines and this has now become my practiced method for serving these wines once they have reached maturity. I prefer to decant my old Barolo or Barbaresco now in the early afternoon of the day I am going to serve it. However, I do not generally leave the wine in its decanter this whole time, but tend to decant the wine, taste it, and then pour it back into its original bottle (properly rinsed out of sediment) at some point and allow it to spend the remainder of its aeration time in the bottle, with a smaller surface area for oxygen exchange, rather than in the decanter. If, when I taste the wine right after decanting, it still seems pretty snappy with acidity, I will often leave it in decanter for thirty minutes to an hour, prior to returning it to the bottle for four or five more hours of gentle aeration (with the cork removed from the bottle). If the acids seem relatively tame (for Nebbiolo), then I will often pour it right back into the bottle after decanting, and then stand the bottle back up in my cellar with the cork out until I plan to serve it.

One thing that I do not let worry me at all with older Nebbiolo is the relative color, or lack thereof, with older wines when I open them and decide on their decanting regimen prior to service. Nebbiolo has very fragile pigmentation in general, and it is often not rare to find a wine at age forty or fifty that is the color of onion skin, rather than the more reddish hue one would

find with equally venerable bottles made from different grape varieties. Even if the wine is a pale onion skin color, I will decant the wine, taste it and usually put it back in the bottle for at least three to four hours of gentle oxygenation with the cork out in my cellar. In my experience, the relative color of an old Nebbiolo is not all that important in judging the soundness of the wine, and the brilliance of the wine is often a far better way to predict its provenance than the wine's actual color. Even, onion skin-colored, pale Nebbiolos will be bright and vibrant in decanter, if the wines are still sound, and it is really wines that are dulled in appearance (whether pale or still more red in hue) that are the more suspect of poor provenance. I should also take a moment to discuss how I prepare my Nebbiolo, or for that matter, all of my older red wines that have sediment, for decanting, as I have evolved my strategy as the years have rolled by for how best to handle sediment in old red wines.

### ***Handling Sediment Prior to Opening a Red Wine***

This is probably a bit out of place to be going into this here, when we still have several more important red grape varieties to go into below, but as sediment is such a tricky thing to deal with when it comes to older Nebbiolo, I thought I would tuck this section in here, rather than further down in the article. As I mentioned above, I first began developing my style of handling old wines with sediment when I was a sommelier at Gotham Bar and Grill in Manhattan. At that time, I had expanded the wine list from the two hundred and fifty selections I inherited from my predecessor to somewhere between seven and eight hundred, and I simply did not have room in my storage at the restaurant to stand up any large number of old wines with sediment. So, I learned how to open the wines on their sides prior to decanting, so that I would not need to stand them up, and with a bit of practice, it became quite easy to open a bottle while still on its side and not disturb the sediment at all prior to decanting. These days, I never stand anything up (other than vintage Port, as the bottles are often so dark that I cannot see through them to gauge where the sediment is when I am decanting them) in my cellar and open everything on its side before I decant it. With a good corkscrew (I have long preferred a Screwpull because of its very refined bit), or better yet, these days, a Durand, the technique is quite easy to open a wine on its side and keep the sediment still lying along the bottle in the same place it has been during its hibernation in the cellar. I simply tilt the neck of the bottle up a little bit, to keep the wine from pouring out when the cork is removed, cut the foil capsule with a foil-cutter and then remove the cork with the bottle angle still fairly close to ninety degrees. For those that have a wine cradle, this works even better than trying to keep the bottle at this slight angle by hand, but if one does not own a cradle (I have never gotten around to buying one myself), it is really not all that difficult to do.

Once the cork is removed, I then decant the wine without ever having stood it up and I find that the line of sediment will seldom budge during these maneuvers, once one has had a bit of practice opening bottles up on their sides. A good way to practice this technique is to open some bottles of white wine in this manner, as then there is no sediment to worry about and one can get the feel for opening bottles in a horizontal position. Once this decanting approach is mastered, one no longer has to stand bottles up in advance to let the sediment get to the bottom and it no longer becomes a complicated bit of calculus to decide which older bottles to stand up to drink in the coming weeks and months. However, for those that still would like to stand up some bottles to let the sediment settle, let me run quickly through what I have found over the years to be the necessary amount of time to stand up a bottle and let the sediment settle back to



the bottom prior to drinking the wine. I often read of people that say they stood up a certain wine for three or four days to let the sediment settle out, prior to opening it, but in my experience, no matter what grape variety the wine is made out of, this is nowhere near sufficient time for the sediment to properly come back out of suspension after an older bottle has been stood up. I would put the minimum time required to be two weeks for older red wines that have quite a bit of sediment, and this would be even for wines made out of grape varieties with relatively mellow sediment, such as Pinot Noir or Gamay. For wines made from Cabernet Sauvignon or Nebbiolo, I would not think of opening them until they have stood for a full month, so you can see why I am such a partisan now of decanting older red wines on their side, without ever standing them up, as I no longer need to plot out my mature red wine drinking schedule a month in advance!

### ***Syrah-Based Wines***

Syrah is another grape that I decant routinely, whether it be young or old. It is a grape that tends to be fairly reductive in the bottle when young, so extended decanting time if opening a young example is often very rewarding and almost *de rigueur* for any bottles that have started out their lives more reductive in nature. The grape does not generally have the same acid structure as Pinot noir or Nebbiolo, so I am less concerned with loosening up the acidity in the wine with aeration, but so many examples of Syrah start out reductively when first opened (even wines that are ten or fifteen years of age) that it is now habit for me to decant almost every example of Syrah that I drink or taste, no matter how old it is. As each example will have a range of reductive aspects to it, I do not have any hard and fast rules when it comes to decanting a Syrah-based wine prior to serving, so I tend to decant them and then taste, to try and get a feel for how long a given wine might wish to spend in decanter prior to service. The style of Syrah that I tend to love best, which is made with plenty of whole clusters and little or no new oak, will obviously often need the longer aeration time prior to serving, but as this style of wine is becoming the majority of Syrah produced these days, even here in the US (I cannot overstate how happy I am to see the evolution of this grape variety in America, as there are now so many truly excellent producers today making wines that pay stylistic homage to the greats of yesteryear in the northern Rhône Valley and eschew the monster truck style of American Syrah that was so vociferously championed by Robert Parker in the later, darker days of his career), this decanting methodology seems now to be universally useful for Syrah. As a general rule of thumb for examples of Syrah that are a bit on the reductive side when first opened, thirty minutes is usually a good timeframe for their stay in decanter, prior to serving. But, it is easy enough to taste the wine during its period of aeration and decide for oneself (as long as you do not utilize those three or four ounce sample pours!) when it might be good to consider serving the wine.

### ***Grenache and Mourvèdre***

While I have a small cache of Bandol resting comfortably in my cellar, I no longer have more than a smattering of Châteauneuf du Pape bottles down there, as this is a region that moved decidedly away from what I valued in wine during the decade of the 1990s, and other than a few holdouts like Éric Texier, I do not know who is still making wines in the region that would dovetail with my tastes. So, when discussing how best to serve Grenache-based wines, my perspective is tempered by the passage of time, as it has now been quite a long time since the wines from the southern Rhône took up a significant percentage of my cellar space. However, there was a time when this was not the case and I bought and cellared a lot of Châteauneuf du Pape and drank the wine with quite some regularity, but the last vintage that I bought heavily

was the 1990 vintage and all of those wines and those from the top vintages between 1981 and 1990 here are now long gone from my cellar. It is too bad, for if I knew that the region was going to veer off stylistically from my tastes, I might not have drunk those wines with so much frequency back in the day and I might still have a nice cache of them down there to ease my passage into old age. In any case, back in the day, other than removing the wine from its sediment (once it had started to form), I had always found grenache-based wines to be pretty easygoing when it came to service and not particularly insistent on extended aeration in decanter to show at their best.

These days, most of my grenache experience comes from Spanish wines made from Garnacha (or Garnaxta for those growing the grape in the Catalan section of Spain), or the growing number of really good examples being made in Oregon or California. I still like the grape when crafted in these regions, which seem to understand what was lost stylistically when Châteauneuf du Pape went off the rails. In my experience, grenache is a beautifully transparent wine down to its underlying soil, if allowed not to get too ripe, but I generally find that this is quite straightforward in terms of handling and its charms are quite evident once the wines are opened and they do not take hours to blossom, as can be the case with some other red varieties. If others, who may dip their toes in the grenache waters with more frequency than I have different conclusions, I would certainly be open to hearing them, for as I said above, I do not have much in my cellar anymore. Mourvèdre is a grape that behaves a bit more like syrah than it does grenache- or at least this has been my impression- and I routinely give mourvèdre-based wines quite a bit of aeration before thinking about serving them. Usually thirty minutes to one hour in decanter serves these wines nicely, particularly once they have gotten to be ten years of age or older (which is when I start to think about drinking them), as I find that it takes quite a bit of oxygenation to let the core of black fruit in these wines rise up and take center stage in the wine. This is also true of the one Châteauneuf du Pape that I think of as a mourvèdre-based wine, Château de Beaucastel, which was always the one Châteauneuf du Pape in my cellar that I would give an hour in decanter prior to serving.

### ***Gamay***

As readers already know, I drink a lot of Beaujolais and really like the Gamay grape. However, I like it best when it has had at least a few years of bottle age, as I like to let the wine get beyond its exuberantly fruity youthful period of cranberries and cherries and mellow into a far more complex personality that includes many more aromatic and flavor elements in its personality. It is really only in the twenty-first century that *vignerons* in the region, beyond a few domaines, have really begun to understand just how beautifully their wines can age and started to keep more back in their cellars for personal consumption at age fifteen or twenty. Prior to this new millennium, estates such as Château Thivin or Domaines des Billards, where the family proprietors kept plenty of old wines in their cellars, were the exceptions, rather than the rule in Beaujolais, and even proprietors in the top vineyards of Crus such as Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent would often drink up most vintages in their own cellars before their tenth birthdays. With older Beaujolais, the wines need to be decanted to remove them from their sediment, but I generally do not give them quite as long in decanter after removing them from the deposit before I serve them. I find that they generally show very well as soon as they have been decanted, and though they do not show signs of degradation with an hour or more in decanter (if we can manage to not finish

the bottle over that time), they generally do not need time to stretch their wines at age ten or twenty and show pretty complete profiles soon after they are placed in decanter.



### ***Cabernet Sauvignon***

I do not drink a lot of young Cabernet Sauvignon these days, for much like Syrah, the style of Cabernet Sauvignon that I put in my cellar is classical in nature and built for long-term cellaring and I have little desire to waste bottles drinking structured young cabernet sauvignon out of my cellar when they are only a decade or so in age. And I do not drink or cellar any “modern-styled” examples of cabernet sauvignon, so obviously the service suggestions that follow for this varietal would not be necessarily applicable to those wines. But, for classically-styled and proportioned cabernets, either from Bordeaux estates along the Gironde or in the New World, decanting is necessary in my opinion prior to drinking these wines. I have a lot of cabernet-based wines in my own cellar and drink them with great frequency when the volume flow of samples allows me to dip my toe in my own cellar, and I always decant these wines. In my experience (and, of course, this is based on the styles of wines that I personally cellar), I tend to not even think about opening a bottle of cabernet-based wine until it is at least twenty-five years of age, if the wine hails from a successful vintage. The grape variety does generally not have the same issue with acidity as pinot noir or nebbiolo, so my primary purpose in decanting cabernets is to remove the wine from its sediment. However, this is also a variety that needs some time to stretch its wings after decanting, so my general rule of thumb will be thirty minutes

in decanter prior to service, for wines that range from twenty-five to forty years of age. Wines older than this, I will do my customary decanting and taste the wine, to see how long I feel it might need in decanter. If it seems a bit delicate structurally, I just return it to the rinsed out bottle and put a cork back in it until it is time to serve.

While cabernet sauvignon is not generally a grape where acidity plays a key role in deciding how to handle the wine prior to serving, on some occasions, a vintage will come along where the acidity is unusually high in general terms for cabernet, and in these fairly rare occasions, I find that the acidity should be taken into consideration with projecting an aging curve for the wines of the vintage, rather than in how long to leave them in decanter when one is finally ready to drink them. For example, the 1966 vintage in Bordeaux was rather atypically high in acid for a successful vintage on the Gironde, and this affected their aging curve more than how to serve the wines to best advantage. Where I mentioned above that twenty-five years out from the vintage is a good place to start thinking about drinking traditionally-made cabernet-based wines, this guideline was not useful for the 1966 clarets, which took longer to develop than lower acidity, ripe vintages from this era, like 1962, 1964, 1970 or 1971. It was really not until the 1966s started to reach their fortieth birthdays that they really started to fully blossom (at least for the higher level classed growths) and show all of their qualities. Prior to this, they were certainly complex, but always a bit sinewy in structure, due to their surprisingly resilient girdles of acidity, and it was not really until the dawn of the new century that the acids relaxed enough for the underlying mid-palate richness of these wines to really show and the wines to nicely flesh out and start to drink optimally.

There is a genre of cabernet-based wines that I am really out of touch with these days, which are those known as Super Tuscans, so I do not know if my preferred techniques for drinking cabernets cited above are any longer applicable to this category of wines. My preferred approach would have certainly worked with these wines back in the decade of the 1980s, when I drank and cellared them with some frequency, but I have lost contact with the wines in my journalistic days and do not really know what would be the best way to handle them now. I would certainly decant them, to remove them from their sediment, but in terms of how long I would allow them to aerate in decanter, I really do not know. On one hand, many would benefit from some aeration to allow more complexity to emerge with oxygen exchange, but on the other, the role of new oak in these wines has to be considered. The combination of higher alcohol levels in many contemporary Super Tuscan bottlings (due primarily to global warming), and their high percentages of new oak (due to the fashions of international tastes) can make extended aeration problematic when drinking these wines. The tannins from new oak barrels leech into solution in red wines faster at higher alcohol levels, making it more difficult at higher octanes to properly control the influence of oak tannin in the finished wine. This can be covered up to some degree by the plushness of fruit that accompanies young cabernets at higher alcohol levels, but as this initial puppy fat fades away, the handling of the wine to hide the oak tannins becomes more difficult. I have drunk several maturing wines of this nature where they start to show well after fifteen minutes or so in decanter, but by the thirty minute mark, oak tannins have started to become uncovered on the backend of the wines and often I cannot finish the bottle, as they have become astringent and out of balance from their wood tannins drying the backend of the wine.

Any discussion of proper serving techniques for cabernet sauvignon-based wines needs to talk a bit about a few of the outliers in this category that merit special attention. The two that immediately come to my mind are Château Latour and Mayacamas Vineyards during the long career of Bob Travers. Both of these wines were built for a far longer haul than any of their contemporaries, and my twenty-five year rule of thumb for a good time to start drinking these wines was most emphatically not appropriate for either of these two wines, from a top vintage. I have some old Mayacamas cabernets in my cellar from the decade of the 1970s that are now drinking well (1970, 1973 and 1974), but the 1975 and 1978 are still not even ready yet and are still fairly tannic! And none from the decade of the 1980s are even remotely ready to drink, so clearly one has to add a decade or two to my rule of thumb for Bob Travers' versions of Mayacamas cabernet sauvignon. Similarly, Château Latour is an estate that was famed for more than a century for the longevity and leisurely pace at which its wines matured. This was certainly true through the first half of the twentieth century and up until at least the decade of the 1980s, when there was some gentle criticism that the wines were being made in a more "forward" style. However, certainly in the last quarter century, the estate has returned to its very structured, classical style (if it ever really wandered away from this!), and forty to fifty years of age is probably again the proper age to start thinking about opening up a bottle of Château Latour in a great vintage of recent times.

### ***Merlot***

In my experience, there are the wines of Pomerol, the 1981 Kalin Cellars Merlot "Reserve" (which remains by quite some margin the single finest American example of Merlot that I have ever tasted), and everything else made primarily from this grape (at least if we remove the wines of St. Émilion from the discussion for the moment, as they often rely as much or more on Cabernet Franc as they do Merlot). I have been curious in recent years about a few of the old California Merlot specialist bottlings from estates such as Duckhorn Vineyards and Matanzas Creek Vineyards from the vintages of the late 1970s and first half of the 1980s, and a couple that I have drunk have also been quite good and serious examples of the variety that have stood the test of time, so perhaps there is a wider playing field of top flight, cellar-worthy wines made from Merlot than those which I mentioned. But, our discussion of how to best serve this grape is best focused first on the wines of Pomerol, as these remain the ultimate expression of high quality that the variety has realized. As far as serving, I generally handle these wines as I do traditionally-styled cabernets, letting them get to a minimum of twenty-five years of age and then decanting them and generally letting them have at least a half hour in decanter prior to serving. In terms of aging the top wines of Pomerol, there are a handful of estates that have deeper clay soils than others, and I have found that these wines, such as Châteaux Pétrus, Trotanoy and Lafleur, often need much longer than twenty-five years of bottle age to really reach their plateaus of maturity and start to drink with optimal generosity. Those with less deep soils, such as La Conseillante, l'Evangile, Lafleur-Pétrus and the like, tend to really start to sing around age twenty-five. The singular and superb estate of Vieux Château Certan does not really fall into this category, as it included a significant percentage of cabernet sauvignon in its *cépages* up until quite recently, and in my experience, it generally needed a bit more than twenty-five years in the bottle to start to show at its peak- at least when cabernet sauvignon was still a key building block in the wine.

Beyond the reach of the very best wines of Pomerol (and the aforementioned 1981 Kalin Cellars bottling, which has remarkably aged along the lines of these top Pomerols), merlot is not really a grape that I have all that much recent experience with, as I have not drunk any of the more commercially-oriented and less structured wines from this category in a very long time. Perhaps they are so commercially out of favor after the movie “Sideways” that most are no longer even produced? In any event, they are beyond the scope of this article, as are the simpler, commercial examples of cabernet sauvignon and the like that are also made for early drinking and were not discussed in the preceding section. However, the Cabernet Franc grape is a completely different topic and deserves its own section.



### ***Cabernet Franc***

Generally, we have two important regions for Cabernet Franc: the central Loire Valley and the wines of St. Émilion. As the second region is comprised of blended wines, that also include merlot and sometimes cabernet sauvignon, I will turn to them second in discussing service. For the central Loire Valley and its great appellations of Chinon, Bourgueil and Saumur-Champigny, we have wines today that are generally made at the top estates for long and positive evolution in the bottle and both cellaring and proper decanting are necessary. These wines are a bit unique in our discussion, as they have undergone a sea change of style since the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, when the vast majority were crafted to emulate the early appeal of Beaujolais at the time and only the most traditional and top tier producers were still making



wines for long-term aging. However, the overall stylistic pendulum for the wines of Chinon, Bourgueil and Saumur-Champigny started to swing back to the older school, more cellar-worthy style of wines in the decade of the 1980s (which also saw the origins of climate change- perhaps not coincidentally) and for several decades now, the top wines produced in these appellations have been built for the cellar. With these wines, decanting is a must in my book for a couple of reasons, with the first obviously being that they develop considerable sediment once they are past ten years of age. The other reason I like to decant them is that they can be a bit funky when first opened, and the sweet black fruit tones found in most of these wines can sometimes take thirty minutes in decanter to start to stir, even when the wines are twenty or more years of age.

Cabernet Franc grown in the central Loire Valley can be grown on a wide variety of soil types, from the chalky *tuffeau* the region is so famous for, to clay, gravel and primarily sandy, alluvial soils. Each soil type influences this grape rather dramatically, helping to shape its eventual structure and potential longevity, as well as how the wine shows when first opened at maturity. The wines grown on alluvial or sandy soils tend to be the easiest-going structurally and also the most fruit-driven in personality, so they will seldom show any of the slightly funky elements of cabernet franc grown on other soils when they are first opened. They will generally drink nicely from age six or seven (depending to some degree on the style of the vintage) and generally do not demand extended time in decanter to blossom. The chalky *tuffeau*-based examples of cabernet franc usually show more inherent structure, as they have better acids in general than those grown on sandy soils, and so a bit of extra time in decanter to let the wine blossom a bit more from behind its good acidity is merited. I like to give these wines thirty minutes in decanter before serving them and will not generally open up these wines until they are a minimum of ten years of age, if the wine hails from a top estate who is aiming to make wines for the cellar. Cabernet franc grown in gravelly or clay soils are the ones that are most inclined to show those funky or animal notes when first opened, and these are the wines that really demand at least a minimum of thirty minutes in decanter (an hour is often better), as the fruit elements (inevitably black fruity in tone) in these wines can really be hidden until they have had sufficient aeration. A typical example of this style of cabernet franc would be any of the top examples from the Chinon vineyard of Les Cornuelles, which has a lot of clay in its soils and really needs time in decanter to properly blossom.

In the Loire Valley, cabernet franc is also the most important red wine grape in the Anjou region, and here, the wines need both extended bottle age and time in decanter prior to serving to show at their best. They are not as inherently elegant as the finest red wine appellations of the central Loire Valley, but with a decade's worth of bottle age and thirty minutes of time in decanter to let them stretch their wings, they can be very satisfying in their own right. Moving onto the region of St. Émilion, where cabernet franc is generally blended with merlot or a bit of cabernet sauvignon, the wines tend to age very much along the lines of most of the cabernet sauvignon-based wines of Bordeaux, and I tend to treat them similarly in terms of what age I like to start drinking them and how I handle them prior to service. But, as was the case in our section on cabernet sauvignon, when I speak of the wines of St. Émilion, I am confining my comments to the wines made in a traditional style, as I do not willingly drink any of the new, modern-styled and dullard wines concocted by the Über Consultants of the Right Bank, most of which taste stillborn to me in any case and neither bottle age or proper handling is likely to help. In the US, wines made by Chris Camarda at Andrew Will Cellarers in Washington, which are varying

blends of cabernet franc, merlot and cabernet sauvignon, are styled very much like the best old school wines of St. Émilion, and treating them to similar times in decanter prior to serving seems warranted. There are also some very good pure cabernet franc wines starting to be made here in the US- not all that many yet, but some very good ones that strike me as harbingers of even better things to come in the coming years. One of my favorites in this regard is the absolutely stellar new Sunbasket Vineyard bottling of cabernet franc from Cathy Corison. As most are relatively recent phenomena, I do not yet have a really strong sense of how to handle them when they are fully mature and ready to drink, but I suspect that letting them age fifteen to twenty years is going to see them into their sweet spots of peak maturity and thirty minutes in decanter is going to be a proper amount of aeration for them prior to service.

### ***Mencia***

The proper place to have inserted the discussion of Mencia probably should have been right after Syrah, as it too seems to be best handled along the same lines as that grape. I often find that young mencia-based wines can also be a bit reductive if drunk in their youth, so thirty minutes in decanter is often very rewarding to let the wines open up and show all of their layers of youthful complexity. As the red wines of Galicia are really only starting to come into their own in the last decade, as the region was not even really a commercially viable wine-producing region for these beautiful red wines until the twenty-first century, I do not yet have a lot of experience with how to handle mencia-based wines at full maturity, but I have plenty in my cellar and will eventually understand far better how to serve them to their best advantage when the wines have had sufficient bottle age. Within Galicia, we also have the issue of many of these vineyards being very old and having only recently been reclaimed from the encroachment of the wild, so many of them are actually field blends that may be Mencia-dominant, but also include several other grapes such as Brancellao, Sousón, Alicante Bouschet, Mouratón, Caiño, Garnacha Tintorera, Merenzao and a host of other possibilities, so there is no hard and fast rule about how to serve wines here that could be composed of such blends. My experience with younger wines made from these field blends is that they are not all that dissimilar structurally from bottlings produced from pure Mencia, and so they respond quite well to thirty minutes in decanter before drinking them.

A further permutation with the beautiful red wines of Galicia has to do with the soil composition of a given vineyard, with those planted on soils dominated by slate or granite tending to be more pure in their fruit expressions, while those with more clay in the soils can share some of those funky or animal overtones when they are first opened that are found in cabernet franc vineyards planted on clay or gravel in the central Loire. I would say that when it comes to these variations based on the soil type of the vineyard, wines made solely from Mencia again behave similarly to those made from field blends that may include several other grapes, and all of these benefit from aeration prior to serving when the wines are on the younger side. In general, for these younger wines, I try to give them all thirty minutes in decanter to let them properly blossom, and will probably approach older ones in my cellar (somewhere down the road) in a similar fashion, with my customary methodology of decanting the wine and then tasting it to get some sense of its structure at this point in its evolution, and adjust time in decanter according to my impressions. I should also mention that I have tasted some very, very promising examples of Mencia produced in Oregon, and it may well be that this will be a major

red wine variety here in the coming decade or two. The younger ones that I have tasted from Oregon have also benefited from some time in decanter prior to serving to really blossom.



### ***Tempranillo***

Tempranillo is another grape that I invariably decant prior to serving- regardless of its age. This may seem counterintuitive, as the traditionally-oriented bodegas in Rioja are well-known for their very long barrel aging regimens for their wines prior to finally bottling them, and it would seem on the surface that wines that have enjoyed long and leisurely *elevages* in barrel prior to bottling would not really be in need of aeration prior to serving. However, as acidification has often been practiced in Rioja, one will often find rather tangy wines here, even thirty or forty years out from the vintage, and due to the acids in the wines, decanting is often a very rewarding experience with these older vintages of Rioja, as it will often let the aromatics and flavors blossom more completely, and it also unlocks that velvety palate impression that classic Rioja is so well-known for and can be masked if just poured directly from the bottle. As old school Rioja often spend a long time in barrel prior to bottling (though the number of years traditional Rioja spends in barrel these days is shortening from what was the case a generation ago), with the wines typically racked once or twice a year during their *elevage*, they do not generally throw as much sediment as a similarly aged cabernet sauvignon-based wine. However, I still do not like drinking these wines with the sediment still in them, so beyond the need to

often unlock the acids a bit, I try to steer clear of serving the wine with the sediment still in the wine.

With the new style of Rioja, where the wines spend much less time in the cellars prior to release, are generally aged for shorter periods in a higher percentage of new oak (often in French barrels as well), the guidelines mentioned above may not be applicable. As most of those wines are relatively recent phenomena and still emphatically too young for drinking (at least to my classically-inclined palate), I do not have a lot of experience with how best to handle them, but my gut instinct is that the serving suggestions for cabernet sauvignon-based wines are probably going to also work well for these wines. I have not yet bought too many for my own personal cellar, preferring to devote my Rioja purchasing to traditionally-styled estates, it may be some time before I have a better sense of how to best serve these wines at full maturity or even what timeframe is reasonable to anticipate said maturity. Beyond Rioja, my serving preferences for tempranillo from regions such as Ribera del Duero, I would generally peg the vast majority of the top bottlings of these wines as being ready to drink between ages fifteen and twenty-five and best decanted thirty minutes before service. As I went into in some depth a couple of issues back, I would make an exception for Vega Sicilia's Único bottling, which often needs more like forty or fifty years to really start to reach its apogee and which benefits rather dramatically from extended time in decanter. In many ways, I handle Vega Sicilia Único much as I do older Barolo or Barbaresco, rather than other tempranillo-based wines.

### ***Barbera, Dolcetto and Aglianico***

There are so many different red and white grape varieties in Italy that I could not address every single one of them in this article, even if I let it run to book length! But, let me at least take a look at three more of the more important ones in the country, as I feel that they are often not properly handled. Starting with Dolcetto, which is frequently (and misleadingly) described as the "Beaujolais of Italy", I have seldom been served the wine in what I consider a proper fashion. First and foremost, it needs decanting when drunk young, to let it relax a bit behind its usually pretty bouncy acids and to let the wine move beyond its simple "fruitiness" and show more layers of its personality. A minimum of fifteen minutes in decanter is merited for Dolcetto. I should also mention that I like my Dolcetto with a bit of bottle age, seldom preferring the newest vintage release to a bottling that has been in my cellar for at least a few years. When we move onto Barbera, my expectations for both the quality of the wine and its potential longevity grow exponentially. This is a grape that I feel is dramatically underrated for its absolute quality, and I cellar my Barbera bottlings for at least three to five years before starting to drink them. I also routinely decant them for a minimum of thirty minutes prior to serving, not only to get them off their sediment (as I am letting my bottles age), but also to unlock the wine from behind its girdle of acidity, which can often be just as strident as wines made from pinot noir or nebbiolo. With Aglianico, most importantly, the grape of Taurasi, extended aeration when the wine is ready to drink is very often rewarded in my experience. Twenty to thirty years out from the vintage is a good place to look for full maturity with Taurasi. I do not treat mature Taurasi to as long in decanter as I do mature Barolo, but usually an hour in decanter seems to be my customary timing before I serve a mature example.

## ***Zinfandel***

Zinfandel has become such a stylistically schizophrenic grape since the 1990s that I really do not know even how to talk about its service needs today. If we ignore the Monster Truck, super high octane and sweet wines that form one end of the stylistic spectrum (which I do not drink ever, if I can help it) and just look at the wines produced that attempt to adhere to the older style of the wines from Joseph Swan and Ridge Vineyards back in the 1970s and 1980s, we still have a fairly wide range of style to try to cater our service parameters to and allow the wines to show optimally. As Rod Berglund, winemaker and owner of Joseph Swan Vineyards today, pointed out to me many years ago, the zinfandel grape has a pretty unruly acidity structure and getting those acids to start to ripen up and back off is often the chief goal of a given growing season. Sometimes, this takes letting the sugars in the grapes accumulate to pretty heady levels before picking can commence, and in some recalcitrant years, they never really budge sufficiently and the wines remain aggressively tangy for their entire lives in bottle. Due to the high acids found in “traditional” styles of zinfandel, I generally try to err on the side of extended aeration for most of my zinfandels, at least up to a certain age. I will often try to anticipate how long in decanter a wine may need by its alcohol level: wines in the thirteen to 13.5 percent range (low octane in the world of zinfandel) often will want a good hour in decanter to blossom. Those from 13.5 up to 14.5 may need less time, so I try to taste the wines right after decanting (focusing mostly at the acidity when I am tasting at this point) and try to tailor the amount of time in decanter to my perception of how tangy the acids are when I first taste it after opening.

I do look for and drink a bit of much older zinfandel, when I can find well-stored bottles at auction from the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, as I find that the old school style of zin back then aged far better than most commentators suppose and I have had some truly beautiful bottles of old zinfandel in recent times. Not too long ago I brought a bottle of the 1974 Cuvaision Zinfandel, which was made by Philip Togni, to a BYOB tasting with one of my wine groups here in the New York area and it ended up being the wine of the tasting, so one can see that the grape variety can produce some serious longevity if made in the style of yesteryear. When I contemplate buying older zinfandel at auction from this era, I am rather particular about alcohol levels in the wines, and generally steer clear of anything above 13.5 percent, as in my experience, though those wines may have been flat out delicious in their first decade or so of life, they do not generally tend to stand the test of time and reward twenty or thirty or more years of bottle age. On the other hand, wines like the 1974 Cuvaision, which was closer to thirteen percent (if memory serves me correctly) had aged brilliantly. With really old zinfandels of this ilk, I tend to not give them any extended time in decanter, once I have opened them and decanted them off of their sediment. It is my impression that zinfandel is a fairly fragile wine structurally after long bottle aging, and so, I tend to serve the wine soon after decanting and not let it start to collapse from too much oxygenation in decanter.

## ***Port, Madeira and Sauternes***

I obviously decant vintage Port with regularity, as once it has had sufficient bottle age, it is probably the one wine that can compete with Barolo for having the most bitter sediment. As I mentioned in the introduction, it remains the one wine that I routinely will stand up in my cellar for a month prior to decanting, as I find that it is often bottled in nearly black glass bottles that prove to be very, very difficult for my flashlight or candle luminosity to penetrate. In terms of how long to give it in decanter, once it has been opened, prior to serving, that tends to be tailored

by both the age of the wine and the style of the vintage, in combination with the house style of a given Port lodge. A Taylor-Fladgate, Fonseca or Dow's vintage Port at age thirty or forty is going to be given more time in decanter prior to service than a comparable vintage from a house such as Croft or Sandeman's, simply based on house style. I am also going to give significantly more air to a 1977 than I am to a 1970 vintage, for example, based on the general structure of each vintage, rather than the seven years that separates the two years. As a rough rule of thumb, I tend to like to give vintage Port a good hour in decanter before serving, if the wine is in the thirty to fifty year range, and I will often go this long as well with wines that are in the fifty to seventy-five year range as well. I also never worry about finishing off a bottle of vintage Port on the first day that it is opened, as in my experience, it will easily keep a week to ten days before fading, if I double decant it back into its washed out bottle after serving it the first evening.

Sauternes is a wine that I generally do not decant (unless I am going to serve it double blind to one of my tasting groups), as I find that it tends to drink very nicely when served directly from the bottle. Occasionally, a very old bottle will have some fine sediment or some tartrate crystals that have filtered out of solution and I will then decant the bottle to provide more elegant service, but this is a pretty rare occurrence. In terms of temperature for service, I like to try to keep it cooler than cellar temperature, but not too cold. So I will pull a bottle of Sauternes out of the fridge about fifteen minutes before I am going to serve it, to let it come up in temperature a bit, and try to monitor its temperature and not let it get too warm (for instance, setting it on the table after pouring), as I find that many examples can get a bit structurally blowsy if they are served to warm. With Madeira, I generally do not decant these wines either, but I do open them a week before I really want to think about serving them. I will open the bottle, often pour just a bit in a glass to give a bit larger surface area in the bottle for oxygen to work its magic, and then leave the bottle in my cellar for a week or more before coming back to it. When I put the freshly-opened bottle back in my cellar, I put the cork back in the bottle, but I could imagine a bottle of Madeira sitting in the cellar with its cork out for that week and also not really degrading at all. It is not that the wine is not drinkable when it is first opened, but I find that it often is a bit volatile and has some bottle funkiness that it needs to work out, and given how beautiful these wines can be when they have stretched their wings properly, these days I just open up a bottle, pour a little out, and return it to the cellar for a week before I start to serve it in earnest. I also keep my bottles open for quite a long time in my cellar, and I have some that have been open now for a couple of years and I do not really feel that they have faded over this time. The wines certainly shift in personality over such long periods of being open, but Madeira is such a relatively indestructible wine in the first place, that I do not tend to worry about it being open for quite extended periods of time. Which reminds me, I have a couple of bottles that have been open down there for a long time now, and I am going to wrap this article up and see if I can find them...