

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

September-October 2020

Number Eighty-Nine

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RECENTLY-TASTED ALSACE WINES AUTUMN 2020



This new report on the beautiful wines of Alsace primarily covers the new releases from the 2018 vintage, with just a few of the early-arriving 2019s also starting to find their way into the pipeline here in New York. Both were very hot summers in the region, and to a certain degree, both years will be defined by the torrid mid-summer weather of each growing season. However, as was the case in other parts of France, there are important difference in the two summer seasons. In 2019, spring was cool and rather late in Alsace, with some early April frosts causing a bit of damage (and, as was the case throughout so many other parts of France, producing widespread sleeplessness at many wineries, even for *vignerons* who were fortunately spared serious frosting). The weather picked up nicely as May arrived, with seasonal temperatures and little rain, so that fruit began to mature very nicely. June and July were hot and dry, but fears brought on by hydric stress were relieved by timely rains in August that kept maturity mounting nicely out in the vines. The timing of much-needed rain in Alsace in August was mirrored in other regions covered in this issue of the newsletter, such as Beaujolais and the northern Rhône Valley and would prove to be of pivotal importance in shaping both the style and the ultimate quality of the vintage of 2019. September temperatures stayed warm in Alsace and the harvest was conducted under lovely conditions. Picking began in September and progressed

in a leisurely fashion throughout the month, with growers in the cooler sections of the Bas Rhin finishing up in the first week or so of October. Yields in 2019 are down notably from the very generous crop size of 2018. It is still very early days for the shipping of 2019s and I will have much more to report on this vintage in the next feature on Alsace.

The Alsace growing season was quite different at the outset in 2018, as the first several months of this year were about as wet as Alsace has ever seen. Lots of rain in January was followed by a particularly cold and snowy February, and as the temperatures start to hedge towards springtime levels, the rains kept up and it was a very damp, dismal and grey start to 2018 in Alsace. May was also one of the wettest month on record in the region. Flowering occurred in early June, with still some rainy days interspersed with sunshine, but the crop set was good and as the rains finally departed, the temperatures started to rev up and allow the fruit to ripen very well. With all the spring rain, mildew was a threat and growers had to be vigilant out in the vines. July weather was seasonably hot and a serious heat spike arrived with the outset of August of 2018, with temperatures soaring to over forty degrees Celsius. Fortunately, all that rain in the first half of the year allowed water reserves to be more than a match for the heat of August and ripening did not slow from hydric stress in 2018. The frost damage in the region in 2017 had allowed for plenty of pent up energy in the vines, so the crop of 2018 was quite generous, and if the heat of the backend of summer had not arrived, it could have been problematic for growers to try and ripen up such a large crop. But, with all the hot sunny days, the bunches ripened up just fine and picking began at the start of September. Daytime temperatures remained high throughout the harvest, with evenings cooling down a bit, but this is not a vintage where acidity is particularly tensile and the wines all seem to have an early generosity to them- even the generally more reserved Rieslings. Happily, the harvest period was one of relaxed celebration for *vignerons*, as the bunches had ripened up very nicely and each grape variety was on its own schedule, so there would not be instances of having pressure to pick everything all at once, as full maturity was nicely spread out across microclimates and grape varieties.

Crémant d'Alsace

Dopff & Irion Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

The current release of Dopff & Irion Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut is composed of a fifty-fifty blend of Pinot Blanc and Pinot Auxerrois. The *vins clairs* are given six months aging prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation, with the wine then aged twelve to fifteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a bright and stylish nose of apple, wheat toast, lovely minerality, white flowers and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and frothy, with nice mineral drive and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a good, solid example. 2020-2030. **87.**

Dopff & Irion Brut Rosé NV

The Dopff & Irion non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed entirely from pinot noir. The wines offers up a lovey salmon color and a bouquet of tangerine, rhubarb, a good base of minerality and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, young and snappy, with a fullish profile, a good core and mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and a long, still quite youthful finish. This does not come with the date of disgorgement on it, but I would suspect it is fairly recent, given the still pretty tensile girdle of acidity here. It is a good bottle that could do with a bit of bottle age to allow the acids to relax a bit more. 2021-2030. **87.**

2018 Albert Mann Extra Brut Millésime

The 2018 Albert Mann Extra Brut Millésime is composed of a blend of Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir. The 2018 version shows lovely ripeness in its aromatic constellation of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, a lovely base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex finish. Not surprisingly, the Barthelmé brothers fashion pretty serious Crémant d’Alsace! 2020-2035. **89.**

2016 Mélanie Pfister “Breit” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime

The 2016 Mélanie Pfister “Breit” Blanc de Blancs is composed of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of Pinot Blanc and Pinot Auxerrois. It was aged for twenty-four months prior to disgorgement and was finished with a *dosage* of three to four grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of apple, tart pear, bread dough, white flowers and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, zesty acids, frothy *mousse* and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is quite tasty already, but clearly has the structure to age gracefully. 2020-2035+. **89+.**

Pinot Blanc and Pinot Auxerrois

2018 Pinot Blanc “Cuvée René Dopff”- Dopff & Irion (screwcap)

The 2018 Pinot Blanc “Cuvée René Dopff” from Dopff & Irion is a *négociant* bottling for them, as this is made from purchased fruit. The 2018 version offers up a pretty nose of white peach, apple, a touch of straw and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bouncy, fullish and has as good core of fruit, with fine balance, sound acids, a moderately deep core and sneaky length and grip on the focused finish. This is a good, solid example of Pinot Blanc, but I find the estate’s Crustaces blend (ninety percent Sylvaner and ten percent Pinot Blanc) has a bit more personality in this vintage. 2020-2025. **87.**

2018 Pinot Blanc (Auxerrois)- Domaine Henry Fuchs

Paul Fuchs took over the family domaine in Ribeauvillé from his father Henry a few years ago and has moved the estate’s farming over to certified organic viticulture. His 2018 Pinot Blanc is nicely ripe at 13.5 percent and offers up a very expressive bouquet of white peach, apple, spring flowers, a touch of wheat chaff and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with solid framing acids for the next four or five years, a lovely core, good soil signature and a long, juicy finish. This is a touch soft, as some 2018s can be from Alsace, so will want drinking up in its relative youth, but it is very refined and tasty. 2020-2025. **88.**

2018 Pinot Blanc- Domaine Albert Mann (screwcap)

The 2018 Pinot Blanc from the Barthelmé brothers is a very stylish example of the vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, peach, an exotic touch of papaya, a lovely base of minerality, gently musky floral tones and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and wide open in personality, with good framing acids, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex finish. This is a 2018, so it is a tad soft and will want drinking a bit on the early side, but it does not lack for structure or bounce on the palate. Good juice. 2020-2025. **89.**

2018 Pinot Auxerrois “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Albert Mann (screwcap)

When I first was introduced to the Barthelmé brothers’ wines in the early 1990s, I bought a case of their excellent Pinot Auxerrois Vieilles Vignes in several vintages. The wine always aged beautifully and has been an extraordinary value for a long time. I wonder if the vintages under screwcap will age as gracefully as those old vintages did under cork? In any case, the 2018 version is excellent out of the blocks, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of white peach, clementine, a hint of guava, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones and a floral topnote redolent of both citrus blossoms and honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and wide open in personality, with a succulent core of fruit, good soil signature, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. This is a 2018, so the acids frame the wine nicely, but probably will not supply a chassis for longer-term cellaring, but in any case, the wine is so delicious out of the blocks that not too many people are going to be inclined to defer gratification! 2020-2026. **90.**

2018 Pinot Blanc “Vieilles Vignes” Sec- Domaine Schoffit

The 2018 Pinot Blanc “Vieilles Vignes” from Bernard Schoffit is a beautifully expressive wine right out of the blocks, with just a touch of tropical fruit shadings to its aromatic and flavor profiles. The bouquet offers up scents of peach, spring flowers, a hint of papaya and a beautiful base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil undertow, very good acids for the vintage and a long, succulent and bouncy finish. This is very, very good pinot blanc. 2020-2028. **90.**

2018 Pinot Blanc “les Princes Abbés”- Domaine Schlumberger (screwcap)

The 2018 Pinot Blanc from Domaine Schlumberger is composed entirely of Pinot Blanc *vrai*. The 2018 comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a youthful nose of peach, apple, a lovely base of soil tones, white flowers and a touch of leanness in the upper register for its seven months *elevage* on its fine lees in hundred year-old *foudres*. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a good core of fruit, good balance and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is just a whisper clamped down on the backend from its screwcap, so give it a bit of aeration before drinking it, as it opens up nicely. 2020-2027. **89.**

2017 Paar “Deux Cépages”- Mélanie Pfister

Mélanie Pfister has given a new name to this bottling, which previously was labeled as Pinot Blanc. As I mentioned last year, this bottling is roughly a fifty-fifty split of Pinot Auxerrois and Pinot Blanc, so it has been given a new name to convey this blend. The cuvée is still raised in stainless steel and given almost a full year of *elevage*, prior to bottling right before the next harvest. The 2017 Paar comes in at a svelte 12.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully refined and mineral-driven nose of pear, white peach, complex, limestone minerality, a touch of wheat chaff and a lovely topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a good core, superb mineral drive and bounce, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and vibrant finish. This is very good juice! 2020-2035. **90.**

2017 OX (Pinot Auxerrois)- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace (screwcap)

Andrée Trapet and her husband, Jean-Louis share duties at Andrée’s family’s domaine in Riquewihr, so the husband and wife team spend a fair bit of time on the autoroute between Gevrey-Chambertin and Alsace. Today, Domaine Trapet d’Alsace is directed by Andrée Trapet, who has introduced biodynamic farming methods to her family’s fine bevy of vineyards and sought to make classic, dry-styled Alsace wines that retain fidelity to their underlying *terroirs*. Their “Ox” bottling is composed entirely of Pinot Auxerrois, with the *elevage* done in a combination of older Burgundy casks and concrete eggs. The 2017 Ox is a young wine, and

being bottled under screwcap, it needs a bit of time in decanter to blossom right now. But, once it stretches its wings, it offers up a bright bouquet of apple, tangerine, a hint of lychee nut, spring flowers and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and really shows a lovely core, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, bouncy finish. This is a serious bottling of Pinot Auxerrois and the wine really deserves to be bottled under a natural cork! 2020-2030? 90.



Sylvaner and Chasselas

2018 Sylvaner “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Henry Fuchs

The old vine bottling of Sylvaner from Paul Fuchs is made from sixty year-old vines that are grown on a cool, clay-based site. The 2018 version comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane and delivers a lovely bouquet of green apple, wet stones, dried flowers, a beautiful base of soil tones and a hint of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, complex and beautifully mineral in personality, with a fine core, very good acids and grip and a long, well-balanced and quite classy finish. This is very, very good Sylvaner. 2020-2030. 90.

2018 Chasselas “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Schoffit

Bernard Schoffit’s parcel of old vine Chasselas in Colmar were planted eighty years ago, so these are truly Vieilles Vignes! His 2018 version is a beautiful wine, with the ripeness of the vintage giving this an exotic sheen that almost recalls gewurztraminer in its aromatic constellation of lychee nuts, musk melon and pear, complex soil tones and a topnote of acacia

blossoms. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and really shows lovely mineral undertow (particularly for a 2018), with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, sound acids and a long, complex and succulent finish. This is delicious! 2020-2030. **91**.

Pinot Gris

2018 Pinot Gris- Domaine Henry Fuchs

The 2018 Pinot Gris from Paul Fuchs hails from a parcel of vines on the Mulforst hillside, halfway between Ribeauvillé and Hunawihr. It is a warmer *terroir*, with the vines planted on silty clay soils. However, they are planted right up under the tree-line, which helps retain acidity in the wine. It is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in old *foudres*. The 2018 offers up a ripe and stylish nose of peach, a touch of tangerine, musky floral tones, a nice base of soil and a topnote of straw. On the palate the wine is bright, succulent and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, sound framing acids and impressive length on the complex and wide open finish. This comes in at fourteen percent in 2018 and carries a wisp of backend sweetness, but I really like the balance that Monsieur Fuchs has struck with this wine in the hot summer of 2018. Good juice. 2020-2030. **90**.

2018 Pinot Gris- Domaine Albert Mann (screwcap)

The 2018 Pinot Gris from Domaine Albert Mann comes in listed at fourteen percent and is already wearing its heart on its sleeve, jumping from the glass in an extroverted and classy blend of apple, peach, wheat chaff, a lovely foundation of soil tones and a hint of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is juicy, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, a good, solid base of soil, sound framing acids and a long, succulent and wide open finish. This is a very inviting entry level bottle of pinot gris. 2020-206. **89**.

2018 Pinot Gris “Rosenberg”- Domaine Albert Mann (screwcap)

The Rosenberg vineyard bottling of Pinot Gris from is produced from twenty-five year-old vines planted on a soil mix of clay and limestone. The 2018 version from the Barthelmé family is lovely, offering up a ripe, but not overripe nose of white peach, a hint of tangerine, chalky soil tones, wheat chaff and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a plush core of fruit, good soil undertow, sound acids and a long, succulent and nicely balanced finish. 2020-2028. **90+**.

2018 Pinot Gris “les Princes Abbés”- Domaine Schlumberger

The Pinot Gris “les Princes Abbés” from Domaine Schlumberger hails primarily from the family’s vineyards in the hillsides of Guebwiller, with soils that are decomposed Vosges Mountain sandstone over a volcanic subsoil. The 2018 version comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers a fine, youthful bouquet of apple, wheat chaff, peach, lovely minerality and gentle floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a fine core of fruit, good acids and grip and a long, well-balanced and zesty finish. This is still nicely adolescent in profile and should really blossom nicely with another six to twelve months in the bottle. It is finished quite dry and is a lovely example of Pinot Gris. 2021-2040. **90+**.

2017 Pinot Gris “Spiegel”- Domaine Schlumberger

1998 was the first vintage that Domaine Schlumberger began producing a Pinot Gris bottling from their holdings in the grand cru of Spiegel. These are not particularly old vines, not having reached their twelfth leaf in 2017, but the wine has plenty of mid-palate depth. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of peach, a hint of pineapple, musky floral tones, a good base of

soil and a touch of the varietal's wheat chaff in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, sound framing acids and fine focus and bounce on the long, gently sweet finish. This comes in 13.7 percent octane and carries just over thirteen grams per liter of residual sugar, giving the wine a good sense of balance. As it does not have racy acidity, I would plan to drink it up over the next three to five years, during which time it will be very tasty. 2020-2025. **90.**



Riesling

2018 Riesling “Cuvée René Dopff”- Dopff & Irion (screwcap)

The Cuvée René Dopff bottling of Riesling from Dopff & Irion is also part of their *négociant* lineup of wines, with the wine raised in stainless steel tank for six months prior to bottling. This is actually a very good example of a blended Riesling, offering up a bright and expressive bouquet of apple, tart orange, petrol, stony minerality, dried flowers and a hint of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a fine core, a good girdle of acidity and fine focus and cut on the long and complex finish that closes with a note of orange peel. This is a lovely bottle of entry level Riesling and it is sheer madness to bottle this wine under screwcap! 2020-2030+? **89.**

2018 Riesling- Domaine Henry Fuchs

Paul Fuchs' entry level cuvée of Riesling is produced from vines closing in on fifty years of age, with all the fruit grown in the domaine's hometown of Ribeauvillé. The 2018 version comes in listed at 13.5 percent alcohol and wafts from the glass in a refined and expressive bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of petrol, chalky minerality, lime peel and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, lovely balance and cut and a long, very classy finish. This is a very, very fine "basic" bottling of Riesling! 2020-2045. **91+**.

2018 Riesling "Hagel"- Domaine Henry Fuchs

As I mentioned in my last article on Alsace, the granitic vineyard of Hagel lies up above the grand cru of Kirchberg and is a great *terroir* for Riesling. The 2018 Hagel from Monsieur Fuchs comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol in this warmer vintage and delivers a beautifully precise and chalky bouquet of apple, tangerine, petrol, a beautiful base of minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, stunning mineral drive and cut, laser-like focus and a long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. This is dynamite Riesling! 2020-2050. **92+**.

2018 Riesling "Cuvée Albert"- Domaine Albert Mann (screwcap)

The "Cuvée Albert" Riesling from Domaine Albert Mann is produced from grapes in the vineyards of the Rosenberg and Altenbourg, with the vines averaging thirty-five years of age. The 2018 Albert comes in listed at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a fine nose of apple, grapefruit, a touch of menthol, stony soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a good core, nice soil signature, sound acids and a long, nicely balanced finish. This is a very tasty entry level bottle of dry Riesling, with good depth and bounce. I would love to see the Barthelmés abandon the screwcap for this wine. 2020-2030. **89**.

2018 Riesling "Schlossberg" Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Mann

The 2018 Riesling from the Schlossberg vineyard from the Barthelmé brothers is a classic example of this great, granitic *terroir*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a pure and complex constellation of apple, tart orange, stony minerality, lime peel, gentle floral tones and just a whisper of the petrol to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and very refined in personality (particularly for a 2018), with a lovely core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, good acids and a long, complex and youthful finish. This is not particularly powerful by the standards of 2018, which I would guess is the result of some hydric stress in the vineyard here during the hottest part of the summer, but this has the size and shape of a wine that will blossom beautifully with bottle age and end up a gloriously complex middleweight that has a long and charmed life ahead of it. 2025-2055. **92+**.

2018 Riesling "Berg"- Domaine Mélanie Pfister

Berg is the new name for the bottling from Mélanie Pfister's regular Riesling, which used to be called "Tradition". The grapes hail from the Silberberg and Auf dem Berg vineyards, whose *terroirs* are *argile-calcaire* and give wines of great structure for cellaring. The 2018 Berg Riesling comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and delivers a superb aromatic constellation of apple, pink grapefruit, intense limestone minerality, a touch of petrol, white flowers and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with great backend mineral drive and cut, snappy acids and outstanding balance and grip on the long and complex finish. This is approachable today, but is really deserving of

three to five years in the cellar to properly blossom. It is a dynamite bottle of bone-dry Riesling in the making! 2023-2050+. **93.**

2018 Riesling Tradition “Lieu à Dit Harth”- Domaine Schoffit

The 2018 Lieu à Dit Harth bottling of Riesling from Bernard Schoffit, composed from fifty year-old vines in this fine vineyard, comes in this year at thirteen percent octane. It offers up a beautifully expressive and gently tropical bouquet of white peach, a hint of papaya, acacia blossoms, a touch of petrol, a superb base of soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and succulent on the attack, with a lovely core, good mineral drive and cut and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. Good juice. 2020-2040. **90.**

2018 Riesling “les Princes Abbés”- Domaine Schlumberger

The Schlumberger family farms one hundred and forty hectares of their own vines, with fully seventy of these in grand crus. The grapes for their les Princes Abbés bottling of Riesling are essentially the younger vines from their grand cru vineyards of Kitterlé, Saering and Kessler. The 2018 offers up a refined and classic nose of apple, tart orange, complex minerality, a whisper of petrol, citrus zest and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and racy, with good, but not great depth at the core, good mineral drive and grip and a long, youthfully complex finish. This is a good, solid and bone dry example of Alsace Riesling that should age quite nicely. 2020-2040. **90.**

2018 Riesling- Maison Trimbach

The 2018 “regular” bottling of Riesling from the Trimbach family is quite youthful and asks for a bit of aeration before drinking right now, but with some time to open up, it offers up a classic nose of apple, tart orange, a touch of petrol, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has an excellent core of fruit, with good acids and grip, fine balance and a very long, youthfully complex finish. The *elevage* for this bottling is done in both stainless steel tanks and cement vats, and out of the blocks, one can sense the cement portion of the blend, as this young wine still comes across as a tad dusty in personality. But, I am sure this is simply a youthful phase and this will disappear with a bit of bottle age. As this is a blended wine made from a variety of vineyards and soil types, it does not have the mineral signature of most Trimbach Rieslings, but it has depth, complexity and very impressive length and is a very good entry level bottling. 2020-2040. **89.**

2017 Riesling “Furstentum” Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Mann

The Barthelmé brothers’ Riesling vines in Furstentum are now just over twenty-five years of age, so they are now into their prime and really starting to perform to maximum potential. The hard base of limestone here is the perfect foil to this grape and the 2017 Furstentum is exceptional, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of apple, tangerine, chalky minerality, petrol, a touch of citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely open on the attack, with a superb core, great backend mineral drive, zesty acids and impeccable balance on the long and complex finish. This is a beautiful wine that is starting to really drink nicely, but has decades of life ahead of it. 2020-2045+. **94.**

2017 Riesling “Saering”- Domaine Schlumberger

Domaine Schlumberger’s 2017 Riesling from the grand cru of the Saering was fermented down to almost complete dryness (less than one gram of residual sugar) and comes in at 14.2 percent octane in this vintage. This is a lovely young wine in the making, offering up a fine bouquet of apple, pear, a hint of lychee nut, a fine base of chalky minerality, orange peel, a touch

of petrol and a floral topnote redolent of both white lilies and citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is a touch more closed than the nose right now, offering up a crisp and full-bodied format, with a good core of fruit, fine transparency and cut, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and still fairly primary finish. I would opt giving this lovely wine two or three years in the cellar to let the palate blossom as much as the nose, and then drink it over the next couple of decades. Good juice in the making here! 2022-2050. **92+**.

2017 Riesling “Réserve”- Maison Trimbach

The Riesling “Réserve” from Maison Trimbach hails entirely from the family’s own vineyards, with the vines averaging between forty-five and fifty years of age. The wine is raised in stainless steel tanks and cement vats prior to bottling. The 2017 Riesling “Réserve” offers up a nascently complex nose of lemon, tart orange, a nice foundation of minerality, a hint of menthol and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely racy, with a superb core, fine soil signature, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and youthful finish. Both the nose and palate here show a bit of their cement tank *elevage*, which I assume will be subsumed into the other elements in the wine with a bit of bottle age, but which gives them a touch of dustiness right out of the blocks. This wine is going to age long and gracefully and it is still very early days for it; I would bury it in the cellar for a minimum of five years and really let it start to come into its own before drinking it in earnest. 2025-2055. **91**.

2016 Riesling “Engelberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Mélanie Pfister

I have only tasted a couple of vintages of Mélanie Pfister’s grand cru Riesling bottling from the Engelberg vineyard, but this is fast becoming one of my absolute favorite dry Riesling cuvées from Alsace! The 2016 Engelberg is really starting to sing on both the nose, now that it has reached its fourth birthday, with the very complex nose wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, tart orange, a hint of lime, a multi-dimensional base of limestone minerality, a touch of both menthol and rosemary and a gentle floral topnote redolent of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully proportioned, with a great core of fruit, great mineral drive and cut, laser-like focus and a long, vibrant and still quite youthful finish. This exudes its limestone minerality like a young vintage of Clos Ste. Hune. Great juice, but give it another few years in the cellar, as though the bouquet is now quite expressive, this is still a young wine on the palate and a bit buttoned up behind its girdle of acidity. 2024-2060+. **94**.

2016 Riesling de Riquewihr- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace

The label has been nicely revised for this bottling, so it now appears with a chic label with the wine’s name represented as “R.- R.Q.W.R.”, but I have listed it here with its full name spelled out. The 2016 bottling comes in listed at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a superb nose of lime, green apple, petrol, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, white lilies and a bit of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and bone-dry in style, with an excellent core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the still fairly youthful, complex finish. This is approachable today, but will be even better with a few years’ worth of bottle age. Fine juice. 2020-2040. **91**.

2016 Riesling “Selection de Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Trimbach

The 2016 Riesling “Selection de Vieilles Vignes” is the first vintage I have tasted of this cuvée from Maison Trimbach. All of the vines that contribute to this bottling are at least fifty years of age, with the vineyard sources all centered around Ribeauvillé. The bouquet is deep, pure and shows off the limestone soils of the area, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of lemon, apple, chalky minerality, citrus peel, a nice touch of petrol and a topnote of white

flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and bone dry finish. This is a beautiful wine in the making, but it deserves some time in the cellar to fully blossom, as right now, it is far more expressive on the nose than it is on the properly youthful and snappy palate. Fine juice. 2023-2050+. **92.**

2016 Riesling “Schlossberg”- Maison Trimbach

For so long I have associated the Trimbach family with Riesling grown on limestone, so it is so nice now to be able to see their magical touch with Riesling grown in granitic soils such as the beautiful Schlossberg vineyard. 2014 was the first vintage for the Trimbach family in the Schlossberg and the 2016 shows that they are really starting to feel at home in this great *terroir*, as the utterly refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, lime, beautifully complex minerality, dried flowers, petrol and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and full, with a lovely core of fruit, an excellent girdle of acidity, impressive focus and cut and a long, youthfully complex and very promising finish that closes with a synthesis of yellow fruit and powdered granite that is most appealing. This is a young thoroughbred that needs some time in the cellar to unwind properly, so be patient. 2026-2060+. **93+.**



2014 Riesling “Clos Ste. Hune”- Maison Trimbach

The 2014 vintage of Clos Ste. Hune is one of the ripest in recent memory, as the wine tips the scales at 14.5 percent octane this year. However, the *terroir* here handles the ripeness beautifully, so the wine is still its inimitable aromatic constellation of tangerine, apple, lime blossoms, a touch of mintiness, plenty of petrol, a kaleidoscopic base of chalky minerality, delicate white flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and bottomless, with a rock solid core, great mineral drive and cut, vibrant acids and lovely balance and grip on the long, ripe and very complex finish. The 1990 Clos Ste. Hune was another ripe vintage out of the blocks, and there are certainly some similarities to be found here in the 2014 version, though this seems perhaps just a tick higher in octane than the '90. It is approachable today, but still in climbing mode and will be even better with further bottle age. 2020-2055+. **94+**.

2011 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach

The 2011 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile” from the Trimbach family is a beautifully pure and classic vintage of this iconic bottling. The bouquet at nine years of age is really starting to express its soul, wafting from the glass in a deep and complex blend of tart orange, apple, citrus peel, plenty of petrol, a gorgeous base of wet stone minerality and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, focused, complex and full-bodied, with a rock solid core, superb mineral undertow that is already starting to get salty, bright acids and impeccable balance on the long, complex and focused finish. This is a ripe vintage of Cuvée Fred, coming in at fourteen percent octane, but is first class juice in every respect. 2020-2050. **93**.

1998 Riesling “Clos Ste. Hune”- Maison Trimbach

This particular bottle of 1998 Clos Ste. Hune had aged beautifully and was at its peak when drunk a couple of months ago. The *à point* nose jumps from the glass in a vibrant and beautifully complex blend of green fruit, chalky minerality, orange peel, petrol and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine chalky mineral drive, good acids and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced and simply beautiful finish. Lovely juice, now at its zenith, but still with plenty of life in it. 2019-2035+. **94**.

Gewurztraminer

2019 Gewurztraminer- Domaine Albert Mann (Screwcap)

The 2019 Gewurztraminer from Domaine Albert Mann is a juicy and complex wine right out of the blocks and will drink beautifully from the moment it hits these shores. The wine comes in at fourteen percent octane and was fermented to almost complete dryness, offering up a vivid bouquet of lychee nut, spiced meats, pear, a fine base of chalky soil tones, orange zest and plenty of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, good soil signature and a long, bright and very nicely balanced finish. The acids are on the low side here, so this will not make particularly old bones, but for drinking over the next decade, this is going to be delicious. 2020-2030. **91**.

2018 Gewurztraminer “les Princes Abbés”- Domaine Schlumberger

The 2018 Gewurztraminer “les Princes Abbés” from Domaine Schlumberger is produced from their vineyards in the communes of Bollenberg and Bux, as well as some of their younger vines in their grand crus. The 2018 comes in listed at 13.5 percent and is beautifully expressive aromatically, jumping from the glass in a blend of lychee nut, rosewater, apple, a hint of spiced meats, musky floral tones and a nice foundation of soil elements. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and carries a fair bit of residual sugar, with a good core, nice balance and bounce and a long, complex and moderately sweet finish. In a vintage like 2018, with plenty of ripeness, the choice was clearly between keeping the alcohol in check and allowing some residual sugar in the wine, or making a very high octane wine, and Domaine Schlumberger clearly chose the former (and wiser- to my palate) course. The acids are fairly gentle here, but the wine has length and backend grip and I think it will age quite nicely on its good balance. Good juice, albeit, a slightly sweeter example. 2020-2040. **89.**

2017 Gewurztraminer “Furstentum” Vieilles Vignes Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Mann

The Barthelmé brothers’ old vine bottling of Gewurztraminer from the grand cru of Furstentum is produced from fifty year-old vines planted on the hard limestone hillside of the vineyard. The 2017 version comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and is beautifully expressive on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, lychee nuts, chalky minerality, orange blossoms, rosewater, a hint of the varietal’s meatiness and a nice array of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full and beautifully defined by its underlying minerality, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, impeccable balance and a long, zesty and very complex finish. The old vines and pure limestone of the vineyard have given this wine a better girdle of acidity in 2017 than the lovely Steingrubler example (please see below). This is dynamite Gewurztraminer! 2020-2045+. **94.**

2017 Gewurztraminer “Steingrubler” Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Mann

The 2017 Steingrubler Gewurztraminer from Domaine Albert Mann comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully perfumed bouquet of rosewater, lychee nuts, a touch of apple, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, spiced meats and a fine topnote of musky floral tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with sound framing acids, a superb core of fruit, good soil undertow and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This carries a bit of residual sweetness on the backend, to keep the potential alcohol level down, but is not too sweet to work very well indeed at the table. Fine juice. 2020-2040+. **92.**

2017 Gewurztraminer “Lenz”- Domaine Mélanie Pfister

Lenz is the new name for the bottling from Mélanie Pfister’s Gewurztraminer which used to be just called “Tradition”, with the fruit for this bottling originating in the limestone-based vineyard of Silberberg. The 2017 version comes in at 14.2 percent octane and offers up a beautifully vivid bouquet of tangerine, lychee nut, rosewater, a bit of spiced meats, a beautiful base of chalky minerality and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and shows superb mid-palate depth, with good acids and grip, fine balance and a long, complex and very classy finish that closes with a note of orange peel. There is a bit of residual sweetness here, but really quite modest by the contemporary standards of this varietal. Fine juice. 2020-2030+. **91.**

2016 Gewurztraminer “Beblenheim”- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace

The new label for this bottling will show the wine’s name as “G.- B.B.H.M.”. The wine comes in at 14.1 percent alcohol in 2016 and delivers a beautifully expressive bouquet of tangerine, lychee nut, spiced meats, tropical flowers, a lovely base of minerality and a topnote of fresh rosemary. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with sound framing acids, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex and wide open finish. There is a modest touch of residual sweetness here, but this is essentially a dry version of Gewurztraminer. 2020-2040. **92.**

Varietal Blends

2018 Crustaces- Dopff & Irion (screwcap)

The Crustaces bottling from Dopff & Irion is made to go with shellfish, as the name implies, and is composed of a blend of ninety percent Sylvaner and ten percent Pinot Blanc. The 2018 comes in at a svelte 11.5 percent alcohol and delivers scents of apple, tart orange, stony minerality and a nice topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and really well-balanced, with a good core, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the focused finish. This is not the most complex wine one is going to come across from the estate, but it is very well-made, long, deep and impressively serious for its genre. 2020-2025. **88.**

2016 Cuvée 8- Domaine Pfister (Vinolok)

As I mentioned last year, the Cuvée 8 is Mélanie Pfister’s bottling that she makes from a blend of different varieties to best exemplify a given vintage. The first vintage this bottling was produced was in 2005. The *cépages* of the 2016 version is fifty percent Riesling, thirty percent Pinot Gris, fifteen percent Gewurztraminer and five percent Muscat, with all but the Muscat hailing from her Silberberg vineyard. I tasted this wine about fifteen months ago and was delighted to see how it was evolving with bottle age. Today the wine is showing beautiful complexity on the nose, which wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, menthol, lime peel, complex, chalky minerality, petrol and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, complex and full-bodied, with impeccable balance and grip, zesty acids, a fine core and a long, chalky and complex finish. This was still tight the last time I tasted it, but it has blossomed beautifully and is now drinking with generosity and style. The fifty percent Riesling has really started to throw its weight around when it comes to the wine’s complexity with a bit of bottle age. 2020-2040. **92.**



Pinot Noir and Other (Almost) Red Wines

2018 Macération de Pinot Gris- Mélanie Pfister

The 2018 Macération de Pinot Gris from Mélanie Pfister was produced by crushing the grapes and giving them two weeks of skin contact before starting of fermentation. As subscribers may know, the skins of Pinot Gris tend to be quite red in hue and more and more *vignerons* (particularly in Oregon) are exploring what can be done with this variety and some extended skin contact. For the 2018 Macération de Pinot Gris, Mélanie split the cuvée in half, with one-half destemmed and the other whole clusters. Each half was raised separately in stainless steel for just under a year, and then blended and bottled, with the bottled wine coming in at just over fourteen percent octane. You can see its color from the photo above. The bouquet is deep and pure, offering up scents of cherries, cranberries, vinesmoke, a hint of sweet stems, chalky soil elements and a touch of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and still fairly youthful, with a good core of fruit and mineral undertow, sound acids and just a bit of backend tannin perking up the long and promising finish. This is a fascinating wine, and my gut feeling is that it will blossom with a year or two in the cellar. How long it will last in bottle is anyone's guess, as this is *terra incognita*, but it would not surprise me if this turns out to be rather long-lived. It is a good wine, not a great wine today, but it is still quite unevolved, and there may be serious complexity lurking here, just beneath the surface. 2022-2040? **88-91?**

2017 Pinot Noir- Mélanie Pfister

The 2017 Pinot Noir from Mélanie Pfister is one of the last releases from her family winery to still be graced with the old label, so the wine is officially listed as from Domaine Pfister on the label. These vines were planted in 1980, on a base of clay and limestone soil, so they are starting to really arrive at a good age now. The 2017 version comes in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a fine young nose of red and black cherries, pomegranate, bonfire, chalky soil tones and a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and tangy, with good intensity of flavor, lovely transparency and grip, modest tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This is going to age into a stylish middleweight that should be really good at the table. Quite tasty! 2023-2045. **89.**

2017 Pinot Noir “les Princes Abbés”- Domaine Schlumberger

The Pinot Noir bottling from Domaine Schlumberger is raised for ten months in the traditional *foudres* in the cellars here, prior to bottling. The 2017 comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a good bouquet of pomegranate, cherry skin, a touch of bitter chocolate, a lovely base of soil, woodsmoke and gamebird. On the palate the wine medium-full, bright and vibrant, with a good, respectable core of fruit, modest tannins and sneaky length and grip on the tangy finish. This is a nicely balanced middleweight that is approachable now, but will also age quite nicely. It is a good effort. 2020-2035. **88.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Rouge comes Renard”- Domaine Henry Fuchs

The 2015 Pinot Noir “Rouge comes Renard” from Henry Fuchs in Ribeauvillé is quite ripe in this vintage, coming in at a full fourteen percent octane. The two parcels of vines here hail from the top of the Kirchberg vineyard (which is mostly clay in this section) and the wine is raised in older Burgundy casks for a year prior to bottling. The wine offers up a fine nose of black cherries, pomegranate, a bit of chocolate, soil, woodsmoke and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, nascently complex and moderately tannic, with a good core and soil signature, sound acids and good length and grip on the youthful and gently chewy finish. This needs at least a few years in the cellar to soften up, but should be quite tasty. Structurally, it reminds me a bit of an old school example of Sancerre rouge, albeit, with quite different soil signature. 2021-2040. **87+.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Clos de la Faille”- Domaine Albert Mann

Though the domaine has been producing pinot since the 1993 vintage, this is the first pinot noir bottling I have ever tasted from Maurice and Jacky Barthelmé. It is really quite elegantly styled and promising, but the 2014 will need a few years in the cellar to blossom. The Clos de la Faille vineyard is one *hectare* in size and planted on a base of marly-limestone and sandstone and is farmed biodynamically. The bouquet is pure and very impressive, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, raspberries, a touch of cocoa powder, a fine base of chalky soil tones, roses, gentle spice tones redolent of nutmeg, cedar and a discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, tangy and intensely flavored, with a good core of fruit, lovely transparency, moderate tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Admittedly, I do not taste a lot of pinot noir from Alsace, but this is by quite some wide margin the most impressive example of this varietal I have ever tasted from the region. All it needs is a few years' worth of bottle age to blossom properly and it will be a delight to drink. *Chapeau!* 2022-2050. **92+.**

RECENTLY-TASTED RHÔNE WINES- PART ONE
FIRST OF THE 2019 VINTAGE AND PLENTY OF 2018s AND OLDER WINES



The hill of Hermitage towering behind the center of the town of Tain l'Hermitage under a bright October sun.

I last wrote a feature on the beautiful wines of the Rhône Valley back in October of 2019, just as the very first wines of the 2018 vintage were starting to emerge from the pipeline, and plenty of 2017s and 2016s remained readily available. Now, a year has passed since that feature (though with the coronavirus pandemic, it seems more like a century!) and the very first of the 2019 vintage are starting to trickle in from this lovely region, while the top cuvées from both 2018 vintage and the later-released 2017s are also now in the pipeline. It has been a very good stretch of vintages here in the Rhône, as it seems that *vignerons* are getting better and better at handling the vagaries of global warming in their vineyards, so some of the outlandishly high octane and overripe wines of the first decade of the new millennium seem less prevalent than they did ten years ago. Of course, that could just be my sheltered view, as I always tell importers and distributors of Rhône Valley wines when I am canvassing them for available samples, that there is no need to send wines which are listed with alcohol levels above 14.5 percent, as the bottles will be simply wasted on me if they are too high in alcohol, no matter how legendary the *terroir* might be. So, perhaps things at the high alcohol level continue unabated in many parts of the Rhône Valley and I am just not seeing those wines, but I would prefer a bit of optimism and think that some of the wild excesses of style and octane from the first decade of the twenty-first century are mitigating a bit today.

The first wines from the 2019 vintage here are beginning to filter into the market and it is another strong vintage in the region. Not surprisingly, the vintage's characteristics are not all that dissimilar from those in nearby Beaujolais, with summer heat and drought conditions defining the vintage for the third straight year here. The Rhône did not get out of the spring blocks particularly early in 2019, despite beautiful and warm weather at the start of March that had things looking precocious by mid-month. But April was cold and put the brakes on the promising outset in March. The cold April nights that led to extensive frost damage in some parts of Beaujolais in 2019 were not replicated here, though it was a near miss in some parts of the valley and *vignerons* had a few sleepless nights in early April when the temperature plunged down around freezing. By mid-April, the threat of possible frost damage was past, but the vines' development was now ten days behind schedule of a "normal year" at this point. According to Pierre Fabre of Château Mont-Redon in Châteauneuf du Pape, development was fully two weeks behind schedule by the middle of May and the "first flowers bloomed very late- around May 20th" and "I took almost a month to accomplish fruit set, instead of the usual ten days." The slow and uneven pace of fruit set would lead both to susceptibility to *coulure* and very uneven ripening in the vines as the season rolled on.

However, the blazing mid-summer heat would make up for some of the sluggish start to the growing season of 2019, though this would be complicated by both the heterogeneous nature of the ripening in the vineyards and the nearly relentless drought conditions of the summer- at least in the southern Rhône. As Pierre Fabre notes about the appellations in the south, "the end of June saw the first week of the heat wave" with "a scorching 48° Celsius recorded on June 28th- even the school certificate exam was postponed!" But, the vines were luckily equipped with sufficient subterranean water reserves from the storms of the late autumn of 2018, so they were able to hunker down and withstand the blazing temperatures, with phenolic maturation creeping slowly towards the finish line, rather than shutting down completely in the unending heat. As Pierre Fabre observes, the baking heat of 2019 in the Rhône was different from the blazing summer of 2003, as the heatwave arrived earlier, while the grapes were still quite green, so the roasted character found in so many wines from 2003 would not be replicated in the fruit from the summer of 2019. June, July and August were all exceedingly hot in both the northern and southern ends of the Rhône Valley, but the drought conditions were most emphatically not the same in the two halves of the region. In the south, the heat and drought continued from start to finish, with no rains to ameliorate these effects. In the northern half of the Rhône, there was a short, but quite violent hailstorm centered on Crozes-Hermitage, which struck on June 15th and decimated vineyards in its path. It was brutal for those who were hit with the hail, as fifty percent of the crop was wiped out in a matter of minutes, but the storm was localized in the southern end of Crozes and all the other northern appellations were missed by the hail. The very dry conditions were relieved in August in the north, as some very beneficial rain arrived mid-month (much as was the case in most of Beaujolais at the same time), which offset the drought, added much needed juice to the concentrated berries and brought far better balance to the grapes leading into harvest.

Though it was hot the entire summer of 2019 in the Rhône Valley, the harvest would not be particularly early, due to slowed photosynthesis during the heatwave and the late and uneven flowering back in May and early June, which put different grape varieties on far different paths to final ripening at the backend of the summer. This was particularly notable in the south, as

Pierre Fabre comments that “we started to harvest a few plots of whites at the end of August to keep freshness, but we waited until September 10th and 17th for the majority of Syrah.” The Grenache at Mont-Redon was brought in even later, “harvested between September 20th and October 1st, and lastly came the Mourvèdre, which was not brought in until October 10th - a record (late) date for Mont-Redon.” The *coulure* in parts of the south was worse than in the north, so grape “shatter” had already contributed to very reduced yields in the appellations that were most badly hit by this. The potential crop in Lirac was cited by Monsieur Fabre as particularly hard hit by *coulure*. Adding the heat and extreme drought conditions that prevailed in the south throughout the entirety of the growing season of 2019 produced low yields, small, thick-skinned and very concentrated berries, with high levels of tannins, concentrated acidities from partially desiccated bunches and plenty of color and extract in the resulting wines. This will likely lead to very structured, powerful wines from the top appellations in the south, but it is still too early to have tasted many of these wines here in New York, as only the very first 2019 red Côtes-du-Rhône bottlings have shipped. In the north, yields were more generous than in the south in 2019 (excepting of course the hail-damaged vineyards in Crozes-Hermitage), due to those beneficial August rains which brought things far more into classical balances in the bunches out on the vines. Harvesting was primarily done during the month of September in the north, with only very latest ripening parcels left to be gathered on the first of October.

Regarding the 2018 vintage, this was yet another hot growing season all over France, but happily, the winter had been quite wet, so subterranean water reserves were able to be replenished after the drought conditions of 2017. Flowering was abundant and the early spring weather was excellent, but much of the month of June was rainy and mildew was a constant pressure on *vignerons* and spraying had to be carried out with great frequency during the first three weeks of the month to protect the plants. Happily, by the end of June the sun returned and the growing season was very nice the rest of the way on to harvest. The possible Achilles’ Heel of the 2018s (for those who adequately handled the mildew pressures of early June) was that there was plenty of heat in August, which sent sugars soaring and *vignerons* scrambling to get rolling with picking at the very beginning of September- making 2018 one of the earliest harvest starts on record in the Rhône Valley. For those unprepared to get started picking at the outset of September, overripeness can often be the result and these estates have made decidedly less interesting wines than those that were able to pick with alacrity in 2018. As was the case throughout all of France in this vintage, for *vignerons* with vines spread out over several different appellations, the best vineyard sites would often be picked first in the immediate aftermath of the heat spike in late August, so it is possible to see more *sur maturité* in Crozes-Hermitage or Saint-Joseph examples from producers in the north who also may have parcels in pricier neighborhoods such as Côte-Rôtie, Condrieu, Hermitage or Cornas. The same can be said in the south, where Gigondas or Châteauneuf du Pape parcels might have been picked ahead of Côtes-du-Rhône vineyards if everything ripened up concurrently.

In any case, having now tasted a far wider range of 2018s from the Rhône Valley than I had at this time last year, it seems to me that this was certainly a vintage that favored red wine producers, as some of the white wines I have tasted from 2018 suffer from both exotic notes of borderline overripeness and a notable dearth of acidity, which makes them a bit shapeless on the palate. Perhaps these are the wines that were made from the later-harvested vineyards when producers had to make decisions about which parcels to collect first? However, this is not true of

all the white wines from this vintage. The best white wines of 2018 have managed to avoid the plunge into overt *sur maturité* in their aromatic and flavor profiles, and have delivered plush, buxom wines of lovely complexity and undeniable early appeal, but generally without a sufficient girdle of acidity to carry the wines more than a handful of years in the bottle. This is not to say that the successful white wines of 2018 will not make very, very good partners at the table for the next half dozen years or so, but it will only be the rare exceptions that will also age long and gracefully. This is most emphatically not the case for the red wines of 2018, which are ripe, often impressively pure, structured nicely and built to develop splendidly in the cellar. The obvious comparison for the 2018 red wines in the Rhône Valley would be the 2015s, which were also the product of a blazingly hot summer. From what I have tasted of these two vintages, I have a pretty decided preference for the style of the 2018s, which seem to have been able to maintain a more pronounced veneer of freshness and vibrancy than the 2015s (in general vintage terms), so that they are ripe, powerful, but also a bit more classically-inclined in personality than the correspondingly successful examples from 2015.

The 2017 vintage in the Rhône Valley, just like 2019, was another extreme drought year, so it is correspondingly powerful and concentrated for quite different reasons than 2018. It was a year where the flowering was not conducted under ideal conditions, so the crop was limited in some vineyards due to *coulure* (or poor fruit set). There were also issues with isolated spring frosts and patches of hail as well in mid-summer, to go along with the severe drought conditions, so it was a seriously challenging growing season for *vignerons* in the region. Unlike 2018, where there had been a nice build-up of subterranean water reserves, due to a wet winter, the months of winter in 2017 were quite dry, so there was not much in the hydric reserve tanks for the summer of 2017. The dip in temperatures in April that led to *coulure* did not affect all of the grape varieties equally, as it was the earlier blossoming vines of grenache and viognier that were the most harmed by *coulure* and yields were often off by thirty or forty percent in grenache vineyards in the southern half of the Rhône and by as much as fifty percent in Condrieu. Less precocious varieties such as syrah and mourvèdre were much less affected by the dip in temperatures in April, so yields for these vineyards were far closer to normal in 2017. The frost and hail damage of 2017 was mostly seriously felt in the northern appellations of Crozes-Hermitage and Saint-Joseph in this year, with yields in Crozes off by ten percent and Saint-Joseph by as much as thirty percent in the vineyards hit the hardest by these dual depredations. The other appellations of the northern half of the valley were more fortunate and yields in places such as Côte-Rôtie, Hermitage and Cornas are quite respectable and the quality of the wines in 2017 here is exemplary. In the southern half of the Rhône in this year, the short crop of grenache has led to generally more wines that are black fruity in character in this vintage, as many cuvées of Châteauneuf du Pape rely more on syrah and mourvèdre in 2017 than is customary. In general, 2017 is an excellent and high quality vintage in the Rhône Valley for the red wines, but was once again more difficult for the white wines, where hydric stress conditions (and the very short crop in Condrieu) led to some quite atypical and tropically-fruited examples of various appellations.

Stylistically, the odd man out of recent vintages here in the Rhône Valley is 2016, which was a decidedly cooler vintage than 2015, 2017, 2018 or 2019 in the northern half of the region. Consequently, there is an old school (or pre-global warming) shape and character to the 2016s from the northern Rhône and it is one of my absolute favorite vintages here in many, many years. The best examples of Côte-Rôtie, Hermitage, Cornas, Crozes-Hermitage and Saint-Joseph from

2016 are going to be veritable cellar treasures when they reach full maturity, and as there remain some of the very best bottlings still available in the market, they are very much worth an extra effort to locate and salt away any remaining wines in the cellar. The 2016s from these appellations are not as plush or flashy as the successes from 2015, 2017 or 2018, but they are perfectly balanced, pure, precise, tightly-wound and so beautifully transparent down to their respective *terroirs* that I have absolutely no doubt that 2016 will be considered the very finest of this fine string of vintages in the northern Rhône when the dust has settled a generation down the road on this five year span. In the southern half of the Rhône Valley, temperatures were higher than they were in the north in 2016, so the wines are big, bold and powerful and are more stylistically akin to the 2015s and 2018s in the south than they are to the 2016s from the northern half of the region. There are plenty of very good southern 2016 bottlings, but my gut feeling is that the future moniker of greatness that will adorn the 2016 vintage will be based primarily on the more cool and classic 2016s from the northern half of the Rhône valley.



One thing that has been quite apparent in tasting through this much larger than customary mountain of samples from the Rhône Valley is that the use of new oak here has mirrored much of the rest of the wine world in the last decade and a half, and that the type of “toast” *vignerons* are putting on their barrels when they decide to use some new oak in the *elevage* of a given wine has moved away from the heavily-toasted barrels of the late 1980s and 1990s in the direction of more spicy and cedary tones to new oak. This trend probably began back in the 1990s when

Robert Parker and Steven Tanzer both lauded wines that had been raised in Taransaud-crafted barrels, which tend to impart a very strong spice character to the wines that were raised in these new casks. Both of these reviewers wrote that they enjoyed this type of *Pain Épice* oak seasoning in the wines that they were reviewing, and as wines raised in Taransaud started to seemingly enjoy higher scores, more and more estates started to migrate to this expression of new oak in their own wines. It is not necessary for the barrels to actually be crafted at the Taransaud *tonnelier* to show this oak spice character, as it has been replicated at other barrel makers around the world since those times. I have never really been a fan of this type of oak seasoning, preferring cask shadings that are more vanilla in personality, but it was only when doing this most recent report on the Rhône Valley that I realized how much I patently dislike the combination of new oak “spice” tones with wines made primarily from the syrah grape. This was evident this time around when tasting a range of very good new releases from *Maison Etienne* Guigal, one of the kingpin estates in the region.

Looking back on the use of new oak for wines from the Rhône Valley, Marcel Guigal was probably the godfather of this practice, as he started using plenty of new oak for his Côte-Rôtie bottlings all the way back in the 1970s. I used to have the good fortune to drink a lot of those earlier vintages of Guigal Côte-Rôtie, as I was in the wine trade in Massachusetts at the start of my career and the estate’s most important US importer in those days was Fred Ek of Classic Wines in Boston. So, quite a while before the name of Guigal was globally synonymous with high quality Rhône wines and ubiquitous in most American markets, those of us in the Massachusetts wine trade were already very much aware of just how good Marcel’s wines were. When the practice of aging the single vineyard La-La bottlings of Côte-Rôtie expanded in the mid-1980s to also reach the estate’s regular bottling, the “Côte Brune et Côte Blonde” wine, the use of new oak was very much in the fashion of those times, with the barrels quite heavily toasted. I have to say that I enjoyed the combination of toasty new oak and Côte-Rôtie back in this era- perhaps not as much as I enjoyed the more classically-styled wines from producers who used more whole clusters and little or no new oak-, but those regular bottlings of Côte-Rôtie from Monsieur Guigal in vintages like 1983, 1985, 1987 and 1988 were really very, very well-made wines and aged long and gracefully. Back in those days, I would buy a case of the Côte-Rôtie “Brune et Blonde” bottling from Guigal in every top vintage, so I drank a lot of these wines over the years.

Which brings me to the more recent releases of Côte-Rôtie from the Guigal family and the changed oak influence of new barrels on some of their wines. The Guigal family now has their own cooperage for their barrels, so they are in control of the origin and quality of their oak staves and the aging and toasting of their own casks. The most current release of their Côte-Rôtie “Brune et Blonde” bottling in the market is from the very good vintage of 2017, and the wine is every bit as strong as those that I routinely bought by the caseload back in the 1980s and early 1990s. But, the personality of the oak influence has shifted from the “toasty oak” of that era to the very spicy, cedary profile that is best described as the Taransaud style and which is so popular with winemakers throughout the world at the present time. But, what I am finding is that I really do not like this combination of “spicy new oak” and the syrah grape anywhere near as much as I enjoyed the combination of “toasty new oak” with the grape variety. Perhaps with time, the spicy oak element will be better subsumed in the fruit and soil tones in a given wine and they will synthesize more seamlessly, but at least in the youth of the 2017 “Brune et Blonde”,

the spicy oak seems almost a discordant note in the profile of what is otherwise a very, very strong young example of Côte-Rôtie. I should mention that tasting an example of the Guigal family's old vine cuvée of Saint-Joseph from the same vintage, which they call their "Lieu-Dit" bottling, gave me a chance to compare and contrast oak treatments with their syrah, as the Lieu-Dit's new oak casks seemed far more "toasty" in personality than the "spicy" oak component in the Brune et Blonde bottling of Côte-Rôtie.

It is not only the Guigal family that has adopted more spicy oak into the personality of their bottlings of Côte-Rôtie, as other producers in the appellation are also utilizing some new oak for the *elevage* of their own bottlings, and this more spicy oak element is apparent in wines from several other estates as well. For example, the two very, very good 2017 bottlings of Côte-Rôtie from Domaine Clusel-Roch that I tasted for this report also showed quite a bit of oak spice in their aromatic and flavor profiles (particularly the Les-Grandes-Places cuvée). It is not that any of these wines are "over-oaked", as all have good balance and plenty of stuffing to eventually eat up all the new oak influence and integrated it fully into the overall panoply of the respective wines. For my palate, the issue is more than I really do not like the combination of the spicy oak aromatics and flavors with syrah-based wines, and where it appears, it really stands out dramatically when the wines are relatively young. In my experience, I have found that the Taransaud style of oak spice works reasonably well with cabernet sauvignon-based wines (though I still find it fairly obtrusive), but is patently unsuited to pinot noir-based wines. And, more and more, I am finding that the combination of syrah flavors and aggressive oak spice is as discordant as this type of oak treatment can be with pinot noir. I realize that this is a matter of personal taste to some degree, but I did want to discuss the combination, as there is the possibility that some of the "spicy oak" profile in these wines is the result of a thinking along the lines of "if this type of spicy oak treatment is good enough for Screaming Eagle and Château Pavie, then my Côte-Rôtie bottlings also deserve it". So, believe it or not, here I am advocating for more "toasty new oak" in my northern Rhône wines, if new oak has to be used! Who would have ever thought it?

The notes that follow are generally organized geographically from south to north along the Rhône Valley. I have started with a section on wines from the Collines Rhodaniennes and Vin de France first, even though they can range all over the valley and many actually hail from the northern half of the Rhône. Following this section, one will find the group of Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc and Rosé, followed by the section for Côtes-du-Rhône Rouge. As I only received a fairly small number of samples of the higher classification of Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages for this report, I have not separated them out in their own section, but left them in amongst the other bottlings of straight Côtes-du-Rhône. After the sections on the Côtes-du-Rhône, the listings follow pretty closely the geographic shape of the valley, running in the southwest from Lirac to Châteauneuf du Pape, then sections for Vacqueyras, Gigondas, Cairanne and Vinsobres to close out the southern half of the valley. Moving into the northern half of the Rhône, I have given sections to the wines of both Brézème and Saint-Julien en Saint-Alban, even though they do not yet officially have their own appellations, but are still part of the Côtes-du-Rhône. However, as this seems to me to only be a matter of time until they are allotted their own AOC, I have anticipated *les officials* a bit and them their own subsections to start out the listings of northern appellations. Following them along the line of the river north are the groupings for Saint-Péray, Cornas, Saint-Joseph, Crozes-Hermitage, Hermitage, Condrieu and finishing in the north with

Côte-Rôtie. Within each regional section, wines are listed first chronologically by vintage and then alphabetically by producer. At the end of these tasting notes sections I have appended wines from Ventoux, Roussillon and a few Bandol, as I am not very good at putting Bandol samples away for a future date when they grace my doorstep! Though these are actually the furthest south of the appellations covered in this feature and should have gone first, only Ventoux is officially part of the Rhône Valley (but on the doorstep of Roussillon), so I decided to put all of these together in a single section at the end, to make a very tasty endnote to this feature.

I have made mention, where applicable, if a wine has been sealed under screwcap, though happily, I did not find anywhere near as many screwcaps among my pile of samples from the Rhône Valley as I did, for example, from Alsace when putting together this most recent issue of the newsletter. Not surprisingly, most of the screwcaps that did appear were for Vin de France or Collines Rhodaniennes bottlings, rather than more serious appellations. In particular, I was very happy to see that almost every single bottle of Côtes-du- Rhône *rouge* that I received was sealed under some form of natural cork, with many producers opting for agglomerated corks for their more basic bottlings of Côtes-du- Rhône. As I have mentioned in the past, I fully understand the economic pressures behind choosing a proper closure for the intended price point of the bottle and have long lobbied for producers to use agglomerated corks for their wines at these levels, when it is imperative to be cost-conscious about a closure, and I was very happy to see so many estates in this appellation have gone in this direction to control costs and still provide their bottles with a dependable closure.

Collines Rhodaniennes Rouge et Blanc, Vin de France

2019 Syrah “Gamine”- Pierre-Jean Villa (les Collines Rhodaniennes)

The Syrah “Gamine” from Pierre-Jean Villa is primarily from two old vine parcels of *selection massale* vines that were part of the expanded Saint-Joseph appellation up until the boundaries were tightened up in 2018. The balance of the cuvée comes from some of his younger vines in appellations such as Saint-Joseph, Crozes-Hermitage and Côte-Rôtie. The wine is raised in the oldest casks and *demi-muids* in Monsieur Villa’s cellar. The 2019 version is a lovely and quite svelte example of the variety, offering up a fine nose of cassis, black pepper, roasted meats, bonfire, a fine base of dark soil tones and a bit of black olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is impressively deep and full-bodied, with a fine core, good soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and classy finish. This is an excellent value! My only potential reservation with cellaring the wine is that it is closed with a synthetic cork, so I do not know if this will affect its potential longevity. 2020-2028. **89.**

2018 Syrah- Maison Les Alexandrins (screwcap)

Maison Les Alexandrins is a relatively new project started in 2012 by three friends in the northern Rhône: Nicolas Jaboulet, Guillaume Sorrel and Alexandre Caso. The Jaboulet and Sorrell families are very well-known for their family estates in Hermitage and Monsieur Caso is a viticulturist. The three collaborate to make a range of Rhône bottlings, with their straight Syrah hailing from younger vines throughout the Rhône and the Ardeche regions, with the wine raised in stainless steel tanks. The 2018 version comes in at thirteen percent octane and delivers a classic nose of cassis, pepper, roasted meats, a hint of hazelnut and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite solid at the core, with a good vein of soil, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is complex in a nicely blended manner,

but it starts out just a bit reductive when first opened, so it is best to decant it prior to serving just to let it stretch its wings a bit. It is designed to drink right out of the blocks, but the 2018 version has a nice undercarriage of structure and will keep quite nicely in the cellar. 2020-2027. **88.**

2018 Vin de Pays “À Côte”- Domaine Charvin

The Vin de Pays “À Côte” bottling from Domaine Charvin is composed from a rather unique, fifty-fifty blend of grenache and merlot. Both parcels are certified organic, with the latter vines planted in 1999, while the grenache vines are much older, having been planted in 1973 and 1955. The two vineyards sit near each other on similar limestone, silty soils. Laurent Charvin vinifies them separately and does his *assemblage* after six months of each varietal in tank. The 2018 À Côte offers up a refined nose of dark berries, smoked venison, a touch of pepper, a fine base of soil tones and a topnote of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and refined in profile, with an excellent core of fruit, fine-grained tannin and a long, gently peppery finish. Right now, the merlot component seems to have the upper hand a bit in defining the personality of the wine, but I have the feeling that the grenache will get more assertive as the wine ages. This is an idiosyncratic blend that works beautifully and is an excellent wine, not to mention a superb value! 2020-2030. **91.**

2018 Collines Rhodaniennes Syrah- Domaine Martin Clerc

Louis Clerc started his family domaine only in 1991, after decades working as an agronomist for local fruit farmers in the region. He purchased vineyards primarily in Côte-Rôtie and Condrieu and the estate now totals 8.5 hectares. Louis Clerc passed away in 2007, but his son Martin has been manning the helm here since those days. Martin’s 2018 Collines Rhodaniennes hails from a 1.5 hectare parcel planted in Tupin-Semons, just outside the Côte-Rôtie AOC limits. The vines are now eighteen years of age and Monsieur Clerc ferments this with indigenous yeasts. The 2018 comes in at a suave 12.5 percent octane and offers up a lovely nose of raspberries, pepper, bonfire, dark soil tones and a touch of black olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tasty, with solid depth, tangy acids and just a whisper of backend tannin. This is a good, everyday bottle of syrah. 2020-2025. **87.**

2018 Syrah “le Moulin”- Domaine Dumien-Serrette (Vin de France)

This is a new bottling from Nicolas Serrette, as he bought this parcel of vines, just south of the Cornas appellation a couple of years ago and 2018 was the first vintage where he had enough production to bottle a wine. It is aged in used Burgundy barrels previously used for his Cornas bottlings. The 2018 le Moulin offers up a fine, youthful nose of black raspberries, hung game, pepper, stony soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and a bit more open than the nose might suggest, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a baby Cornas and really could do with a bit of bottle age! A fine value. 2022-2040. **90.**

2018 Viognier- Maison Les Alexandrins (screwcap)

The Viognier bottling from Maison Les Alexandrins hails primarily from vineyards planted on the Coteaux d’Ardèche. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel. The 2018 version offers up a ripe and pretty nose of pear, pineapple, honeysuckle and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with good acids for the vintage, a touch of CO2 adding bounce and a fairly long, vibrant finish. This is a good, solid bottle of entry level Viognier, but it is already a touch pinched from its closure, so decant it before serving. 2020-2023. **86.**

2018 Viognier “Mon Grand-Père Était Limonadier”- Julien Pilon (Collines Rhodaniennes)

The 2018 Viognier “Mon Grand-Père Était Limonadier” from Julien Pilon comes in at 14.2 percent octane and is a fine example of the varietal and an excellent value. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a vibrant blend of pear, nectarine, acacia blossoms, a bit of coriander seed and a nice foundation of minerality. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and tasty finish. This is lovely juice and a great bargain. 2020-2025. **90.**

2018 Viognier “Contours de Deponcins”- François Villard (Collines Rhodaniennes)

François Villard’s Contours de Deponcins bottling of Viognier is produced from his young vines in Condrieu. The 2018 version comes in at fourteen percent octane and is fermented and aged in older casks. It offers up a very pretty bouquet of pear, nectarine, a hint of papaya, musky floral tones and a nice base of salty soil elements. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has quite good acidity for the vintage, with a very respectable core of fruit, good soil undertow and a long, quite complex finish. This is very good and clearly shows its Condrieu pedigree. 2020-2028. **89.**



2017 Syrah “l’Appel des Sereines”- François Villard (Vin de France)

The “l’Appel des Sereines” bottling of syrah from François Villard is made from his younger vines scattered around the northern Rhône. He raises the wine in a combination of tank and older casks prior to bottling. His 2017 version is really starting to drink well, offering up an

impressively complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, pepper, roasted meats, black olive, saddle leather and a nice foundation of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and complex, with a good core, fine balance and grip, melted tannin and a long, energetic finish. This is a fine value! 2020-2024. **88.**

Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc et Rosé

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Gerbaude” Blanc- Domaine Alary

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Gerbaude” Blanc from Domaine Alary is comprised of a blend of forty percent roussanne, thirty percent clairette, twenty percent viognier and ten percent bourblenc. It offers up a bright and complex nose of lime peel, pear, salty soil tones, dried flowers and just a hint of green olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and nicely ripe, with a good core, bright acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This comes in listed at 14.1 percent octane and is nicely mineral on the backend. Good juice. 2020-2026. **88.**

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Grange Daniel” Blanc- Domaine Alary

The la Grange Daniel Blanc bottling from the Alary family is made from pure roussanne. The vines are now only around fifteen years of age, so by the domaine’s standards, these are still pretty young vines. The 2019 version delivers a fine nose of pear, green apple, a good base of stony minerality, lemongrass and a touch of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely detailed, with a fine core, good mineral undertow, bright acids and fine balance and grip on the long and quite complex finish. This is a step up in refinement from the la Gerbaude Blanc. Fine wine. 2020-2030. **89+.**

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Clementia” Blanc- Domaine les Aphillanthes

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Clementia” Blanc from Domaine les Aphillanthes is composed of an exotic blend of forty-five percent each of viognier and roussanne, with the balance made up of clairette. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks and offers up a bright and complex nose of pear, a touch of gooseberry, white flowers, salty soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with a good core, lovely acidity and grip and a long, complex and nicely mineral finish. This is lovely. 2020-2025. **89.**

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Nymphaea” Rosé- Domaine les Aphillanthes

The 2019 “Nymphaea” Rosé from Domaine les Aphillanthes is made from a blend of fifty percent grenache, forty percent cinsault, seven percent mourvèdre and three percent counoise, so this is not your simple Côtes-du-Rhône Rosé. Thirty percent of the blend is also done by *saignée*. The wine offers up a bright bouquet of melon, orange peel, a touch of strawberry and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and quite complex, with a nice core, good mineral foundation and a long, zesty finish. This is very good Rosé. 2020-2023. **89.**

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc- Domaine Grande Bellane

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc from Domaine Grande Bellane is composed entirely of viognier. The wine delivers an expressive bouquet of pear, lemon, a hint of beeswax, white lilies and a good base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has a fine girdle of acidity (as the vines lie at over four hundred meters of altitude), with a lovely core, very good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is very good. 2020-2027. **89.**

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Viognier” Blanc- Domaine les Grands Bois

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Viognier” Blanc from Marc Besnardeau is made from fairly young vines, as these are now around fifteen years of age. However, the wine has plenty of personality on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, nectarine, acacia blossoms, honeysuckle and a nice touch of white soil tones. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and crisp, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and quite classy finish. This is a fine example of viognier and a very good value. 2020-2025. **89.**

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Nature” Blanc- Famille Perrin

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Nature” Blanc from the Perrin family is composed of a blend of grenache blanc, marsanne, roussanne and viognier, with all of the grapes grown in certified organic vineyards. The wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks and offers up a ripe and pretty bouquet of pineapple, melon, lemon peel, gently musky floral tones and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite deep at the core, with good, sound acids for the vintage, fine focus and grip and a long, ripe and generous finish. This comes in listed at 14.1 percent octane, but shows just a whisper of backend heat. A good, solid example. 2020-2024. **87.**

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Nature” Rosé- Famille Perrin (screwcap)

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Nature” Rosé from Famille Perrin is made from a *cépages* of grenache, mourvèdre, cinsault and syrah. The wine is given a short skin contact and then raised in stainless steel tank until bottling. The 2019 version is a lovely, pale salmon color and offers up a pretty nose of tangerine, melon, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has reasonably good acidity, with a nice core and good length on the juicy finish. This is not overly complex, but quite tasty. 2020-2023. **87.**

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Claux” Blanc- Domaine Raymond Usseglio et Fils

The 2019 les Claux Blanc from Stéphane Usseglio is a blend of one-third each roussanne, clairette and grenache blanc, with these vineyards over fifty years of age. This vineyard lies on the Lirac border and the wine really has a white Châteauneuf du Pape personality to it, offering up scents of white peach, lemon peel, stony soil tones, a touch of coriander seed and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with superb focus and grip, sound framing acids and a long, complex and quite classy finish. This is quite lovely. 2020-2028. **90.**

Côtes-du-Rhône Rouge

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône- Domaine les Aphillanthes

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône from Domaine les Aphillanthes is produced with a *cépages* of seventy percent grenache, twenty percent mourvèdre and ten percent carignan, with the vines forty years of age. The wine delivers a lovely bouquet of sweet dark berries, hung game, stony soil elements, bonfire, pepper and a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely chewy, with an excellent core of black fruit, good soil undertow, ripe tannins and a long, complex finish. The mourvèdre in the blend really plays a nice, central role in the wine’s personality. 2020-2030+. **90.**

2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Rouge Carmin”- Domaine les Aphillanthes

Every vine on Daniel Boulle’s Domaine les Aphillanthes has been farmed biodynamically since 2003, and he has been certified since 2007. His 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Rouge Carmin” bottling is composed of a blend of fifty percent syrah, thirty-five percent

cinsault, ten percent grenache and five percent carignan. The wine is fermented in cement tanks and bottled without filtration. It offers up a bright and complex nose of raspberries, *garrigue*, roasted meats, pepper, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, moderate, buried tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is a very fine bottle of Côtes-du-Rhône. 2020-2030+. **90+**.

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Gerbaude”- Domaine Alary

The 2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Gerbaude” from Domaine Alary is a blend of grenache, syrah and carignan, from vines that are twenty or so years of age today. The wine is nicely black fruity on the nose, as the syrah and carignan currently have aromatic ascendancy in the blend of dark berries, cassis, hung game, pepper, stony soil tones, *garrigue* and just a touch of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite refined on the attack, with a good core of black fruit, stony undertow, modest tannins and a long, complex finish. This is very good Côtes-du-Rhône. 2020-2028. **89**.

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “le Poutet”- Domaine Charvin

The Côtes-du-Rhône “le Poutet” from Domaine Charvin is composed roughly of a blend of eighty percent grenache, seven percent each of syrah and mourvèdre and six percent of carignan. The oldest vines in the blend are fully ninety years of age, with the average here at least forty. The soils are sandy, with a vein of clay and plenty of *galets roulés*, and the vineyard is farmed organically. The 2018 le Poutet offers up a bright and complex bouquet of red and black raspberries, pepper, smoked meats, a fine base of soil tones, bonfire, a touch of celery seed and a fine array of other savory elements often found in old vine grenache. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and peppery, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex, well-balanced and discreetly warm finish. This is a big boy for Côtes-du-Rhône, but nicely soil-driven at the same time. Good juice. 2021-2035. **89**.

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “Classique Mistral”- Domaine de Ferrand

The Mistral bottling of Côtes-du-Rhône from Philippe Bravay at Domaine de Ferrand is his younger vine cuvée, made from vines that range from five to thirty years of age. The *cépages* of the 2018 version is fifty percent grenache, forty percent syrah and five percent each of carignan and vaccarèse. Each varietal is fermented and aged separately, with *assemblage* only done prior to bottling, which is done without filtration. The 2018 Mistral is a very pretty example of Côtes-du-Rhône, wafting from the glass in a mix of raspberries, fruitcake, *garrigue*, a lovely foundation of soil, a touch of pepper and a whiff of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and complex, with fine transparency and bounce, a bit of backend tannin and a long, peppery and complex finish. This is made for early consumption and the 2018 is loaded with charm right out of the blocks. 2020-2025. **88+**.

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “Cuvée Antique” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine de Ferrand

The old vine bottling of Côtes-du-Rhône from Domaine de Ferrand is produced from an organically-farmed 3.5 hectare parcel of vines, with the age of the plantations ranging from fifty to ninety years of age! The vineyard is planted to roughly ninety percent grenache, with the balance a field blend of syrah, mourvèdre and cinsault. Everything is fermented together in cement with indigenous yeasts, with a varying percentage of whole clusters and aged in cement vats for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2018 Vieilles Vignes offers up a deep and complex nose of black raspberries, spit-roasted game, stony soil tones, a bit of French roast, *garrigue* and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and complex, with a

fine core of creamy old vine fruit, firm, ripe tannin and a long, beautifully balanced finish that closes with plenty of pepperiness and a lovely savory element from the whole clusters. This is a dynamite, black fruity bottle of Côtes-du-Rhône that is built to age for a long time and really deserves some bottle age before drinking it with abandon. Great juice. 2023-2045. **92.**



2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Ferrande” Syrah- Domaine de Ferrand

The la Ferrande bottling from Philippe Bravay he likes to call his “yearly challenge” wine, as syrah easily gets overripe in the Châteauneuf du Pape region, so, to Philippe’s mind, picking dates have to be perfect to get this wine into bottle with some finesse. His 2018 la Ferrande comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and is on the money in terms of ripeness, offering up excellent purity in its bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, hung game, smoke, a hint of dark chocolate and a lovely base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, suave tannins and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is as lovely wine that is wide open in personality right out of the blocks, but has good backend grip and structure and should have no difficulties aging gracefully, despite fairly low acidity. Good juice and emphatically not crossing the border into *sur maturité*! I really like this. 2020-2030+. **91.**

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Promesses”- Domaine Font du Vent

Bertrand and Guillaume Gonnet have been running this family estate in Châteauneuf du Pape since 2006. They are the fourth generation of their family to manage the property and

everything here is farmed and certified organic. The 2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Promesses” from Font du Vent is composed of a blend of seventy percent grenache and thirty percent syrah, from a ten hectare vineyard not far from Costières de Nîmes. The vines are thirty years of age and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in cement tanks for about a year prior to bottling. It offers up a ripe and complex nose of raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, pepper, a nice range of spice tones, a good base of soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely robust in personality, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip, ripe tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. This is 14.5 percent octane, but it carries it pretty well and has a lot of Châteauneuf personality to it in 2018. Good juice. 2020-2030. **89.**

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône- Domaine Grande Bellane

The Domaine Grande Bellane is located at the relatively high altitude commune of Valréas, which lies alongside of the appellation of Vinsobres. This is a cooler microclimate, so the syrah planted in the vineyards here does particularly well compared to the hotter microclimates at lower altitude. The estate’s 2018 Côtes-du-Rhône is composed from a *cépages* of grenache, syrah and carignan. Fermentation is done solely with indigenous yeasts and the wine offers up a complex nose of dark berries, cassis, pepper, roasted venison, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and black fruity in personality, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, complex and peppery finish. Good juice. 2020-2030. **89.**

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “Valréas”- Domaine Grande Bellane

The 2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “Valréas” from Domaine Grande Bellane is made from a fifty-fifty blend of grenache and syrah, with these vineyards sitting at fully four hundred meters above sea level, making them amongst the highest elevation vines in the southern half of the Rhône Valley. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and the 2018 version offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, pepper, espresso, black olive, woodsmoke, a fine base of stony soil tones and just a hint of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a sappy core, suave tannins and a long, complex and peppery finish. This has plenty of syrah personality and is a fine bottle. 2020-2035. **91.**

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Philippine”- Domaine les Grands Bois

The Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages cuvée “Philippine” from Domaine les Grands Bois has a *cépages* of sixty percent grenache and forty percent syrah. The 2018 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a bright and sappy nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, pepper, hung game, dark soil tones, bonfire and a gentle topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and focused, with a plush core of fruit, good soil signature, buried tannins and a long, complex finish that just hints at *sur maturité* on the backend. This is very much a creature of its vintage, but it is very well done within the parameters of the torrid summer of 2018 and is quite tasty. 2020-2030. **88.**

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Trois Soeurs”- Domaine les Grands Bois

The les Trois Soeurs bottling of Côtes-du-Rhône from Marc Besnardeau’s Domaine les Grands Bois is composed of a blend of sixty-five percent grenache, thirty percent syrah and five percent of carignan, with the vineyards ranging from thirty to sixty years of age. The 2018 version delivers a ripe and classy bouquet of black raspberries, hung game, bonfire, a bit of coffee grounds, a fine base of soil and a topnote of spice. On the palate the wine is deep, plush and wide open in personality, with a sappy core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, complex finish that closes with just a bit of apricot-like *sur maturité*. The wine is well-made and the

octane here is 14.5 percent (with the alcohol is very well-integrated), but the slightly overripe flavors will not be for everyone. 2020-2030. **86.**

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “Nature”- Famille Perrin

The 2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “Nature” from Famille Perrin is a blend of grenache and syrah from vineyards north of Orange that are certified organic by Ecocert. The wine is raised in a combination of older oak casks and stainless steel tanks and the 2018 version comes in listed at 14.1 percent octane. It offers up a ripe and vibrant nose of red and black raspberries, a touch of *garrigue*, pepper, hung game, a good base of soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, gently warm and nicely balanced finish. This is a very good example of Côtes-du-Rhône. 2020-2030. **89.**

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Bouveau”- Domaine Saint-Damien

Domaine Saint-Damien is owned by the Joel Saurel, who is getting more and more assistance from his son Romain in recent vintages. The estate is best known for their excellent examples of Gigondas, but their Côtes-du-Rhône cuvées are also very strong. Their 2018 “la Bouveau” bottling is composed of a quite unique *cépages* of eighty percent syrah, fifteen percent cinsault and five percent viognier. This three hectare vineyard faces north and the syrah and viognier were planted here in 2002, but the cinsault dates all the way back to 1954. The 2018 version of la Bouveau offers up a superb, black fruity nose of cassis, roasted meats, pepper, saddle leather, tapenade, a fine base of soil and a lovely topnote of gentle spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. The northerly exposition here gives the syrah a refinement one does not often find from the southern half of the Rhône. Fine juice and an excellent value! 2020-2030+. **91.**

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Plan de Dieu” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Saint-Damien

The old vine bottling of Plan de Dieu from Joel and Romain Saurel is composed of a blend of eighty percent grenache (vines planted in 1949) and twenty percent mourvèdre (vines planted in 1978). The grapes are co-fermented in cement vats and aged in the same for eight months prior to bottling. The 2018 Plan de Dieu offers up a superb bouquet of black raspberries, cassis, bonfire, spit-roasted game, *garrigue* and a lovely base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core of old vine fruit, superb mineral drive, moderate, ripe tannins and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. To my palate, this is a baby Gigondas and is a superb value! 2023-2040+. **91+.**

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône- Domaine Terre Davau

The Côtes-du-Rhône from Domaine Terre Davau is made by Florian André of Château de Mannisy, as this is his mother's small family domaine, which is farmed biodynamically. The *cépages* of the 2018 is forty-five percent each of grenache and syrah and ten percent cinsault, with the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts. It offers up a fine, black fruity nose of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, roasted meats, rosemary, thyme, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a sappy core of black fruit, good soil undertow, ripe tannins and a long, complex finish. Though this is forty-five percent grenache, at least out of the blocks, its personality is quite defined this year by its syrah and carignan components. A fine example. 2020-2030+. **90.**

2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Claux”- Domaine Raymond Usseglio et Fils

Stéphane Usseglio now runs this family domaine in Châteauneuf du Pape. His les Claux bottling of Côtes-du-Rhône is from the *lieu à dit* of the same name, which lies right on the border of Lirac. The wine is one-third each of grenache, syrah and mourvèdre, with the vines fully fifty years of age. The 2018 les Claux offers up a deep and complex bouquet of dark berries, bonfire, spit-roasted venison, coffee bean, a fine base of dark soil tones and just a hint of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, broad-shouldered and rock solid at the core, with superb mineral drive, ripe tannins, fine focus and balance and a long, peppery and complex finish. This drinks like a veritable cross of Lirac and Châteauneuf du Pape and emphatically deserves some cellaring time to properly blossom. It is an excellent wine and will be very long-lived for Côtes-du-Rhône. 2025-2050. **92.**



2017 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Galets Plan de Dieu”- Domaine les Aphillanthes

The 2017 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Galets Plan de Dieu” from Domaine les Aphillanthes is produced from forty-five year-old vines, with the *cépages* sixty percent grenache and twenty percent each of syrah and mourvèdre, with all the vineyards certified biodynamic. The wine is fermented and aged in cement and the 2017 offers up a lovely, vibrant and surprisingly black fruity nose of black raspberries, tapenade, pepper, roasted meats, stony soil tones and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a plush core of black fruit, good mineral drive and grip, well-measured tannins and a long,

complex and well-balanced finish. This is very good and carries its 14.5 percent octane quite seamlessly. 2020-2030. **90.**

2017 Côtes-du-Rhône- Domaine des Haute Cances

The 2017 Côtes-du-Rhône from Domaine des Haute Cances is composed from a *cépages* of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, Cinsault and Carignan. The wine is aged in cask for one year prior to bottling, and the 2017 vintage comes in at a rather robust fifteen percent octane. The wine offers up a ripe and impressively fresh bouquet of red and black raspberries, fruitcake, roasted meats and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and complex, with a plush core of fruit, modest tannins and a fair bit of backend heat on the complex finish. This wine actually carries its alcohol pretty well, but fifteen percent is an awfully big number for a table wine. 2020-2025. **87.**

1971 Côtes-du-Rhône- Le Vieux Vivarois (Tournon)

I bought this lone bottle at auction because I could not turn down a 1971 bottle of Côtes-du-Rhône from an unknown producer (at least to me) situated in the town of Tournon, which is the heart of Saint-Joseph country. This is very much old school, as it comes in listed at twelve percent octane and has aged surprisingly well, offering up a bright and nicely red fruity nose of raspberries, smoked meats, brown spices, a lovely base of gently autumnal soil, cloves and a topnote of hickory smoke. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, resolved and less complex than the nose promises, but still with a good core of fruit, melted tannins, tangy acids and impressive focus and grip on the nicely balanced finish. The wine is not as complex as a 1971 would be from a more exalted appellation like Saint-Joseph or Gigondas, but it remains a tasty glass of wine. It seems to have a fair bit of grenache in the blend, based on its red fruity character, so it is not as Saint-Joseph-like as I hoped when I bid on it, but it is a fairly tasty old wine whose primary weakness is quite modest complexity. I should note that it faded after an hour in decanter, so it is time to drink it up (though I have probably just opened the last extant bottle on the planet!) 2020-2025. **85.**

Lirac

2018 Lirac “Trinité”- Château de Mannisy

Château de Mannisy is located in the village of Tavel, right next door to Château d’Aquéria. The current winemaker here is Florian André, who started making the wines here in 2004. Monsieur André converted the vineyards over to organic viticulture soon after his arrival and everything here is now certified by Ecocert. His 2018 Lirac “Trinité” is composed of a blend of grenache and syrah and offers up a ripe and black fruity nose of dark berries, hung game, woodsmoke, coffee grounds, a very good base of soil tones and a bit of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a plush core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, ripe tannins and a long, complex finish. It is already approachable, but a few years in the cellar will allow the tannins to fall away a bit more. Good juice in the riper style of 2018. 2020-2035. **90.**

2017 Lirac “Charles I”- Domaine Stéphane Usseglio

The Lirac “Charles I” bottling from Stéphane Usseglio is composed of a blend of seventy percent grenache (eighty year-old vines), twenty percent syrah (forty-five year-old vines) and ten percent mourvèdre (twenty-five year-old vines). The grapes are completely destemmed before fermentation and *elevage* is done half in Stockinger *foudres* and half in cement vats. The 2017

version is excellent, offering up a deep and nascently complex nose of dark berries, cassis, bonfire, roasted venison, a bit of coffee grounds and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and very well-balanced finish. This is first class Lirac! 2020-2040. **92.**

Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc

2018 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc “Roussanne Pur”- Domaine Raymond Usseglio et Fils

The 2018 Roussanne Pur from Stéphane Usseglio is barrel-fermented in new to three year-old Burgundy casks. The nose of the 2018 offers up a bright and new oaky blend of pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, stony soil tones, white flowers and a generous serving of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and less new oaky in profile than the nose suggests, with a good core of fruit, nice touch of soil and a long, gently new oaky and vibrant finish. The acids here are really quite good for 2018 and this wine should drink well for a decade. This is the first vintage that I have tasted of this bottling from Monsieur Usseglio, and 2018 is hardly a vintage that favors white wines, but I still have the sense that this wine would be even better if no new oak casks were used. Roussanne is a very transparent variety in my experience, so one, two and three wine casks are still going to give it a nice touch of vanillin oak, without straying towards overpowering the other elements in the wine and making the wine slightly one dimensional. This is quite tasty in 2018, but there is more potential here that can be unlocked by less new oak. 2020-2030. **89.**

2017 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Domaine Éric Texier

Éric Texier’s 2017 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc is a fifty-fifty blend of clairette and bourblenc, as it has been for many years. These grapes are harvested on the early side to maintain freshness, are barrel-fermented and aged in old Burgundy casks for one year prior to bottling, without fining or filtration. The 2017 version is outstanding and now wide open in personality and drinking very well, offering up a complex nose of lemon peel, pear, a touch of hazelnut, gentle leesy tones, dried flowers, just a whisper of vanillin oak and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully deep at the core, with a fine foundation of soil, sound framing acids and impeccable balance on the long, zesty and refined finish. This is so nicely balanced that it may age longer than I anticipate, but it is drinking so well right now that I cannot see any compelling reason not to enjoy it right now! 2020-2027+? **93.**

Châteauneuf du Pape Rouge

2018 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Charvin

The Châteauneuf du Pape from Laurent Charvin is made entirely with whole clusters, fermented and raised in cement and the wine bottled unfiltered after twenty-one months *elevage*. The *cépages* here is eighty-five percent grenache and five percent each of syrah, mourvèdre and vaccarèse. Only the syrah is relatively young, with the vines now closing in on a quarter century, with everything else at least sixty years of age. The 2018 version comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully complex and spicy bouquet of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, stony soil tones, bonfire, pepper and a veritable smorgasbord of spice tones from the combination of *garrigue* and all those whole clusters. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a great core of fruit, superb soil signature and grip,

ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is a great young bottle of Châteauneuf du Pape! 2030-2075+. **95.**

2018 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine de Ferrand

The 2018 Châteauneuf du Pape from Philippe Bravay at Domaine de Ferrand hails from his four vineyard parcels in the northern end of the appellation. Half of the vines are now forty-five years of age, and these are the young vines in the cuvée! The other half are now between ninety-five and one hundred and ten years old! The *cépages* is principally grenache, with ninety percent of the cuvée comprised of this grape and the other ten percent a field blend from the very, very old vine half of the cuvée. The wine is raised in a combination of cement vats and stainless steel tanks and sees no oak, with de-stemming decisions based on the style of the vintage. The 2018 Domaine de Ferrand comes in listed at fifteen percent octane and offers up a deep and classic nose of raspberries, fruitcake, pepper, roasted meats, *garrigue* and a superb base of stony minerality from all those ancient vines. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and spicy, with a great core of fruit, superb soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex finish that closes with just a wisp of backend heat. This carries its alcohol very well and should age quite gracefully, but it is a slightly headier version of the appellation. 2028-2060. **92.**

2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Tradition”- Domaine Font du Vent

The 2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Tradition” from Domaine Font du Vent is composed of a blend of seventy percent grenache, twenty percent syrah and ten percent mourvèdre. The vines for this bottling all range from fifty to fully ninety years of age! The wine is fermented in a combination of cement tanks, old oak vats and stainless steel, with anywhere from sixty to one hundred percent of the bunches de-stemmed, depending on the vintage and the variety. The 2018 is excellent on the nose, jumping from the glass in a blend of cherries, raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, roasted game, bonfire, *garrigue* and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of ripe fruit, firm, buried tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, well-balanced and chewy finish. This is a fine example, with its reported 14.5 percent octane carried quite well. 2025-2055+. **92.**

2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Girard”- Domaine Raymond Usseglio et Fils

The 2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Girard” from Stéphane Usseglio is produced from a *cépages* is ninety percent grenache the other ten percent comprised of syrah, mourvèdre, counoise and cinsault. Sixty percent of the grenache is from fifty year-old vines, with the other thirty percent taken from Monsieur Usseglio’s one hundred and ten year-old vines, most of which are reserved for his Cuvée Imperiale bottling. The 2018 Cuvée Girard comes in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol and offers up a deep and vibrant nose of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, a great base of stony soil tones, a touch of fruitcake, pepper, *garrigue*, bonfire and a topnote of sandalwood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a superb core of fruit, fine mineral drive, ripe tannins and a long, complex and classic finish. This does not show a hint of backend heat and is a superb bottle of Châteauneuf in the making. 2026-2060. **93+.**

2017 Châteauneuf du Pape “les Sinards”- Famille Perrin

The Famille Perrin bottling of Châteauneuf du Pape is composed of thirty percent younger vines from their famed Château de Beaucastel vineyards, with the other seventy percent of the cuvée hailing from other vineyards that they own in the appellation. Its *cépages* is made up of grenache, syrah and mourvèdre, so it does not include the full thirteen permitted grapes, as is the case with the *grand vin* at Beaucastel. The 2017 les Sinards comes in at 14.5 percent octane

and delivers a refined and quite complex bouquet of dark berries, grilled meats, pepper, autumnal soil tones, bonfire, *garrigue* and a fine foundation of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, focused and impeccably balanced finish. This is outstanding Châteauneuf du Pape! 2025-2065. **93.**

2017 Châteauneuf du Pape “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Éric Texier

Éric Texier’s 2017 Châteauneuf du Pape “Vieilles Vignes” has just been released and shipped in quite recently here to New York. The wine is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent grenache and five percent mourvèdre, with the grenache seventy years of age and all hailing from the famed La Crau section of the appellation (where Vieux Telegraphe is located). The wine is one hundred percent whole clusters and raised in old Burgundy casks prior to bottling, without fining or filtration. The 2017 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a superb bouquet of red and black raspberries, spit-roasted venison, pepper, *garrigue*, a great base of stony soil tones, bonfire and a nice touch of fruitcake in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and very classic finish. There is just a whisper of warmth on the backend here, but this is a very traditional expression of La Crau and a great bottle of Châteauneuf du Pape in the making. 2027-2065. **94.**



2016 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Etienne Gonnet”- Domaine Font du Vent

The Cuvée Etienne Gonnet bottling from Domaine Font du Vent is their oldest vine cuvée, with the foundation of this wine being the family’s one hundred to one hundred and twenty year-old grenache vines located in the superb *lieu à dit* of la Crau, where Vieux Telegraphe is situated. This has long been considered one of the very finest *terroirs* in the appellation. The *cépages* is sixty-five percent very old vine grenache, twenty percent syrah and fifteen percent mourvèdre (with the vines of the latter two varieties ninety years of age). The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in traditional old oak vats, with de-stemming ranging from fifty to one hundred percent (depending on vintage character), and then the mourvèdre and syrah are aged in older *demi-muids* prior to blending. The very old vine grenache is raised in cement tank. The 2016 version offers up a superb and very complex bouquet of black raspberries, black cherries, hung game, bonfire, a bit of cigar ash, pepper, *garrigue*, stony soil tones and just a touch of fruitcake in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with fine mineral drive, a superb core of old vine fruit, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, focused and classic finish. This is very, very good. 2026-2065. **93+**.

Vacqueyras

2018 Vacqueyras- Domaine les Ondines

The 2018 Vacqueyras from Domaine les Ondines is comprised this year of fifty percent grenache, thirty-seven percent syrah and thirteen percent mourvèdre, which is a higher percentage of syrah than what had previously been customary with this bottling. All of the domaine’s vineyards have now been certified organic since 2009. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in cement vats for one year prior to bottling. The 2018 version offers up a very complex and black fruity nose of cassis, dark berries, pepper, roasted meats, tapenade, bonfire and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and peppery in personality, with a fine core of fruit, excellent acidity for the vintage, ripe tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is excellent juice! 2024-2050. **92**.

2018 Vacqueyras- Domaine du Terme

Anne-Marie Gaudin’s Vacqueyras hails from a three hectare parcel of vines she purchased for the family estate after she took over for her father in the late 1980s (the family has larger holdings in Sablet and Gigondas). The wine is composed of a blend of eighty percent grenache and twenty percent syrah, with the vines forty-five years of age. The wine is aged in older *foudres* for eight to ten months prior to bottling. The 2018 version offers up excellent complexity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of black raspberries, fruitcake, woodsmoke, hung game, chicory and a fine blend of chalky and gently autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, focused and gently heady finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but might be just a touch higher, as it hails from the torrid summer of 2018. This is really first class Vacqueyras, but the headier personality of the vintage keeps its score down just a touch. I would love to taste it in a cooler vintage, if we ever see one again. 2020-2030. **88**.

Gigondas

2018 Gigondas “la Gille”- Famille Perrin

The 2018 Gigondas “la Gille” from the Famille Perrin is primarily based on vines grown in chalky marl, but there is a parcel of very old vine grenache that is planted in pure sand and these vines are pre-phylloxera and on their *franc de pied* roots. The grapes are destemmed and raised in old *demi-muids* and *foudres*. The 2018 la Gille comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and delivers a fine and surprisingly black fruity aromatic constellation of black raspberry, cassis, bonfire, roasted venison, a lovely base of soil, pepper and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and peppery, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This carries its octane very nicely and should age quite gracefully. 2024-2055. **92.**

2018 Gigondas “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Saint-Damien

The Vieilles Vignes bottling of Gigondas from Joel Saurel’s Domaine Saint-Damien is composed of a blend of eighty percent grenache (planted in 1964) and twenty percent mourvèdre (planted in 1977). The varieties are co-fermented in cement tanks and then aged in old *foudres* for twelve months prior to bottling. The 2018 version comes in at fifteen percent octane and offers up a beautifully red fruity bouquet of raspberries, cherries, a bit of fruitcake, green peppercorns, roasted meats, *garrigue* and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and peppery, with good soil inflection, a fine core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins and a fair bit of backend heat perking up the long and complex finish. I love everything about this wine except its octane, but this is the age of climate change. I really do not know how to score this wine, as it is very, very well-made, but just a bit too hot for my tastes. Add four points to my score if your personal palate is not daunted by fifteen percent! 2028-2055+. **88.**

2018 Gigondas “la Louisiane”- Domaine Saint-Damien

The *lieu à dit* of la Louisiane has some of Monsieur Saurel’s oldest vines, as the grenache here was planted in 1942, the cinsault in 1951 and the mourvèdre in 1977. The *cépages* here each year is eighty percent grenache, fifteen percent mourvèdre and five percent of that old vine cinsault. The wine is fermented in cement and aged in old *foudres*, just the same as the Vieilles Vignes bottling. The 2018 la Louisiane comes in again at fifteen percent alcohol and delivers a more black fruity bouquet of black raspberries, smoked venison, pepper, bonfire, a fine base of stony soil tones, *garrigue* and a bit of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, ripe tannins and a long, warm and surprisingly well-balanced finish. There is still some backend alcohol here, but I get the impression that the octane is a touch better managed by these old vines than in the above wine. It is still a bit too high in alcohol for my tastes, but I do fancy that I could settle in with this wine around the fireplace, while the *mistral* was blowing outside and quite enjoy it (provided I did not have to be productive the following morning). 2028-2055+. **90** (with the same caveat to inflate its grade appropriately if you are a bit more intrepid than I when it comes to higher octane wines).

2016 Gigondas- Guigal

As I mentioned in the introductory discussion of recent vintages in the Rhône Valley, the southern half of the region was nowhere near as cool during the growing season in the north. This is quite evident in the fifteen percent octane of the 2016 Guigal Gigondas, which is composed of a blend of seventy percent grenache, twenty percent syrah and ten percent carignan. The wine is raised in traditionally large oak *foudres*, though fifty percent are new oak. The nose

of the 2016 Gigondas delivers a deep, ripe and fairly black fruity nose of black raspberries, hung game, coffee grounds, lavender, dark soil tones and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral undertow and a long, ripely tannic and impressively well-balanced finish. There is no sign of backend heat here on the finish, but there is a certain graininess to the texture of the tannins that belies the wine's higher octane level. All things considered, this is quite good for its vintage, but at fifteen percent, I do not know how long it will age. 2026-2045. **90.**

2016 Gigondas- Domaine du Terme

Anne-Marie Gaudin's Gigondas is made from a similar blend of eighty percent grenache and twenty percent syrah, and the vineyards are approximately the same age as those the family owns in Vacqueyras. However, this bottling includes ten percent whole clusters (the Vacqueyras is ninety-five percent de-stemmed), is fermented with indigenous yeasts and given a very long, slow fermentation and *elevage* prior to bottling without filtration. The 2016 Gigondas comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up an excellent nose of raspberries, cherries, roasted meats, pepper, stony soil tones, woodsmoke and a lovely spread of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a very good, young bottle of Gigondas, but it will want four to six years in the cellar to soften up a bit on the backend. It comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but carries its alcohol very well. 2025-2055. **91.**



Cairanne and Vinsobres

2019 Cairanne “la Font d’Estevenas” Blanc- Domaine Alary

The 2019 la Font d’Estevenas Blanc from Domaine Alary is the first example of Cairanne Blanc that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The wine’s *cépages* is a blend of roussanne and clairette, with the former planted in stone terraces and the latter in soils of blue clay. The vineyards are thirty years of age and harvest is done first thing in the morning to preserve freshness. The wine delivers a fine bouquet of quince, crab apple, wet stone minerality, dried flowers and a bit of peach stone. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with zesty acids, good mineral drive and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is good! 2020-2025+. **89.**

2018 Cairanne “la Brunote”- Domaine Alary

The Cairanne “la Brunote” bottling from the Alary family is made from a rather unique *cépages* of grenache, mourvèdre and carignan. The grenache is grown in stone terraces in the subsection of Cairanne known as “*Terroir Garrigue*”, while the mourvèdre and carignan hail from hillside vineyards planted on blue clay and limestone, with all three parcels of vines more than fifty-five years of age. The 2018 la Brunote delivers a fine bouquet of dark berries, spit-roasted game, pepper, woodsmoke, *garrigue* and a fine base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, plenty of pepperiness, ripe, buried tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, classic finish. This is first class Cairanne. 2020-2035+. **91.**

2018 Cairanne “l’Estévenas”- Domaine Alary

Domaine Alary’s l’Estévenas cuvée is produced from a combination of sixty-five percent grenache and thirty-five percent syrah, planted in a mountainside vineyard of crumbling clay and limestone. The syrah vines are *petite serine* taken from cuttings that originated in Côte-Rôtie and were planted in 1960. The two varieties are fermented separately with indigenous yeasts and blended after six months of *elevage*, with the wine raised for up to eighteen months in a combination of cement vats and old *demi-muids*. The 2018 l’Estévenas offers up a beautiful bouquet, where the *petite serine* really takes center stage in its constellation of black raspberries, pepper, black olives, smoked meats, a superb base of soil tones and a topnote of spice elements. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, outstanding precision and mineral transparency, ripe, buried tannin and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is a new world to me, as I am accustomed to Cairanne being a beautifully refined expression of higher altitude grenache, but this wine’s personality is deeply embedded in its *petite serine* component. Great juice and an absolute steal! 2020-2035+. **93.**

2018 Cairanne “la Jean de Verde”- Domaine Alary

The la Jean de Verde bottling of Cairanne from Denis Alary is made from a blend of ninety-five percent grenache and five percent carignan, with the vines for both varieties having been planted all the way back in 1955. The 2018 la Jean de Verde offers up a beautifully red fruity nose of cherries, raspberries, stony soil tones, spiced meats and a lovely topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and spicy, with a lovely core of fruit, good mineral undertow, modest tannins and a long, tangy and gently warm finish. This vintage comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, which seems correct, and so the wine shows a whisper of backend heat, but plenty of complexity and bounce to go with its discreet headiness. It is a lovely example of Cairanne from a hot summer. 2020-2030. **89.**

2018 Cairanne “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Alary

The Cairanne “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Alary is produced from forty-five year-old vineyards planted on the village’s “stone terraces”, with the *cépages* here being a blend of grenache, syrah and carignan. The varieties are fermented separately, all with indigenous yeasts and blended once malolactic fermentation is complete. The 2018 V.V. offers up a ripe and complex nose of black raspberries, cassis, coffee grounds, spit-roasted game, pepper, *garrigue*, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and nicely suave on the attack, with a good core of fruit, fine mineral drive and a long, moderately tannic finish. Good juice, with just a whisper of the vintage’s *sur maturité* showing on the backend. 2020-2030. **89+**.

2017 Vinsobres “les Cornuds”- Famille Perrin

The Perrin family of Château de Beaucastel fame owns sixty hectares of vines in the appellation of Vinsobres, which is the most northern in the official southern half of the Rhône. The vines lie at an average of three hundred meters above sea level, with the altitude making this one of the cooler microclimates in the southern half. The grapes are harvested by hand, with the syrah for the blend fermented in older *foudres* and the grenache in stainless steel. 2017 Vinsobres “les Cornuds” comes in listed at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a nicely black fruity and syrah-influenced nose of dark berries, pepper, smoked meats, a good base of stony soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of upper register lavender. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and svelte in personality, with a good core of black fruit, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. Due to the altitude, this is quite elegant in profile and very tasty. 2020-2035+. **90+**.

Saint-Julien-en- Saint Alban

2017 Saint-Julien en Saint Alban Blanc “Vieille Marsanne”- Dom de Pergaud (Éric Texier)

The 2017 Vieilles Marsanne bottling from Éric Texier sees four months of skin contact and then two years of gentle aging in old barrels prior to bottling. The 2017 version literally is right off the boat and offers up a fine nose of pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, orange peel, a lovely base of soil tones, fresh rosemary and a topnote of wild flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, fine soil signature, good, zesty acidity and a long, well-balanced finish that closes with a delightful note of that same fresh rosemary. This is a lovely wine. 2020-2026. **90**.

2017 Saint-Julien en Saint Alban- Éric Texier

The “regular” bottling of Saint-Julien-en-Saint-Alban from Éric Texier is his younger vine cuvée, as these vines range from thirty-five to forty years of age. They are entirely *petite serine* syrah, with the wine aged for seventeen months in cement vats prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The wine offers up a superb and youthful bouquet of cassis, grilled meats, bonfire, black olive tapenade, pepper, dark soil tones and dollop of shoe polish in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is an absolutely superb bottle in the making, but it could do with a few years in the cellar to blossom. A great value! 2023-2045. **91**.

2014 Saint-Julien en Saint Alban “Vieille Serine” Domaine de Pergaud- Éric Texier

These are Monsieur Texier’s oldest syrah vines, as these ancient *petite serine* vines were planted in the 1930s. The soils in this appellation are pure granite on the west bank of the river, and Éric ferments this wine in cement and ages it fully three years in old *foudres* without racking prior to bottling without fining, filtration or any added SO₂. The 2014 version is starting to really show some secondary layers in its superb bouquet of dark berries, spit-roasted venison, black olive, stony minerality, woodsmoke, a bit of hazelnut, pepper and lovely autumnal notes of fallen leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with an excellent core of black fruit, modest tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and peppery finish. While this still has some tannin to carry it further along its path, it is really drinking so well today that it is hard to argue for deferring any gratification! 2020-2045. **92.**

Brézème Blanc et Rouge

2019 Brézème Blanc- Domaine Éric Texier

The Brézème Blanc bottling from Éric Texier is composed entirely from roussanne. These are not particularly old vines, but they take to the limestone soils found in Brézème beautifully. The wine is fermented with whole clusters and indigenous yeasts and raised in cement tanks. The 2019 version is beautifully complex and already quite expressive on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, bread fruit, chalky soil elements, a touch of wild fennel, gently musky floral tones and a topnote of raw almond. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, zesty acids and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is a beautiful bottle. 2020-2030. **92.**

2018 Brézème Blanc- Domaine de Bréseyne

The 2018 Brézème Blanc from Domaine de Bréseyne is composed of a *cépages* of sixty percent grenache blanc, thirty percent viognier and ten percent marsanne. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and raised half in older casks and half in tank. The 2018 Blanc is the first under the new ownership group and it is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of pear, musk melon, lovely soil tones, acacia blossoms and a hint of coriander seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a plush core of fruit, good soil signature, sound framing acids and a long, complex and succulent finish. This is a 2018 white, so it is a bit low in acidity and will not make old bones, but it has plenty of enjoyment in it if drunk over the next few years. Good juice and I cannot wait to taste the new regime’s red from 2018! 2020-2023. **88.**

2018 Brézème Rouge- Domaine Éric Texier

The brand new release of Brézème rouge from Éric Texier is fresh off the boat and excellent. The nose jumps from the glass in a wealth of syrah aromatic goodness, with scents of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, smoked meats, tapenade and a lovely base of limestone soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, a bit of backend tannin and a long, impeccably balanced and complex finish. This wine is awash in all of the joy that young syrah can bring! 2020-2030. **90.**

2017 Brézème- Domaine de Bréseyne

Domaine de Bréseyne was just purchased in 2018 by Maison les Alexandrins, so this 2017 was crafted by the previous owners of the estate, the Gresse family. The wine is entirely made from syrah, with whole cluster fermentation and fifteen months *elevage* in two and three

year-old casks. The 2017 offers up a fine nose of dark berries, black raspberries, pepper, grilled meats, vanillin oak and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, gently new oaky finish of lovely refinement. This is done in a more modern style, and is quite well done in that style, but it will be interesting to see if *Messieurs* Jaboulet, Sorrel and Caso will take this wine and make it in a more traditional style in future vintages. Good juice. 2020-2028. **89.**

2015 Brézème Blanc “Vieille Roussette” Domaine de Pergaud- Éric Texier

The 2015 Brézème Blanc “Vieille Roussette” from Éric Texier has also just arrived here in New York, five years out from the harvest. These very old Roussanne vines were planted back in 1936, and Éric fermented fifty percent of the cuvée in amphora for six to eight weeks, while the other half was barrel-fermented in old casks. After eight weeks of skin contact in amphora, the two portions were blended together. They were then divided up for aging in a combination of amphora and older barrels. The wine offers up today a deep and complex bouquet of clementine, lemon peel, green olive, a touch of nutskin from skin contact, limestone minerality and a topnote that hints at rosemary. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, complex and quite soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent acidity and a long, very well-balanced finish. I have had very few wines partially made in amphora that are this good, as this wine is fresh, zesty and loaded with personality at five years of age and still has plenty of life ahead of it. Quite unique in style and absolutely superb! 2020-2030+. **92.**



2014 Brézème “Vieille Serine” Domaine de Pergaud- Éric Texier

These old *petite serine* vines were also planted in the 1930s, so the primary difference between this and the Saint-Julien en Saint-Alban version is that Brézème, sitting across the Rhône is a much cooler microclimate and the soils are chalky, rather than the pure granite in Saint-Julien en Saint-Alban. The two Pergaud bottlings are raised the same in the cellar, gentle extraction during fermentation in cement, three years in old *foudres* and then bottling without added sulfur, filtration or fining. The 2014 old vine Brézème delivers a beautiful nose of cassis, dark berry, espresso, pepper, roasted meats, chalky soil tones, the first hints of autumn leaves, tapenade and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is elegant, full-bodied and perfectly balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive lift from its undercurrent of minerality, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex, modestly tannic and vibrant finish. Marcel Guigal’s father always said that if he had not been successful starting up his *négociant* business in Ampuis, he would have liked to have purchased the entire hill of Brézème, and tasting this beautiful wine, one can see why. A superbly complex, understated and refined wine. 2020-2045+. **93.**

Saint-Péray

2018 Saint-Péray- Julien Pilon

The 2018 Saint-Péray from Julien Pilon is composed of a blend of eighty percent marsanne and twenty percent roussanne and comes in at a reported 14.2 percent octane. It offers up a ripe and pretty nose of pear, peach, salty soil tones, a bit of sweet almond and a gently musky floral topnote redolent of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with broad shoulders, a good core of fruit, fairly discreet acids and just a whisper of backend heat on the long and succulent finish. This is a good, solid effort, but the torrid summer of 2018 can be felt here a bit on the backend. 2020-2024. **87.**

2018 Saint-Péray “Version”- François Villard

The 2018 Saint-Péray “Version” bottling from François Villard is composed of a blend of eighty percent marsanne and twenty percent roussanne. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in older Burgundy casks, which average three to five years of age. The 2018 Version offers up a nicely ripe and expressive bouquet of pear, fresh pineapple, a touch of honeysuckle, a nice touch of stony soil tones and a topnote of sweet butter. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely ripe in personality, with a good core, sound acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This comes in listed at fourteen percent octane, which seems about right, and it will probably be best drunk over the next four or five years. A good example. 2020-2025+. **88.**

Cornas

2018 Cornas “l’Élégance du Caillou”- Julien Pilon

The 2018 Cornas “l’Élégance du Caillou” from Julien Pilon is another fine example of the vintage, marrying ripe fruit with good mineral definition and a fine structural chassis for aging. The wine comes in listed at 14.2 percent alcohol (as does every other 2018 from Monsieur Pilon- I am sensing a pattern here), but this seems accurate for the Cornas. The fine young nose offers up a ripe blend of black raspberries, black olive, hung game, pepper, a bit of chocolate, stony soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, plush and full-bodied, with a sappy core of fruit, good minerality and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. This is very 1990-like in personality. 2028-2070+. **92.**

2017 Cornas “Patou” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Dumien-Serette

The Patou bottling of Cornas from Gilbert and Nicolas Serette is made from all old vines, with many that date back to the 1920s. The wine is fifty percent whole clusters and raised for two years in casks that range from two to seven years of age. The 2017 Patou comes in at thirteen percent octane and delivers a beautifully classical bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, roasted venison, pepper, black olive, stony soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a rock solid core of fruit, exceptional mineral drive and grip, firm, perfectly integrated tannins and a long, tangy and tightly-knit finish that promises greatness in due course. This is a great bottle of old school Cornas in the making- just add the requisite amount of patience to let it blossom. 2035-2085. **94.**

2017 Cornas “Cuvée Henri” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Dumien-Serette

The Cuvée Henri is a fairly new bottling from the Serette family, as they only began producing this wine once Nicolas joined his father Gilbert full-time at the domaine. This is made from the family’s very oldest vines, with all of them in excess of one hundred years of age. There are only two casks made of this stunning Cornas, with the 2017 Cuvée Henri offering up tremendous depth in its bouquet of dark berries, black raspberries, spit-roasted game, tapenade, pepper, woodsmoke, a superbly complex foundation of stony soil, espresso and a hint of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent down to its stony minerality, with a rock solid core of black fruit, ripe, firm tannins and superb length and grip on the perfectly balanced and peppery finish. This is another absolute classic bottle of Cornas. 2035-2085. **95.**



Saint-Joseph Blanc

2019 Saint-Joseph Blanc “Saut de l’Ange”- Pierre Jean Villa

The Saint-Joseph Blanc “Saut de l’Ange” from Pierre Jean Villa is composed entirely from Roussanne, which he raised in six hundred liter, used *demi-muids* prior to bottling. The 2019 version offers up a fine nose of pear, a hint of tangerine, hazelnut, a fine base of soil tones, white flowers and a hint of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core and soil signature, good acids and bounce and a long, classy finish. This is an excellent bottle of Saint-Joseph Blanc. 2020-2030. **91.**

2018 Saint-Joseph Blanc “Dimanche à Lima”- Julien Pilon

The *cépages* of the 2018 Saint-Joseph Blanc “Dimanche à Lima” from Julien Pilon is a fifty-fifty blend of marsanne and roussanne. The wine is quite ripe on the nose, offering up scents of pineapple, nectarine, a bit of hazelnut and a bit of butter. On the palate the wine is ripe, full, broad and rather overripe in flavor profile, with a good core, soft acids and a long, juicy finish. This is very much a creature of the hot summer of 2018, with quite low acids, a touch of heat and a finish that really seems to be searching for a bit of structure on the backend, as the wine fans out like a river delta. This is a succulent, fruit-driven example and is okay, in the context of the vintage, but not exactly my cup of tea. 2020-2022. **85.**

2018 Saint-Joseph Blanc- E. Guigal

The Saint-Joseph Blanc from the Guigal family hails from vineyards that they purchased from the Grippat family in 2000 and Domaine de Vallouit in 2001. They are all centered around the town of Tournon in the heart of the terraced hillsides of the prime section of Saint-Joseph. The blend is composed of ninety-five percent marsanne and five percent roussanne, with the vines ranging from twenty to fully fifty years of age. The wine is raised in a fifty-fifty combination of stainless steel and cask, with half of the barrels new each year for that portion of the blend. The 2018 Saint-Joseph Blanc offers up a fine young nose of pear, white peach, white flowers, a bit of peach stone, salty soil tones and a very discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, good soil signature and grip, sound framing acids and lovely length on the youthful finish. Though this is not particularly high acid, in the style of the vintage, the balance is impeccable and this should age very well for a 2018 white. It is quite approachable already, but I would be inclined to give it at least a year or two in the cellar and let some of its secondary layers of complexity emerge. Good juice. 2020-2030. **90.**

Saint-Joseph Rouge

2019 Saint-Joseph “Préface”- Pierre Jean Villa

The Saint-Joseph “Préface” from Pierre Jean Villa is made from several different parcels in the northern end of the appellation. Some of the vineyards used for this bottling are old vine *Serine* and these are whole cluster fermented, with the younger vines generally destemmed. The wine is raised for a year or so in a combination of two hundred and twenty-five and six hundred liter casks, with all of the wood used. The 2019 bottling comes in a fourteen percent and offers up a deep, sappy and youthful nose of cassis, black raspberries, woodsmoke, roasted meats, dark soil tones, pepper and a touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with superb soil signature and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is still loaded with puppy fat, but there is a lovely chassis underneath and the wine will be excellent in time. One can already drink it with immense

pleasure, but there is so much more detail waiting to emerge with just a bit of bottle age that I would wait until at least next year to start popping bottles. 2021-2045. **91+**.

2018 Saint-Joseph “Rue des Poissonniers”- Julien Pilon

The 2018 Saint Joseph from Julien Pilon is a lovely example of the vintage: ripe, broad-shouldered and gently roasted in personality like a 1990 might have been, but with fine balance and detail. The wine comes in listed at 14.2 percent octane and this seems about right, as it wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, roasted meats, chocolate, bonfire, chicory, hazelnuts, a good base of soil tones and just a touch of pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with good soil signature, suave, buried tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and wide open finish. Good juice. 2020-2035+. **90.**

2018 Saint-Joseph “Tildé”- Pierre Jean Villa

The Tildé bottling from Pierre Jean Villa is his old vine cuvée of Saint-Joseph, with the vines having been planted between 1963 and 1970, in the heart of the appellation in terraced hillsides at three hundred meters above sea level. The wine typically includes sixty percent whole clusters, is raised in older Burgundy barrels and *demi-muids* and sees fully two years of *elevage* prior to bottling. The 2018 version is deep, ripe and classy on the nose, wafting from the glass in a sappy blend of black raspberries, cassis, black olive, pepper, hung game, a fine base of stony soil tones and a topnote of hazelnuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core with sappy fruit, with fine mineral undertow, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is very much reflective of its vintage, so it is awash with ripe fruit today, but underneath is excellent structure and mineral drive and once the puppy fat backs off a bit, this is going to be a very classic and long-lived bottle. Stylistically, it reminds me very much of a top example of the 1990 vintage in the northern Rhône. 2025-2050+. **92+.**

2017 Saint-Joseph- E. Guigal

The 2017 Saint-Joseph from the Guigal family is a superb example of the appellation. The wine is raised exclusively in “one wine” casks for two years prior to bottling, with all of the fruit hailing from the vineyards the *maison* purchased from Domaines Grippat and de Vallouit at the start of the new millennium. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic blend of cassis, dark berries, pepper, black olives, hung game, black olive and just a hint of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully mineral in profile, with a superb core of black fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and very, very promising finish. All of the Guigals’ vineyards in Saint-Joseph lie between Tournon and Mauves in the heart and soul of the original appellation, on the steep, terraced granitic hillsides, and this wine is clearly one of their top bottlings at the present time and a fine, fine value! It is approachable now, but it would be crime not to give it at least a handful of years in the cellar and let it blossom more fully, as this is quite serious juice! 2023-2055. **93.**

2017 Saint-Joseph “Lieu-Dit”- E. Guigal

The Lieu-Dit bottling of Saint-Joseph from the Guigal family hails from the eponymous vineyard in the heart of Tournon that originally gave its name to the appellation in 1956. These vines came to the Guigals from their 2000 vineyard purchase from Domaine Grippat and are the oldest vines that the family bought, with the original vines here now seventy-five years of age (though there is a re-planted parcel that is now twenty years-old). The Guigals own fully sixty percent of this iconic vineyard. The old vines give a very modest yield and the Guigals age this

wine in fifty percent new oak and fifty percent “one wine” casks for two years prior to bottling. The wine is quite a bit more new oaky in personality than the straight Saint-Joseph bottling, but has plenty of stuffing to carry the wood and offers up a deep and promising bouquet of dark berries, roasted meats, woodsmoke, pepper, stony minerality, a touch of hazelnut and a generous serving of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, young and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins and a long, classy finish that will be very complex in due course, but right now is still a bit marked by its fifty percent new oak. This is an excellent bottle of Saint-Joseph, but stylistically this is a wine crafted to cater to the Guigals’ well-heeled La Mouline fan base, rather than a classical expression of this outstanding *terroir*. It is beautifully done in its style and no doubt, will open the eyes of some previously Côte-Rôtie-exclusive Guigal customers to the great quality of Saint-Joseph. But, I also have the feeling that the underlying *terroir* here has even greater potential, if this wine were to be made in the classical style championed by old school proprietors like Raymond Trolat, with some whole clusters and *elevage* without any new oak. That said, this is a truly excellent wine done in the style of La Mouline or La Turquie, and I have to imagine that most Rhône fanciers have no problem with the *maison* opting for this stylistic direction for one of their two Saint-Joseph bottlings! 2023-2055. **94.**

2017 Saint-Joseph “Poivre et Sol”- François Villard

The Saint-Joseph “Poivre et Sol” from François Villard is from fairly young vines (just over twenty years of age), but planted on steep hillsides of decomposed granite and quartz. The wine includes eighty percent whole clusters and is raised in older Burgundy casks for fifteen months prior to bottling. The 2017 Poivre et Sol comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a beautiful nose of dark berries, pepper, roasted meats, stony soil tones, tapenade and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, very well balanced finish. This does not quite have the mid-palate amplitude of older vines, but this quality will come in time, and as far as the profile of this wine goes, it is beautifully classical and a first class example of Saint-Joseph. It is approachable now, though still a bit chewy, and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for two or three years and let it soften up a bit more on the backend. Fine juice. 2022-2045+. **92.**

2016 Saint-Joseph “les Côtes”- Vincent Paris

The 2016 Saint Joseph “les Côtes” from Vincent Paris is starting to blossom nicely and is not too far away from hitting its plateau of peak drinkability, but it is not quite there yet. The bouquet now is still youthful, but starting to reveal its full panoply in its aromatic combination of cassis, pepper, black olive, espresso, dark soil tones, a nice touch of roasted meats and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature and grip and a long, moderately tannic and well-balanced finish. This is first class Saint-Joseph that still has several decades of life ahead of it, so there is no rush to be opening bottles now! 2020-2040+. **92.**

1995 Saint-Joseph “Vieilles Vignes”- Raymond Trolat

I bought a half case of this wine in the late 1990s, but cannot recall when I drank the other five bottles! No doubt, it was early on, when I did not really understand just what I had in my hands with this wine. In any case, I had been carefully guarding my last bottle for most of the last twenty years and decided to open it only when the pandemic made the future seem even

more uncertain than it already is every single day. The wine at age twenty-five is at its apogee, offering up a deep and smoky nose of dark berries, cassis, smoked meats, black olive, pepper, hickory smoke and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, still a bit of modest backend tannin, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is not a broadly expressive wine like a twenty or thirty year-old Hermitage from Gérard Chave might be, but rather a bottomless wine of exceptional complexity that invites the taster in, but demands a bit of concentration to see all of its multi-faceted personality- much more Gentaz-like in personality. It truly is stunning juice and still has tons of life in it. 2020-2040+. **94.**



Crozes-Hermitage Blanc

2018 Crozes-Hermitage Blanc- Maison Les Alexandrins

The 2018 Crozes-Hermitage Blanc from Maison Les Alexandrins is composed of a blend of sixty percent marsanne and forty percent roussanne, with the wine barrel-fermented and aged in cask prior to bottling. The nose is nicely bright and precise for the vintage, with no overt tropical overtones in its bouquet of peach, pear, a touch of hazelnut, white lilies and new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very nicely balanced for the vintage, with a good core, fairly modest acidity, but good length and grip on the succulent finish. This wine comes in at thirteen percent octane and is impressively light on its feet for the vintage, but it is pretty soft and will want drinking up over the next few years. I do not know what the percentage of new oak

was used here, but I would love to see this wine raised only in older casks, just to tone down the oak component a bit more. All in all, this is a good wine and quite a success in the challenging white wine vintage of 2018. 2020-2025. **88.**

Crozes-Hermitage Rouge

2018 Crozes-Hermitage- Maison Les Alexandrins

The 2018 Crozes-Hermitage from Maison Les Alexandrins receives a short “cold soak” prior to the onset of fermentation, and comes in listed at 14.1 percent octane in this vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of sweet dark berries, smoked meats, pepper, dark soil tones, tapenade and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and refined, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, buried tannins and excellent backend lift on the long and complex finish. The structure nicely builds in this wine as it is open, auguring very well for its positive evolution with further bottle age, though it is already quite easy to drink. A fine example. 2020-2035+. **90.**

2018 Crozes-Hermitage “Les Châssis”- Domaine Des Hauts Châssis

The “Les Châssis” bottling of Crozes-Hermitage from Franck Faugier’s Domaine Des Hauts Châssis is his old vine cuvée, with the vines seventy years of age. All of Franck’s vineyards have been certified organic since 2017. The 2018 Les Châssis comes in at 13.8 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely, suave bouquet of cassis, raspberries, smoked meats, bonfire, a lovely base of soil tones and a touch of black olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with superb mineral drive, a fine core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, well-balanced and quite serious finish. This is an excellent and quite old school example of Crozes-Hermitage that should age beautifully! 2020-2040+. **92.**

2018 Crozes-Hermitage “Classique”- Domaine Yann Chave

The Crozes-Hermitage “Classique” from Yann Chave is his younger vine cuvée, with vines averaging around twenty years of age for this bottling. Most of his vineyards are centered around the town of Mercurol, which is the filet section of the appellation. The grapes are completely de-stemmed for this bottling and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts. The 2018 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a ripe and vibrant nose of black raspberries, pepper, a touch of black olive, roasted meats, dark soil tones, violets and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and sappy, with a superb core, ripe tannins and a long, complex and slightly warm finish. This has tons of personality, but it is a rather heady example of the vintage. Some tasters will like this more than me, as it is just a bit ripe for my palate. 2020-2030. **88.**

2017 Crozes-Hermitage- E. Guigal

The Crozes-Hermitage from the Guigal family is produced from their own vineyards, with the 1999 vintage their first release of this cuvée. The vines are thirty-five years of age and all of the vineyards are on hillsides in the region. The wine is aged for two years in used two hundred and twenty-eight liter casks prior to bottling. The 2017 Crozes offers up a fine nose of cassis, dark berry, pepper, fire pit, espresso, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, modest tannins and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a good, solid example of the appellation, but a touch heavy-handed stylistically and one has the sense that the family’s heart is not into their Crozes as much as their stellar examples of Saint-Joseph. 2020-2030. **88.**

2017 Crozes-Hermitage “Certitude”- François Villard

The Crozes-Hermitage “Certitude” from François Villard hails entirely from vineyards in the village of Mercurol, in the shadow of the hill of Hermitage. The wine is fermented entirely with whole clusters and aged in older casks for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2017 Certitude delivers a superb aromatic constellation of cassis, pepper, roasted meats, black olive, dark soil tones, a nice touch of spice from the stems and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, well-balanced and quite serious finish. I love the whole cluster influence here, which augurs very well for its future evolution, but which will ask for a few years in the cellar to blossom. This is first class Crozes!

2016 Crozes-Hermitage “Domaine de Thalabert”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

The 2016 vintage of the Domaine de Thalabert from Paul Jaboulet is beautifully precise and classy, coming in at thirteen percent octane and really starting to drink with distinction at four years of age. The very expressive bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and utterly classic blend of cassis, grilled meats, pepper, stony soil tones, black olive tapenade and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and impeccable balance on the long, complex and utterly seamless finish. This wine is starting to drink very well indeed, but has the structure to also age long and gracefully. It reminds me of the 1989 Thalabert when it was young, except the 2016 is more precise and refined in its aesthetic sensibilities and is an utterly superb bottle of Crozes-Hermitage (not to mention, a veritable steal)! 2020-2050. **93.**

Hermitage Blanc

2018 Hermitage Blanc “Prisme”- Julien Pilon

The 2018 Hermitage Blanc “Prisme” from Julien Pilon is composed entirely of marsanne, from the *lieu à dit* of Maison Blanche on the hill of Hermitage. The wine is raised for sixteen months in cask prior to bottling and the 2018 comes in officially at 14.2 percent octane. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautifully ripe and pure nose of pear, fresh pineapple, sweet hazelnuts, a fine base of soil, a touch of orange peel and a lovely framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and a touch tropical in profile, with a full-bodied format, plenty of depth at the core, quite good acids for the vintage and just a touch of backend heat poking out on the long, complex finish that closes with a distinctive note of orange peel. To my palate, this is a bit riper than its stated 14.2 percent, but it handles its alcohol quite well and really has pretty good acidity for this hot summer. It is stylistically a child of its vintage, but it is quite a strong effort for a 2018 white Rhône. 2020-2030. **89.**

2017 Hermitage Blanc “le Chevalier de Sterimberg”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

The 2017 Hermitage Blanc “le Chevalier de Sterimberg” from Paul Jaboulet Aîné is an absolute classic in the making. The wine comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and offers up a deep and youthful nose of pear, apple, floral tones gently redolent of honeysuckle, a superb base of soil, citrus peel and perhaps a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This could do with some bottle age to blossom more completely, but it is already quite approachable and a tasty drink. 2023-2050. **92.**

Hermitage Rouge

2018 Hermitage- Domaine Yann Chave

The Hermitage from Yann Chave is produced from thirty year-old vines, from two small parcels in the *lieux à dits* of Baumes and le Péléal. He de-stems the bunches, ferments with indigenous yeasts and raises this wine in six hundred liter casks, as Monsieur Chave prefers the larger barrels for syrah. The 2018 version comes in listed at fourteen percent and offers up a deep and classic bouquet of cassis, sweet dark berries, pepper, roasted meats, tapenade, a superb base of soil, a touch of nutty new oak and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully plush on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, firm, ripe tannins and a long, chewy and complex finish that closes with a note of meatiness and bitter chocolate. The touch of generosity on the attack quickly gives way to classic Hermitage structure and this is most emphatically not a wine for early drinking, but with sufficient bottle age, it is going to be an excellent bottle of Hermitage. 2030-2080. **93.**

2017 Hermitage- Faugier-Gonnet

The Hermitage from Franck Faugier is composed essentially a fifty-fifty blend of fruit from the granitic *lieu à dit* of Bressards and the more crushed soils of le Méal, with both parcels having been planted in 1975 and now in their prime. The wine includes roughly thirty percent whole clusters and is raised in two hundred and twenty-eight liter Burgundy barrels, with twenty percent new and the rest on a five year rotation. The wine spends a year in casks, prior to being assembled for two to three months in tank and then is bottled without fining or filtering. The 2017 Hermitage offers up a deep and classic nose of black raspberries, cassis, smoked meats, pepper, a complex base of stony soil tones, a touch of cedary oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, buried tannins and impeccable balance on the long, youthful and peppery finish. This is an outstanding bottle of Hermitage in the making- all it needs is proper time alone in the cellar to blossom completely. 2027-2065+. **93+.**

2017 Hermitage- E. Guigal

The Guigal family's Hermitage is made from a combination of the four parcels they own on the hillside and some fruit that they purchase to augment their estate-grown production. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and aged in cask for two and a half to three years, depending on the style of the vintage, with fifty percent of the oak renewed each year. The 2017 Hermitage comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but seems decidedly cooler in personality, offering up a deep and ripe nose of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, black olive, roasted venison, a fine base of stony soil tones, woodsmoke and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent down to the soil, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and quite classy finish. This is not a massive example of Hermitage, but rather a classic wine in terms of weight, detail and soil signature. As I have mentioned with several other northern wines in this report, I would love to see more toasty new oak character here (like the estate used to practice in the 1980s and 1990s with this cuvée), rather than the spicy oak, as I find toasty oak marries more seamlessly with the syrah and soil elements. But, this is a first class bottle of Hermitage in all other respects and very elegant in profile, without sacrificing any of Hermitage's broad shoulders and depth. Fine juice. 2030-2075+. **93.**

2016 Hermitage “La Maison Bleu”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

The 2016 vintage of La Maison Bleu from Caroline Frey at Paul Jaboulet Aîné is an outstanding example of young Hermitage. This bottling is a touch less ripe than the La Chapelle 2016, coming in at even fourteen percent alcohol and offering up a superb young nose of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, a fine base of stony soil, cigar smoke, black olive, roasted venison and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, firm, buried tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthful and very promising finish. The La Maison Bleu is not as powerful or structured as La Chapelle, but it is a proper Hermitage and the 2016 will want at least eight to ten years in the cellar before broaching. It will age long and gracefully. Fine juice. 2028-2065+. **92+**.

2016 Hermitage “La Chapelle”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

The 2016 vintage of La Chapelle is everything one would expect from the confluence of a brilliantly old school, classic vintage and one of the most iconic red wine bottlings in the Rhône Valley. The wine comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a vibrant, complex and very pure bouquet of cassis, smoked meats, pepper, beautiful spice tones, stony minerality, a bit of saddle leather, woodsmoke and a nice framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, great mineral drive, ripe firm tannins and a long, nascently complex and very, very promising finish. This is perhaps just a touch higher in octane, but it reminds me very strongly of the great 1989 La Chapelle when it was first released. It will be interesting to follow the 2016 over the coming decades and see if the slightly riper character of this wine will impinge upon its longevity, in comparison to past legendary vintages of La Chapelle such as 1978, 1988, 1989 and 1990 (all of which were plenty ripe out of the blocks). But, upon release, this has everything one could ask for to deliver future greatness! 2030-2100. **96**.



Condrieu

2019 Condrieu “Jardin Suspendu”- Pierre Jean Villa

Pierre Jean Villa’s Condrieu “Jardin Suspendu” is composed from a couple of different parcels, with about half the cuvée hailing from vines planted by Pierre Jean in 2009, with the other half of the bottling made from vines planted in the 1970s. The combination of younger and older vine fruit works very nicely in this cuvée, with the wine raised in older *demi-muids*. The 2019 Jardin Suspendu comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a beautifully refined bouquet of pear, almond, acacia blossoms, a touch of citrus zest, a beautiful base of white soil tones and gentle spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, fine mineral undertow, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. There is absolutely nothing blowsy here, as this wine has structure, cut and grip (attributes that are sometimes hard to find in Condrieu from warmer growing seasons like 2019). 2020-2035. **92+**.

2018 Condrieu “Verchery”- Domaine Clusel-Roch

Gilbert Clusel’s Condrieu is produced from thirty year-old Viognier vines, with most of the cuvée barrel-fermented in older casks and a smaller percentage fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. The two portions of the cuvée are raised in the same vessels they are fermented in for one year and only blended right before bottling. The Clusel family’s 2018 Condrieu comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and delivers a superb bouquet of melon, pear, acacia blossoms, a touch of raw almond and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with fairly gentle acids, but fine focus and balance and a long, succulent and complex finish. This is on the lower side of acidity, as is the style of the 2018 vintage for whites in the region, but it is pure, complex and an absolute pleasure to drink today and the only down side is that it is likely to be fairly short-lived. However, it will deliver plenty of pleasure during its prime! 2020-2026. **92**.

2018 Condrieu “la Doriane”- E. Guigal

The 2018 Condrieu “la Doriane” from Guigal is ripe and complex on both the nose and palate, in the style of this vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of pear, coriander seed, salty soil tones, white lilies, acacia blossoms and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and focused, with a good core of fruit, quite good acidity for the vintage, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and slightly warm finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but seems perhaps just a touch north of this to my palate. This is a very good example of 2018 Condrieu, and though I would love to see it just a touch lower in alcohol, that is the nature of this growing season. It is extremely successful in the context of its vintage. 2020-2026. **91**.

2018 Condrieu “Lône”- Julien Pilon

Julien Pilon’s 2018 Condrieu “Lône” is also a pretty ripe white wine in this vintage, but here we have some good acidity, mineral drive and focus to help support the ripe and quite attractive fruit tones in the wine. This 2018 Condrieu comes in listed at 14.2 percent alcohol and offers up a very pretty nose of pear, casaba melon, nectarine, a lovely base of soil, white lilies and a hint of coriander seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe, full-bodied and focused, with very good acidity for the vintage, a fine core, good cut and grip and a long, complex and slightly warm finish. This is a very good effort for the vintage. 2020-2026. **89**.

2018 Condrieu “les Terraces du Palat”- François Villard

The 2018 Condrieu “les Terraces du Palat” from François Villard is made from parcels of twenty-five year-old vines, with the wine barrel-fermented and raised for eleven months in cask, with twenty-five percent of the oak new. The 2018 les Terraces du Palat offers up a ripe and extroverted bouquet of pineapple, tangerine, citrus blossoms, a touch of marinated orange peel, good minerality and gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and rock solid at the core, with good focus and grip, sound acids and a long, ripe and wide open finish. This comes in listed at fourteen percent alcohol, but seems a bit higher than that to my palate, though it is pretty shapely for its octane level. That said, at least out of the blocks, it is not particularly complex and is most attractive for its pretty and generous layering of tropical fruit tones. 2020-2030. **89.**

Côte-Rôtie

2018 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Domaine Champet

The 2018 “la Viallière” from Domaine Champet is a superb young bottle of Côte-Rôtie, with fine depth and soil signature coupled to utterly classic stylistic sensibilities. The youthful nose wafts from the glass in a primary blend of black raspberries, cassis, hung game, pepper, bitter chocolate, stony soil tones, a hint of nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with a superb core of fruit, ripe, firm tannins and great length and grip on the nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a properly-structured young bottle of Côte-Rôtie and will demand some extended cellaring to blossom fully, but it comes in listed at 12.5 percent octane (and this seems fairly accurate) and should prove to be an outstanding bottle with sufficient aging. It is so exquisitely balanced out of the blocks that it is almost approachable today, though I should note that it gets more tannic with extended aeration right now and there are so many layers here to unfold that it should be allowed to hibernate in a cool corner of the cellar for a full decade before really thinking about broaching bottles! A fine, fine example of Côte-Rôtie. 2030-2080. **93.**

2018 Côte-Rôtie “la Porchette”- Julien Pilon

The 2018 Côte-Rôtie “la Porchette” from Julien Pilon is another fine example of the vintage. The wine is ripe, but shows absolutely no signs of *sur maturité* in its aromatic profile of cassis, sweet dark berries, grilled meats, pepper, a fine base of stony soil tones, a hint of nutskin, plenty of upper register smokiness and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant for the vintage, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a very good bottle of Côte-Rôtie in the making. 2028-2075. **92+.**

2018 Côte-Rôtie “Carmina”- Pierre-Jean Villa

Pierre-Jean Villa’s Carmina bottling of Côte-Rôtie is made from a half hectare parcel of old vines (planted in 1959 and 1964) and two hectares of younger vines in the northern end of the appellation. It is comprised entirely of syrah, with the exception of two viognier plants that somehow found their way into the vineyards, so are added for a less than trace amount of this grape. Pierre-Jean will use anywhere from thirty to fifty percent whole clusters for this bottling, depending on the style of the vintage, and I have to assume he used fifty percent in the ripe summer of 2018. This wine is raised in a combination of casks and *foudres*. The 2018 Carmina comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a ripe and expressive nose of cassis, black raspberries, grilled meats, pepper, black olive, a fine base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, fine

mineral undertow, ripe tannins, fine grip and a long, chewy and classically balanced finish. This is going to be a fine bottle in due course. 2030-2075+. **92+**.

2018 Côte-Rôtie “Fongéant”- Pierre-Jean Villa

Monsieur Villa’s Fongéant bottling is produced from old *selection massale* cuttings planted in 1954. This beautiful vineyard, lying just up the slope from Côte Brune and looking down on the center of Ampuis, is one of the finest *lieux à dits* in all of Côte-Rôtie. The wine ranges from two-thirds to one hundred percent whole cluster inclusion, and again, I have to suspect it was entirely whole cluster in 2018. The *elevage* is done primarily in older *demi-muids*, and in most vintages there are about two hundred cases produced. The 2018 Villa Fongéant also comes in listed at fourteen percent alcohol and delivers a superb young bouquet of dark berries, roasted venison, a touch of hazelnut, a beautifully complex base of stony soil tones, pepper, tapenade and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pure on the attack, with a rock solid core of old vine fruit, great mineral drive and grip, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is a brilliant bottle of old school Côte-Rôtie in the making. 2032-2085. **94+**.



2017 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Julien Barge

The 2017 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy” from Julien Barge is absolutely classic in profile and a superb wine in the making. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of cassis, black plums, pepper, grilled meats, black olive, a gorgeous base of soil tones and a touch of

hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, superb transparency and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and perfectly balanced young finish. This is always Julien's most suave cuvée of Côte-Rôtie out of the blocks, and this is the case in 2017, so the wine is already approachable in its youthful guise. But, this is a superbly traditional bottling of Côte-Rôtie and it really deserves ten to twelve years in the cellar to really blossom and show all of its layers of complexity. It is a beautiful bottle of wine. 2030-2080. **93+**.

2017 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Martin Clerc

The Côte-Rôtie from Martin Clerc is composed entirely from syrah, with the vines in the southern sector of the appellation and having been planted in 1990. Martin ferments the wine with indigenous yeasts, uses fifteen to twenty percent whole clusters and ages it for fifteen to eighteen months in a combination of Burgundy casks and *demi-muids* prior to bottling, with only around twenty percent new oak. The 2017 version is excellent, offering up a classic nose of cassis, black pepper, hazelnut, roasted game, black olive, a superb base of soil, just a whisper of cedary oak and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and classically elegant in profile, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature and bounce, suave, seamless tannins and a long, complex and soil-driven finish. This is the first vintage of Monsieur Clerc's Côte-Rôtie that I have tasted and I am quite impressed! 2027-2065+.

93.

2017 Côte-Rôtie "les Schistes"- Domaine Clusel-Roch

The les Schistes bottling from Gilbert and Guillaume Clusel is their younger vine bottling, as these vines are only twenty years of age. However, they are all *selection massale* from the original *petite serine* that date back to the domaine's foundation in 1935, and one of the *lieux à dits* that contribute to this bottling is the superb la Viallière vineyard. The *cépages* of this bottling is ninety-five percent syrah and five percent viognier, with the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for two years in cask, with fifteen percent new oak. The 2017 les Schistes offers up a lovely bouquet of cassis, pepper, roasted meats, a lovely touch of sweet stems, stony soil tones, a dollop of oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very transparent down to the soil, with a fine core of black fruit, ripe tannins, tangy acids and excellent balance and grip on the long, refined and nascently complex finish. This is proper, old school Côte-Rôtie and in due course, this is going to be an excellent drink. But, give it some hibernation time in the cellar first! 2030-2065. **91+**.

2017 Côte-Rôtie "les Grandes Places"- Domaine Clusel-Roch

Les Grandes Places is the Clusel family's oldest vines example of Côte-Rôtie, as their one hectare parcel in this great *terroir* are fully eighty years of age today. This bottling is entirely syrah, fermented with indigenous yeasts, partially whole clusters and aged for two years in cask, with one quarter of the barrels new. The old vine intensity here is quite evident on the nose, which wafts from the glass in a superb blend of black raspberries, cassis, pepper, bonfire, roasted venison, a superb base of dark soil, a hint of black olive, hazelnut and a refined framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of black fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and impeccable balance on the long, cool, complex and very promising finish. Given the drought conditions of 2017, the svelte, transparent and utterly classical shape of this wine is remarkable, as is its thirteen percent octane! The twenty-five percent new oak here still needs some time to fully integrate, but will do so seamlessly in due course. That said, this is most emphatically a wine that does not need the new

oak, as the combination of very old *petite serine* vines and such a great *terroir* would do just fine without any new casks at all. 2030-2075. **93.**

2017 Côte-Rôtie “Brune et Blonde”- E. Guigal

The 2017 Côte-Rôtie “Brune et Blonde” bottling from the Guigal family includes four percent viognier in the *cépages* this year and was raised in fifty percent new oak casks for three years prior to bottling. It is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a pure, complex and nicely perfumed bouquet of raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, a touch of lavender, a fine base of soil and a judicious framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and peppery, with a good core of fruit, tangy acids, ripe, buried tannins and fine grip on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is a very nicely transparent example, with well-managed ripeness and very good purity. It needs bottle age to properly blossom, but it is going to be a very good bottle of Côte-Rôtie in due course. 2027-2065. **92.**

2017 Côte-Rôtie “Château d’Ampuis”- E. Guigal

The 2017 Château d’Ampuis bottling of Côte-Rôtie from the Guigal family is composed of a blend of ninety-three percent syrah and seven percent viognier, with the vineyards that build the foundation for this cuvée pretty much equally split between the *Côte de Blonde* and the *Côte de Brune*. The vines average fifty years of age for the Château d’Ampuis and the wine is raised for thirty-eight months in all new casks prior to bottling. The 2017 version comes in listed at a nicely measured 13.5 percent octane and offers up a bright and very complex nose of raspberries, a touch of sweet dark berry, pepper, spiced meats, a lovely base of soil tones, bonfire and plenty of spicy new oak, which has an almost cinnamon aspect to its spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and new oaky in personality, with a lovely core, fine transparency, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. This still needs several years in the cellar to fully synthesize its new oak component, but should have no difficulty doing so in due course. It is a beautifully refined and complex example of Côte-Rôtie, but I would have loved a bit different signature to the new wood than this spicy direction. But, that is just personal taste. 2028-2065+. **94.**

2017 Côte-Rôtie “Vieilles Vignes”- Éric Texier

I love Éric Texier’s Côte-Rôtie “Vieilles Vignes” bottling, and the 2017 vintage is no exception. The wine is made entirely from eighty-plus year-old syrah vines, grown in the *lieu à dit* of Corps de Loup in the commune of Tupin et Semons in the southern end of the appellation in the *Côte de Blonde*. The wine is one hundred percent whole cluster fermented, with indigenous yeasts and raised for twenty months in used Burgundy casks, ranging from seven to ten years of age. It is bottled unfiltered. The 2017 version comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, grilled meats, black olive, a complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, a nice touch of sweet stem tones and a topnote of hazelnut. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and peppery, with a lovely core and soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and vibrant finish. This wine is made from *Côte de Blonde* fruit, rather than *Côte de Brune*, but in all other aspects, this is every bit as old school as any vintage from Marius Gentaz as one could ask for! 2030-2080. **94.**

2016 Côte-Rôtie “le Gallet Blanc”- François Villard

The Côte-Rôtie “le Gallet Blanc” bottling from François Villard includes just over eighty-five percent whole clusters, with the fruit for this bottling hailing from several plots in the towns of Ampuis and Saint-Cyr, primarily planted on schist. The wine sees twenty percent new

oak, with the other casks ranging from two to four years of age. The 2016 le Gallet Blanc comes in at a cool thirteen percent and offers up a beautiful young nose of dark berries, grilled meats, plenty of pepper, a fine touch of youthful stems, stony soil tones, woodsmoke and just a whisper of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, peppery and beautifully transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, nicely-integrated tannins and a long, complex and classy finish. This is very much emblematic of the cooler character of the 2016 vintage (which I absolutely adore), but also another wine where the new oak is somewhat spicy in personality and has not yet married seamlessly with the underlying wine. I would have loved to have seen a bit more “toast” to the new oak portion of the casks (or all used barrels), as the oak spice, though not particularly obtrusive, is still a bit distracting. But, I like absolutely everything else about this wine and have to imagine that the oak will eventually be subsumed into the other components here and produce a fine and quite elegant bottle of 2016 Côte-Rôtie. 2028-2065+. **92.**



A Few Ventoux, Bandol, Minervois and Friends

2017 Minervois “La Sellerie”- Château Pique-Perlou

The 2017 Minervois “La Sellerie” from Château Pique-Perlou is a fifty-fifty blend of syrah and carignan, with both varieties planted in *argilo-calcaire* soils and with the vines averaging sixty-five years of age. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and then aged from sixteen to eighteen months in cask prior to bottling. The 2017 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a ripe and complex bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, cigar

smoke, soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely light on its feet for its octane, with a good sappy core, ripe, chewy tannins, good grip and a gently new oaky and well-balanced finish. This is a bit more new oaky in personality than I am usually drawn to, but the wine has plenty of personality. It might be even more interesting raised with more one and two wine casks, instead of new barrels, as more soil signature might emerge. Good juice. 2020-2035. **89.**

2017 Le Petitou- Mas d'Amile (Terraces du Larzac)

The 2017 Le Petitou from Amélie d'Hurlaborde's Mas d'Amile is composed of a blend of approximately sixty percent grenache and twenty percent each of syrah and carignan. The grenache and syrah hail from Amélie's highest elevation and coolest vineyards, planted on limestone, while the carignan comes from further down the slope and adds a bit of mid-palate stuffing to what is a racy and transparent example of Roussillon. The vineyards are all farmed organically and are transitioning to biodynamics, with this bottling raised all in older casks. The 2017 Petitou offers up a cool and classy nose of dark berries, leather, *garrigue*, woodsmoke, a touch of black olive and a superb base of limestone minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and beautifully light on its feet, with a good core, fine soil transparency and grip, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. Picture a wine with Mediterranean aromatics and flavors and the weight of a Cru Beaujolais! Fine juice. 2020-2035. **89.**

2017 Ventoux- Château Unang

James and Joanna King are the current proprietors of Château Unang, having bought this Ventoux property in 2001. Their Ventoux *rouge* is composed of a blend of sixty percent grenache, thirty percent syrah and ten percent carignan. The wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The 2017 offers up a fine nose of red and black raspberries, grilled venison, pepper, bonfire, *garrigue* and a fine base of limestone soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core of fruit, ripe tannins, good mineral drive and a long, peppery and very well-balanced finish. This is a Gigondas-wannabe of the highest order and a superb value! 2020-2035. **90.**

2017 Ventoux "la Source"- Château Unang

The la Source bottling from the King family is their higher altitude cuvée, with these vines planted at more than three hundred meters, where the topsoil is only inches deep before the vines hit the mother rock of limestone. The *cépages* here is similar to the above, but with a bit more syrah incorporated in the blend, and the wine is aged almost entirely in *demi-muids*, with twenty percent renewed each year. The 2017 la Source delivers a fine aromatic constellation of raspberries, a bit of fruitcake, roasted meats, pepper, chalky minerality, woodsmoke, just a hint of cedar and a lovely topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite precise, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and very classy finish. The *elevage* in *demi-muids* seems to give this wine a more suave, refined palate impression, without sacrificing any of the soil signature or regional personality in the wine. This is approachable now, but it is built to age and will be so much better if given three to five years in the cellar. Serious juice! 2023-2040+. **92.**

2017 Ventoux- Stéphane Usseglio

The vineyards for Stéphane Usseglio's Ventoux bottling are all Demeter-certified biodynamic, with the wine's *cépages* being seventy percent grenache, twenty percent syrah and ten percent mourvèdre. His 2017 comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and offers up a fine bouquet of raspberries, fruitcake, saddle leather, hung game, pepper, *garrigue* and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely broad-shouldered, with an

excellent core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, tangy, complex and peppery finish. Not surprisingly, given Stéphane's family roots in Châteauneuf du Pape, this wine is nicely structured and will age very well indeed. It would not be remiss to give it a few years in the cellar before broaching it. 2022-2040+. **90.**

2016 Ventoux "Pur Jus"- Château Landra

The 2016 Ventoux "Pur Jus" from Château Landra is composed of a fifty-fifty blend of grenache and syrah. The wine offers up a complex nose of dried raspberries, hung game, pepper, new leather, bonfire, a bit of *garrigue* and a good base of gently autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, robust and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, very good focus and balance and a long, still moderately tannic and complex finish. I really like how the syrah portion of the blend takes over from the mid-palate back here really defines the finish with its pepperiness. This is an excellent wine, with a proper "noble rusticity". 2020-2030+. **89.**

2015 Bandol "Cuvée Estagnol"- Domaine la Bastide Blanche

The single vineyard bottling of Estagnol from the Bronzo family is made from fifty year-old vines, with the *cépages* of this bottling being ninety-two percent mourvèdre and eight percent grenache. The soils here are limestone and clay and the rows are planted east-west, which delays ripening a bit (and is certainly beneficial in this age of global warming). The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in old *foudre*. The 2015 Estagnol delivers a fine aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, cassis, roasted meats, a touch of pepper, bonfire, a fine base of soil and just a hint of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with plenty of sappiness at the core, superb structure and grip, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This wine is listed at 14.5 percent octane and carries its ripeness very well indeed, with only a hint of backend heat. It is a proper *vin de garde* and will demand plenty of cellaring time before it blossoms, but it will be excellent in due course. 2028-2065. **93.**

2015 Bandol "Cuvée Fontanéou"- Domaine la Bastide Blanche

The 2015 Cuvée Fontanéou from Domaine la Bastide Blanche is produced from a single vineyard of sixty year-old vines, with the soils here being red clay and chalk. The vineyard faces north and the *cépages* is the same as the Estagnol- ninety-two percent mourvèdre and eight percent grenache. It too is fermented with indigenous yeasts in *foudre* and aged in the same prior to bottling. The nose of the 2015 Fontanéou wafts from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, dark berries, a hint of tree bark, pepper, woodsmoke, some spiced meat, *garrigue* and a fantastic base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite precise in profile, with a rock solid core of fruit, great mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is also listed at 14.5 percent alcohol, but seems even a bit cooler fruit in profile than the Estagnol this year. It will need every bit as much cellaring time, but it is going to be a simply outstanding bottle of Bandol when it is ready to drink! 2028-2065. **94.**

CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINE INDEX AUTUMN 2020



Champagne Ayala (Aÿ): Brut Nature NV, “Brut Majeur” NV, “Rosé Majeur” Brut NV, 2013 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;

Champagne Barnaut (Bouzy): “Grande Réserve” Brut NV, “Quintessence du Pinot Noir” Blancs de Noir Brut NV, “Authentique Rosé” Brut NV,

Bollinger (Aÿ): “Special Cuvée” Brut NV, Rosé Brut NV, 2012 “la Grande Année” Brut Millésime, 2012 “la Grande Année” Rosé Brut Millésime;

Le Brun Servenay (Avize): “Mélodie en C” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV;

Chartogne-Taillet (Merfy): “Cuvée Ste. Anne” Brut NV, Le Rosé Brut NV, 2015 “Les Couarres” Extra Brut Millésime;

Dehours et Fils (Mareuil-le-Port): Grande Réserve Brut NV, “Les Vignes de la Vallée” Brut NV, “Oiel de Perdrix” Extra Brut NV,

Delamotte (Mesnil-sur-Oger): Blanc de Blancs Brut NV, Brut NV,

Dhondt-Grellet (Flavigny): “les Terres Fines” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV, “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV, “Dans un Premier Temps” Extra Brut NV,

Champagne Doyard (Vertus): Cuvée Révolution Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV, “Cuvée Vendémiare” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV, 2014 “Clos de l’Abbaye” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut

Millésime, 2012 Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime, 2015 Oiel de Perdrix Extra Brut Millésime,

Pierre Gimmonet et Fils (Cuis): *Blanc de Blancs “Cuis Premier Cru” Brut NV, “Oger Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV, 2012 “Cuvée Oenophile” Brut Nature Millésime, 2012 “Spécial Club” Extra Brut Millésime,*

Marc Hébrart (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ): *“Cuvée de Réserve” Brut NV, “Selection” Brut NV, Rosé Brut NV, 2015 “Spécial Club” Brut Millésime; 2013 “Rive Gauche-Rive Droit” Brut Millésime;*

Lilbert-Fils (Cramant) : *Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Base Year 2016), Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Base Year 2015), “Perle” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV;*

Marcel Moineaux (Chouilly): *2007 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;*

Mouzon-Leroux (Verzy): *“L’Ascendant” Solera Extra Brut, L’Incadescent Rosé Extra Brut NV, 2014 “L’Angélique” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime, 2012 “L’Angélique” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime, 2014 “L’Ineffable” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime, 2013 “La Blanche Voie” Extra Brut Millésime;*

Bruno Paillard (Reims): *“Rosé Première Cuvée” Extra Brut NV;*

Pierre Péters (Mesnil-sur-Oger): *“Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV, Réserve Oubliée Brut NV, 2012 “Les Chétilons” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime,*

Philipponnat (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ): *2012 Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime, 2012 “Cuvée 1522” Extra Brut Millésime, 2011 Clos des Goisses Extra Brut Millésime, 2010 “Les Cintres” Extra Brut Millésime, 2009 “La Rémissonne” Extra Brut Millésime, 2009 Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” Extra Brut Millésime;*

Ployez-Jacquemart (Ludes): *“Extra Quality” Brut NV, Extra Brut Rosé NV,*

Adrien Renoir (Verzy): *“le Terroir” Extra Brut NV, 2015 “les Montants” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime,*

Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley): *“Bearwallow Vineyard” Ultra Brut NV;*

Jean-Marc Sélèque(Pierry): *“Solessence Nature” Brut Nature NV, “Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Base Year 2016), “Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Base Year 2015), “Solessence” Extra Brut NV, “Solessence Rosé” Extra Brut NV, 2015 “Soliste Meunier” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime, 2014 “Partition 7 Parcelles” Extra Brut Millésime, 2015 “Infusion Meunier” Rosé Extra Brut Millésime;*

RECENTLY-TASTED SPARKLING WINES AUTUMN 2020



It has been six months now since I last wrote a feature on Champagne and Sparkling Wines. When I worked on the last article on these wines, it was still April and the New York area was “ground zero” for the pandemic, having just supplanted Italy and Spain as the epicenter for the global coronavirus pandemic. Half a year on, New York has controlled the virus to a large extent and it seems just a touch more congruous to be tasting sparkling wines again, as back in April, it sometimes felt like toasting the end of the world. I have not seen any specific market data on how sparkling wines sales have fared around the globe during this dismal year of 2020, but I have to imagine that they have plummeted, like so much other commercial activity during this unprecedented year of closures, distancing, political malfeasance and heroic efforts by medical personnel around the globe. In the daily challenges of 2020, there has been little cause for celebrating. However, perhaps in these darker times, there is at least the chance that more wine lovers will come to recognize that sparkling wines are not solely for celebratory purposes and start to find a place for them at the dinner table with more consistency, as there is little doubt that the market right now has an amazingly fine array of new releases available from some of the finest estates in the region. And like the wine regions of Germany, Champagne and other sparkling wine regions have benefitted to some degree by global warming (at least up until this

point in time), so we see a range of extremely successful vintages having graced the regions in the last ten or twelve years, which make for some stunning current releases and will supply the foundation of great sparkling wine bottlings still for many more years to come.

As I mentioned back in February, there remain still some importers and houses who were not responsive to my requests for samples for inclusion in this article, and I fully understand that sending out samples while their respective markets are shrinking dramatically from the pandemic is not high on their “to do” lists. I am fully empathetic with their situations and appreciate their past willingness to have sent samples, and hope that when brighter prospects once again return to our planet, I might have the opportunity to catch up on the new releases from these producers who I have not been able to cover in the last couple of iterations of this bi-annual report. Like everyone in the world, I too am looking with great anticipation to a return to some sort of normalcy around the globe when the coronavirus can be tamed and all of us can return to some semblance of our past lives. So, though there are some major new releases from houses such as Krug, Taittinger and Gosset (amongst others) now entering into the market, there are no reviews of the wines in the pages that follow. However, my timing for this article was sound enough to coincide with a plethora of truly stunning new releases from a wide number of Grower Champagne producers, the 2012 La Grande Année bottlings from Bollinger and a number of new Clos des Goisses releases from Philipponnat, so there are no shortage of great bottles covered in the pages that follow. As I noted in past features on Champagne, the truly stunning 2012 vintage remains readily available in the market and should be included in any well-stocked corner of the wine cellar, as it is a beautifully complete vintage that will produce cellar treasures destined to last a generation or two down the road. If your personal wine budgets have not been pinched by the pandemic, it makes good sense to focus on any of the 2012 vintage-dated bottlings still available from the top producers, as these wines are not going to last forever in the pipeline and it is truly a vintage of enormous potential for longer-term cellaring.

I have now started work planning a feature on the beauty of aged, non-vintage bottlings of Champagne for a future issue of the newsletter. I have been writing about how well non-vintage Champagne ages for more than a decade and imploring subscribers to start salting these wines away in their own personal cellars and allowing them additional bottle age before drinking them, as non-vintage wines improve every bit as dramatically as do vintage-dated wines from this region. As I have been taking my own advice during this same ten year span, I am starting to accrue a goodly selection of aged bottles of non-vintage sparkling wines in my own cellar, which I hope will serve as a good foundation for this future article. At this point in time, my hope is to keep most of these wines for the time being, in the hopes of being able to share them in tastings with friends at some point in the near future, after it is once again safe to convene together around the table to share wines. It is not that I could not write a deep article just based on what is in my cellar, but I simply do not want to taste these wines without having the possibility of sharing them with like-minded friends. I also hope to have the opportunity to entice a few producers in the Champagne region to also unearth a few older bottles of their non-vintage wines to open after visits to taste upcoming releases at the *maisons* while in Champagne, so that the article can be as broad-based and thorough as possible. Aging non-vintage Champagne is not a particularly traditional concept, even amongst *vignerons* in the region, so I do not know if requests to producers will bear fruit, but we shall see. Given the fact that, until quite recently, even the world’s greatest non-vintage bottling, Krug’s “Grande Cuvée” was not systematically

cellared by the proprietors, it is hard to know if proposing to taste older bottles of non-vintage bottlings while in the cellars in Champagne will be a fruitful endeavor.

I should take a moment in this article to reflect again upon the continued growth of enthusiasm amongst sparkling wine producers for lower and lower levels of *dosage*. I have mentioned this with some frequency in past features on sparkling wines, but the trend continues to be in the direction of lower levels of *dosage* for a great many of the world's finest bottlings. While lower *dosage* may not ultimately affect the overall quality of a given bottling over the long haul, it does most assuredly affect the wine's drinkability when it is first released into the market. Very, very few producers championing very low *dosage* levels in their current wines are practicing the same high standards of cellar aging as someone like Benoît Tarlant, who routinely holds back his low and zero *dosage* wines in the cellar for six to ten years of aging *sur latte* before disgorging them and sending them out into the market for his clients. Benoît and his family started this practice many years ago, and I fully understand that most other producers simply do not have the financial possibilities to age their wines this long in the cellars prior to release. But, what they need to realize is that it is a minority of their clients who are going to salt away their new releases for several more years in their own cellars, before they start to drink them. If there is not a possibility at the *maison* for further bottle aging, prior to release, for the snappy spine of acidity in a given sparkling wine to relax more, then there needs to be some buffering residual sugar in the wine to make it more approachable upon release and this needs to be taken into account when final *dosage* decisions are made by *vignerons*.

As I was working through this current round of sparkling wines samples, I was struck by how good so many of the wines are today, and how much the general overall quality of most Champagne and other sparkling wines has risen in the last ten to fifteen years. But, at the same time, as the current fashion has been to also dramatically lower *dosage* levels at a majority of *maisons*, these superior quality wines are not necessarily better to drink upon release than the wines of a generation ago, for their higher quality is often masked by far more aggressive acidity these days, with finishing *dosage* levels routinely now below four grams per liter for so many new releases. In a warmer year like 2009, these lower residual sugar levels can still work when the wines are released, but for more typically high acid years such as 2012, 2013 or 2014, such low levels of *dosage* practically demand that the new releases get buried in a cool, dark corner of the cellar for several more years before they will properly come into balance for primetime drinkability. As readers know, I am a huge proponent of aging sparkling wine (like any other world class non-sparkling wine), but I am also concerned with producers being able to grow the Sparkling wine market beyond the "wine of celebration" mantra of yesteryear to a wider and deeper audience that appreciates how good sparkling wines can be at the table. But, producers are not going to be able to grow their market if the wines are too shrill from the combination of their wines' traditionally high acidity levels and lower levels of *dosage* that do not adequately buffer these acids when the wines first hit the market. And, to my palate, the pendulum has currently swung too far in the direction of austerity due to a producer fascination with lower *dosage* levels.

We have to remember that the key fundament to every great wine is balance, and due to regional differences and vintage variations, each great wine finds its point of balance through a myriad of different manners. In Champagne and other sparkling wine regions, *dosage* has long

been one of the key foundational tools for building in perfect balance in the region's wines. I am not advocating that we go back to the era of the 1980s or early 1990s, when, at least here in the US market, most sparkling wines were overly sweet from a too generous *dosage*. I dislike as much as anyone the sloppily-done backends of wines that have been overly sweetened with excessive *dosage*, as too much residual sweetness on the backend from higher levels of *dosage* takes away precision and is certainly a flaw in the wine. But, there is a point of balance here that needs to be discussed, as there are simply too many wines to my palate today that do not have enough *dosage* in them to allow for a harmonious balance in the wine when it is released. I am fully cognizant of the vocal share of the market that really likes very low or non-*dosé* wines, but the question has to be, what is their percentage of the overall sparkling wine market? If these partisans of truly bone-dry sparkling wines are seventy or eighty percent of the market, then I am clearly off base in criticisms of lower *dosage* trends. But, my gut instinct is that the real percentage of purists in this regard is a minority of the sparkling wine market, and a veritable boatload of potential customers are getting left by the wayside with this continued trend downwards towards negligent grams of residual sugar in sparkling wines.



The following notes are listed in my customary fashion: non-Champagne Sparkling Wines first, followed by Brut Nature bottlings, non-vintage Brut and Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs, non-vintage Brut and Extra Brut, non-vintage Rosé, vintage-dated Blanc de Blancs, vintage-dated Brut and Extra Brut and vintage-date Rosé completing the various groupings.

Non-Champagne Sparkling Wines

Rhys Vineyards “Bearwallow Vineyard” Ultra Brut NV (Anderson Valley)

The first release of Rhys Vineyards Ultra Brut from the Bearwallow Vineyard is composed of a blend of sixty-four percent chardonnay and thirty-six percent pinot noir. This wine is from the base year of 2017, with reserve wines from 2016 included, but the plan is to eventually include reserve wines from a solera started in 2016, so it will be based on several more vintages as time goes by. The cuvée’s name beginning with the base year 2019 will be changed to “Reserve Perpetuelle” to reflect this, as that wine will include four vintages in it. The *vins clairs* went through malolactic fermentation, were barrel-fermented and were aged in cask until the June 21st of 2018 (all used casks), so the wine had a nice, extended *elevage* prior to bottling for secondary fermentation. It was disgorged on April 16th of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of pear, a dollop of gooseberry, a fine base of soil tones, bread dough, a touch of menthol and a very, very discreet foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a fine core, very refined *mousse*, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and extremely elegant finish. This is a very impressive first release from Kevin Harvey and Jeff Brinkman, though it did not hurt to have Rodolphe Péters of the Champagne house Pierre Péters consulting on this one! 2020-2045. **93.**

Non-Dosé Non-Vintage Bottlings

Champagne Ayala Brut Nature NV (Aÿ)

The new release of Ayala’s Brut Nature is composed of a *cépages* of forty percent each chardonnay and pinot noir, with twenty percent pinot meunier. The wine is given nearly four years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in June of 2019, which would make this from the base year of 2015. The bouquet is bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, peach, warm bread, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still nicely snappy, with a good core, fine focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex finish. This is well done. 2020-2040. **91.**

Doyard Cuvée Révolution Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Vertus)

The current release of Champagne Doyard’s Révolution Brut Nature is from the fine base year of 2012, with fifty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines from 2011 and 2010. Half of the *vins clairs* are raised in older Burgundy casks and half in stainless steel, with only fifteen percent of the blend undergoing malolactic fermentation. The wine is aged fully seven years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. It offers up an excellent bouquet of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, hazelnut, chalky minerality and a discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, good mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, beautifully-balanced finish. This is my idea of first class non-*dosé*, as the wine has been given plenty of time aging in the cellars to allow the acidity to back off and the wine to drink with generosity today, rather than some of the younger non-*dosé* bottlings out there that are really structured for a sword swallower when they are first released. This is superb. 2020-2035+. **92.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence Nature” Brut Nature NV (Pierry)

Jean-Marc Sélèque’s current release of “Solessence Nature” is from the base year of 2014, fifty percent of the cuvée from his solera of reserve wines. The *cépages* ends up this year being fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir and the wine was disgorged in October of 2019, after more than four years aging on its fine lees. The wine delivers superb aromatic complexity in its blend of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, a very

complex base of soil tones (from the seven different villages included in the cuvée), gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and very classy finish. The extended aging *sur latte* and the fifty percent reserve wines included here allows the Brut Nature style to work beautifully, without any issue with buffering overly snappy acids. This is superb juice. 2002-2045. **93.**

Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut and Extra Brut

Le Brun Servenay “Mélodie en C” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize)

This current release of Le Brun Servenay “Mélodie en C” non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2014, but as is customary with this blend, the base year only constitutes about a third of the cuvée, with the balance made up of reserve wines from the previous three vintages. The wine was disgorged in November of 2017 and finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter, and has now also witnessed three more years of evolution in bottle. The bouquet is beautifully refined today, offering up scents of pear, lemon, chalky minerality, brioche and a floral topnote redolent of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still beautifully zesty, with a fine core, good mineral undertow, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex and classy finish. This has not yet started to show any of the nuttiness of real maturity, but is relaxing very nicely and is getting into an admirable sweet spot for current drinking, without relinquishing any of its future aging potential. Fine juice. 2020-2040. **92.**

Delamotte Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

Delamotte’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut that is currently in the market is a lovely bottle. It is made entirely from grand cru vineyards, with the *vins clairs* fermented in stainless steel and the wine aged *sur latte* for a minimum of four years prior to disgorgement. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined and nicely high-toned constellation of pear, lemon, warm bread, white lilies and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, good mineral undertow and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is approachable today, but will be even better with another couple of years in the cellar to allow its fine girdle of acidity to relax a bit more and let out more complexity. 2020-2040. **91+.**

Dhondt-Grellet “les Terres Fines” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Flavigny)

The les Terres Fines bottling from Adrien Dhondt hails from the family’s vineyards in the premier cru village of Cuis, with the *vins clairs* fermented in a combination of both stainless steel tanks and casks and undergoing full malo. The wine is from the base year of 2016, with thirty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines from their perpetual cuvée, with the *vins clairs* bottled in May of 2017. The wine was disgorged in March of 2019 with a finishing *dosage* of two grams per liter. As the name of the cuvée implies, this is a classic expression of the very elegant *terroir* of Cuis, offering up a superb bouquet of golden delicious apples, pears, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and refined in profile, with a good core, fine soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is more high-toned in style, as befits a bottling from Cuis fruit and is a lovely example of Blanc de Blancs. 2020-2040. **91.**

Dhondt-Grellet “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Flavigny)

Adrien Dhondt’s current release of his non-vintage “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2016, with thirty percent of the cuvée composed of reserve wines from the family’s solera started in 1986. This wine is made entirely from fifty-five year-old vines in

Cramant, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented, going through malo and were bottled up for their second fermentation in May of 2017. The wine was disgorged in March of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of pear, apple, fresh almond, limestone minerality, brioche, white flowers and just a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent mineral drive and focus, elegant, frothy *mousse* and a long, zesty and nascently complex finish. This is still fairly youthful with its *dosage* of three grams and deserves at least a couple of years in the cellar to stretch its wings. It is impeccably well-made and will be a great drink in due course. 2022-2045. **92+.**

Doyard “Cuvée Vendémiare” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Vertus)

The new release of Champagne Doyard’s “Cuvée Vendémiare” non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut is from the base year of 2014, though this only comprised fifty percent of the blend. The remainder is thirty percent from 2013 and twenty percent from the vintage of 2012. Only fifteen percent of the *vins clairs* go through malo, with the forty percent of the wines raised in older Burgundy barrels prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. It was aged *sur latte* for fifty-six months and finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine delivers a superb nose of pear, golden delicious apple, chalky minerality, *crème patissière*, spring flowers and just a hint of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb mineral drive and cut, refined *mousse* and a long, perfectly balanced and extremely promising finish. This bottling is always built to age well (I have had superb examples with twenty years of cellaring) and the new release, though approachable now, really deserves some time in the cellar to start to deliver some of its secondary layers of complexity and soften up its acids. 2023-2050. **92.**

Pierre Gimmonet et Fils Blanc de Blancs “Cuis Premier Cru” Brut NV (Cuis)

The current offering of the Gimmonet Cuis Premier Cru non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2016, with thirty percent of the cuvée made up reserve wines from the vintages of 2012 through 2015. The wine spent nearly three years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in December of 2019, with a finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. It offers up a very expressive bouquet of apple, pear, hazelnut, chalky soil tones and a topnote of brioche. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive and bounce, slightly large bubbles and a long, complex and snappy finish. This is still a young wine and it will really hit its stride with two or three more years in the cellar, though it is already quite tasty. 2020-2040. **90+.**

Pierre Gimmonet et Fils “Oger Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cuis)

The current release of the Oger Grand Cru bottling from the Gimmonet family is from the base year of 2016 and includes reserve wines in the blend from the previous three vintages. The *vins clairs* go through full malo, are aged in stainless steel and the wine was disgorged in January of 2019 with a finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. It offers up a deep and complex nose of pear, apple, plenty of smokiness, a fine base of limestone minerality and a touch of brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a good core, fine mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and a long, well-balanced and still fairly youthful finish. This has broader shoulders and more mid-palate depth than the Cuis Premier Cru bottling above and really deserves a bit more bottle age to fully blossom. Good juice. 2022-2045. **91.**

Lilbert-Fils Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Cramant) Base Year 2016

Lilbert-Fils’ newest release of their non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2016, but fully fifty percent of the blend is composed of reserve wines this year. The wine was

disgorged in the spring of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. It delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, apple, fresh almond, chalky minerality, a touch of bread dough and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and youthfully complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, nicely mineral finish. To my palate, this wine deserves a year or two in the cellar to really blossom properly, but this is not to say that it not approachable today. It is just that there is a lot more here than currently meets the eye. 2023-2045+. **91.**

Lilbert-Fils Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Cramant) Base Year 2015

The bottling of Lilbert-Fils non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from the base year of 2015 is also still in the new York market right now, and the wine is drinking beautifully at the present time. Like the above, this is a blend of fifty percent 2015 juice and fifty percent reserve wines. It was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter, so it has a touch more buffering to it than the 2016 base year version. It was disgorged in the autumn of 2018. The wine delivers a fine aromatic blend of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of limestone minerality, hints of the pastry cream to come and a discreet topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, a fine spine of acidity, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This too remains quite youthful and will be a bit more relaxed on the palate with a touch more bottle age. 2022-2045+. **91.**

Lilbert-Fils “Perle” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cramant) Base Year 2015

The newest release of Lilbert-Fils, old vine cuvée of “Perle” hails from the superb base year of 2015, with one-third of the bottling from reserve wines from 2014. It was disgorged in September of 2019 and finished this year with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. It offers up a lovely bouquet of pear, delicious apple, chalky minerality, a touch of bread dough, white flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and sleek in profile, with a fine core, excellent mineral undertow, refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This bottling is finished at four bars of pressure, rather than the customary six, which makes it fairly approachable out of the blocks, despite the wine being built to age long and gracefully. 2020-2050. **92+.**

Pierre Péters “Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The new release of Rodolphe Péters “Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2017 and was aged two years *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in March of 2020. Twenty-five percent of the *vins clairs* did not go through malo in this blend, which was raised in a combination of stainless steel, cement and oak barrels, and as always, it includes a sizable percentage of reserve wines that date all the way back to the 1988 vintage. The finishing *dosage* is six grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine nose of apple, hazelnut, a touch of *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still nicely tensile (from the non-malo portion of the blend), with a good core, frothy *mousse*, fine soil signature and a long, complex finish. The reserve wines give some fine touches of maturity to the wine. 2020-2035. **91.**

Pierre Péters Réserve Oubliée Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The Pierre Péters Réserve Oubliée non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2014. The *vins clairs* were aged for eighteen months in a combination of stainless steel tanks, cement vats and *foudres* on their fine lees before they were bottled up for the second fermentation. The reserve wines in the blend all hail from a solera that was started by the domaine in the 1988 vintage. The wine is made entirely from grand cru vineyards and seventy-five percent of the cuvée went through malo. It spent at least five years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, with a

finishing *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine offers up a superb aromatic constellation of apple, pear, fresh almond, brioche, chalky minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, lovely balance and grip and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is an excellent wine, which is quite tasty already, but will be even better with another few years in the cellar, as there are more layers of complexity still to unfold here. 2020-2040. **92+**.

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Pierry)

The most current release of Jean-Marc Sélèque’s Quintette Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2016. Up through the 2013 bottling, this was a vintage-dated *cuvée*, but Jean-Marc began incorporation of twenty percent reserve wines for this wine beginning with the 2014 base year version. This bottle from the base year of 2016, with the reserve wines from his solera he started for this *cuvée* a few years back. Half of Quintette’s *vins clairs* are raised in stainless steel and go through full malo, while the other half are barrel-fermented and do not go through malolactic fermentation. Bottling for secondary fermentation took place in July of 2017 and the wine was disgorged in October of 2019 with a finishing *dosage* of two grams per liter. The bouquet offers up a beautifully refined blend of pear, fresh almond, warm bread, a complex base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is excellent. 2021-2045+. **92**.

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Pierry)

This bottling of Quintette is from the base year of 2015, and again, includes between twenty percent reserve wines in the *cuvée* from the reserve wine solera. The cellar treatment here is the same as in the 2016 base year version, with the disgorgement done in February of 2019 and again, a finishing *dosage* of two grams per liter. The nose jumps from the glass in a vivid combination of apple, lemon zest, chalky soil tones, brioche, almond and a hint of the *crème patissière* tones to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with a lovely core and soil signature, frothy *mousse* and impeccable balance on the long, complex and focused finish. The 2016 version has more of a girdle of acidity to it, which will relax with bottle age, but the 2015 base year here is already hitting on all cylinders and is drinking with great generosity. It will have no difficulties aging, but this is the bottling to look for in the market for current drinking (all the relevant details can be found on the back label). 2020-2045+. **92**.

Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut

Champagne Ayala “Brut Majeur” NV (Aÿ)

The current release of Champagne Ayala non-vintage “Brut Majeur” is comprised of a blend of forty percent each of pinot noir and chardonnay, with twenty percent pinot meunier. The wine spent a minimum of two and a half years aging *sur latte* before its disgorgement in October of 2019, which would make its base year 2016. It was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet here wafts from the glass in a refined blend of apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and frothy, with a good core, fine soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, complex finish. This is a very nice bottle of non-vintage Brut. 2020-2035+. **91**.

Champagne Barnaut “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Bouzy)

Philippe Secondé has been running this family domaine since 1985. The estate’s Grande Réserve bottling is their flagship wine, with the reserve wines included here part of a perpetual

cuvée that was started by the house's founder, Edmond Barnaut in 1874! The family has always kept it going, with fully fifty percent of the annual production each year dedicated to reserve wines, just to keep the blending tools at their sharpest. The Grande Réserve bottling is a classic Bouzy cuvée, composed of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay, with the current release from the base year of 2016 and disgorged in September of 2019, with a finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. The *vins clairs* all go through malo here. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a gentle topnote of hazelnut. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and classic finish. This is already drinking very well, but it has the good structural chassis of Bouzy bubbly and will be even better with five or six years' worth of bottle age. 2020-245. **91+**.

Champagne Barnaut “Quintessence du Pinot Noir” Blancs de Noir Brut NV (Bouzy)

The new release of Philippe Secondé's Quintessence du Pinot Noir is outstanding. The wine was disgorged in September of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a refined blend of apple, peach, warm bread, a fine soil signature, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, a serious girdle of acidity, elegant *mousse* and a long, very, very promising finish. This is certainly drinkable today, but a few years in the cellar are really going to allow it to start hitting on all cylinders! 2022-2045. **92**.



Bollinger “Special Cuvée” Brut NV (Aÿ)

The current release of Bollinger “Special Cuvée” is composed of its customary blend of sixty percent pinot noir, twenty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot meunier. It was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and offers up its classic pinot-shaded bouquet of white peach, apple, bread dough, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of hazelnut and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, a good spine of acidity, elegant *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is still a young wine and I would tuck it away in the cellar for at least a few years and let its acids relax a bit and its secondary layers of complexity emerge. 2020-2040. **91+**.

Chartogne-Taillet “Cuvée Ste. Anne” Brut NV (Merfy)

The current release of Alexandre Chartogne’s Cuvée Ste. Anne non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2017. The *vins clairs* were raised in a combination of both stainless steel and oak and the wine was not bottled up for secondary fermentation until July of 2018. The *cépages* is its customary blend of nearly equal parts of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier and the wine was disgorged in February of 2020, with a finishing *dosage* of just over five grams per liter. The wine offers up a vibrant bouquet of apple, white peach, a fine base of soil tones, brioche, gentle smokiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, elegant bubbles, fine balance and grip and a long, zesty and quite classy finish. This seems a touch longer on the backend to me than the last couple of iterations of this bottling that I have tasted and is first class, non-vintage Brut. But, this is still a fairly young wine and I would be inclined to give it some bottle age to let it start to blossom properly. 2022-2040. **90+**.

Dehours et Fils Grande Réserve Brut NV (Mareuil-le-Port)

The new release of the Dehours et Fils Grande Réserve non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2017, with one third of the bottling from Jérôme Dehours’ perpetual cuvée of reserve wines he started back in 1998. The *cépages* is sixty-seven percent pinot meunier, twenty-five percent chardonnay and eight percent pinot noir. The *vins clairs* are aged primarily in stainless steel (five percent old oak casks), go through full malo and are given nine months of extended aging prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The wine was disgorged in September of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of 3.8 grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of white peach, rye bread, a complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a quite delicate topnote of meunier floral elements. On the palate the wine is bright, pure and full-bodied, with a good core, fine soil signature, a still fairly brisk girdle of acidity, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a young wine that will be better with some bottle age, but it is very nicely balanced out of the blocks and I have no trouble drinking it in this youthful phase. 2020-2045. **92**.

Dehours et Fils “Les Vignes de la Vallée” Brut NV (Mareuil-le-Port)

Jérôme Dehours’ “Les Vignes de la Vallée” is from the base year of 2013, with one third of the blend from his solera of reserve wines. The *cépages* is sixty-seven percent pinot meunier, twenty-five chardonnay and eight percent pinot noir, with the *vins clairs* spending nine months aging prior to blending for secondary fermentation. It was disgorged in February of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of 5.6 grams per liter. It delivers fine aromatic complexity in its bouquet of white peach, nutskin, a complex base of soil, plenty of smokiness and a nice touch of rye bread in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a superb core, fine mineral undertow, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and

vibrant finish. This is an excellent bottle of non-vintage Brut that is drinking very well indeed, but has the structure and balance to age several decades. 2020-2045. **92+**.

Delamotte Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The current bottle of Delamotte non-vintage Brut in the market has a *cépages* of fifty-five percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and ten percent pinot meunier. It offers up a refined bouquet of apple chalky soil tones, warm bread, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused finish. I do not know exactly what the *dosage* was for this bottling, but it may be just a tad generous for Champagne fans gravitating more towards Extra Brut or the more moderately-*dosé* Brut bottlings. 2020-2035. **90**.

Dhondt-Grellet “Dans un Premier Temps” Extra Brut NV (Flavigny)

The Dans Un Premier Temps bottling from Adrien Dhondt is composed of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier, with the *vins clairs* raised in both casks and stainless steel tanks and everything undergoing malolactic fermentation. The wine is from the base year of 2016, with thirty percent of the cuvée made up of reserve wines and Monsieur Dhondt allowed the *vins clairs* to age until May of 2017 before bottling the wine up for secondary fermentation. It was disgorged in June of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine, youthful bouquet of apple, pear, hazelnut, brioche, chalky minerality, discreet smokiness and just a hint of buttery oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully snappy, with a superb core, fine mineral drive and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is an excellent bottle in the making, but, at least for my palate, the wine deserves a year or two in the cellar to relax its girdle of acidity a bit more and really start to blossom. It is going to be lovely. 2022-2045. **91+**.

Marc Hébrart “Cuvée de Réserve” Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The Marc Hébrart “Cuvée de Réserve” non-vintage Brut now in the market is from base year 2017, though this is only forty-five percent of the blend this year. It also includes fifteen percent 2016 juice, ten percent 2015 and fully thirty percent 2014. The blend this year works out to eighty-two percent pinot noir and eighteen percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* raised entirely in stainless steel, going through full malo and aging about twenty months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement in October of 2019, with a finishing *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, a touch of almond, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil tones and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core and mineral undertow, pinpoint bubbles and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is very tasty, with the significant percentage of reserve wines in the blend really adding complexity. 2020-2035. **91**.

Marc Hébrart “Selection” Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The current release of the from Jean-Paul Hébrart’s “Selection” bottling is from the base year of 2016, with forty percent of the cuvée comprised of reserve wines from the 2015 vintage. The *cépages* is seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with all of the vines contributing fruit for this bottling at least forty years of age. The *vins clairs* all go through malo and the wine was aged *sur latte* for three years prior to disgorgement in October of 2019. The nose offers up a fine blend of white peach, apple, sourdough bread, chalky soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is a fine bottle of non-

vintage Brut, with the slightly higher percentage of chardonnay here giving the wine a more floral aspect than in the Cuvée de Réserve. 2020-2035. **91.**

Mouzon-Leroux “L’Ascendant” Solera Extra Brut (Verzy)

Sébastien Mouzon’s “L’Ascendant” bottling is a solera of previous vintages of his non-vintage “L’Atavique” cuvée, with the current release being a blend of fifty percent from the 2014 base year and the other half composed of the 2013 through 2010 base year versions from the solera. The wine was disgorged in January of 2019 and is non-*dosé* this year. It offers up a deep and complex bouquet of apple, white peach, sourdough bread, Verzy’s steely minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine mineral drive and cut, elegant *mousse* and a long, firm and youthful finish. For my palate, this wine needs a bit more bottle age to let the acids soften up a bit more, but all of the constituent components are in place to be a superb drink in a few more years. Brut Nature purists will no doubt find it very enjoyable already! 2023-2045+. **92+.**

Ployez-Jacquemart “Extra Quality” Brut NV (Ludes)

The current release of Ployez-Jacquemart’s “Extra Quality” non-vintage Brut was disgorged in November of 2019, so I believe that this is from the base year of 2015, as Laurence Ployez gives this bottling a minimum of three years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine is beautifully precise and complex on the nose, jumping from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, brioche, chalky soil tones, a hint of sweet hazelnut, gentle floral tones and just a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core, utterly refined *mousse*, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex and still quite youthful finish. This wine has a marvelous track record of aging and will be even better three to five years down the road. As is so often the case, this is one of my very favorite non-vintage Brut bottlings currently in the market. 2020-2050. **92.**

Adrien Renoir “le Terroir” Extra Brut NV (Verzy)

The le Terroir non-vintage Brut bottling from Adrien Renoir is composed of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir. Eighty percent of the *vins clairs* are vinified and raised in stainless steel, with the other twenty percent barrel-fermented. The wine is from the base year of 2016, with twenty percent reserve wines from 2015 included and it was bottled up for secondary fermentation in May of 2017. The wine was disgorged in May of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. It offers up a superb bouquet of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of Verzy’s “steely” minerality, almond and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with vibrant acids, fine focus and grip, frothy *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and classic finish. Verzy always is a beautifully mineral example of Champagne and this release of le Terroir from Monsieur Renoir completely embodies that maxim. This is already very tasty, but it will be even better with a few years in the cellar to let its secondary layers of complexity unfold. 2020-2040+. **91+.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence” Extra Brut NV (Pierry)

Jean-Marc Sélèque’s non-vintage, Extra Brut bottling of “Solessence” hails from the base year of 2017, with fifty percent of the cuvée from his solera of perpetual reserve wines. The *cépages* is the same on the Solessence Nature bottling: fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir, and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter when it was disgorged in February of 2002. The wine delivers a superb bouquet of pear, apple, fresh almond, warm bread, chalky soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and youthfully snappy, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, frothy *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish.

This is a beautifully buffered example of Extra Brut and is quite tasty already, but there is plenty more complexity to unleash here with further bottle age and I would opt to tuck this away in the cellar for two or three more years and really let it start hitting on all cylinders. First class juice. 2020-2045. **92+**.

Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut Rosé

Champagne Ayala “Rosé Majeur” Brut NV (Aÿ)

The current release of Champagne Ayala “Rosé Majeur” non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2015 and comprised of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot noir and ten percent pinot meunier, with six percent of the pinot noir being still red wine. The *vins clairs* are fermented and raised in stainless steel, the wine was aged three years *sur latte* before its disgorgement in March of 2019 and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of strawberries, tangerine, bread dough, chalky minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, excellent mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is lovely non-vintage Rosé that should age very nicely and will be even better with five or six years’ worth of bottle age. 2020-2035+. **91+**.

Champagne Barnaut “Authentique Rosé” Brut NV (Bouzy)

The newly arrived version of Philippe Secondé’s “Authentique Rosé” is from the base year of 2018 and was disgorged in March of 2020 with a finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. This is made from the *saignée* method and only includes ten to fifteen percent chardonnay in the *cépages*, with the balance made up of pinot noir, with all of the grapes hailing from the family’s vineyards in Bouzy. The wine is deep garnet in color and offers up a superb bouquet of cherries, rhubarb, chalky soil tones, rye bread, a bit of orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and youthful, with a fine core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the long and very promising finish. Monsieur Secondé likes to release this after only eighteen to twenty months aging *sur latte*, to preserve its youthful verve, but I would be inclined to tuck my bottles away in the cellar for another year or two and really let it blossom completely. Fine juice. 2021-2040+. **92**.

Bollinger Rosé Brut NV (Aÿ)

The new release of Bollinger non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of sixty-two percent pinot noir, twenty-four percent chardonnay and fourteen percent pinot meunier, with five percent of the pinot noir being still red wine from the villages of Aÿ and Verzenay. The wine is finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter in this iteration and delivers a fine, youthful bouquet of white cherries, peach, caraway seed, rye toast and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthful, with a fine girdle of acidity, a good core and soil signature, frothy *mousse* and a long, promising finish. This is approachable today, but to my palate, it cries out for a bit more bottle age to really blossom and start to drink with generosity. 2022-2040+. **91**.

Chartogne-Taillet Le Rosé Brut NV (Merfy)

Though the bottling from the base year of 2016 is imminent in the market here in New York, I was fortunate to receive a sample of the 2015 base year of Alexandre Chartogne’s non-vintage Rosé, so I was able to see the wine with nearly a full year of additional bottle age. The wine is composed of a blend of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir, with eight percent of the pinot being still red wine. Sixty percent of the *vins clairs* are raised in barrel and the wine is given three years aging *sur latte*, prior to its disgorgement in December of 2019 and a

finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine offers up a refined bouquet of white cherries, orange peel, a touch of rhubarb, a lovely base of soil tones, dried roses and a nice touch of gentle spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still nicely snappy, with a good core, fine soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is starting to drink very well, but will continue to age gracefully. 2020-2035. **91.**

Dehours et Fils “Oiel de Perdrix” Extra Brut NV (Mareuil-le-Port)

The Dehours et Fils “Oiel de Perdrix” non-vintage Extra Brut is from the base year of 2017 and is based on a blend of seventy-eight percent pinot meunier, seventeen percent chardonnay and five percent *vin rouge*. The wine was disgorged in July of 2019 and is non-*dosé* this year. The color is a very pale salmon and the wine offers up a beautifully expressive nose of tangerine, caraway seed, sourdough bread, a refined base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a hint of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is young, full and complex, with a fine core, good soil signature and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, zesty and vibrant finish. This is very well-balanced for such a young wine with no *dosage*, and is drinking very well already, but will also age quite gracefully. Most impressive. 2020-2040+. **92.**

Marc Hébrart Rosé Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The new release of the Jean-Paul Hébrart’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a *cépages* of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir, with just over six percent of the pinot being still red wine. The wine is from the base year of 2017, with reserve wines included from 2016. The *vins clairs* go through malo and the wine was disgorged in August of 2019, after eighteen months aging on its fine lees; the finishing *dosage* was 6.5 grams. The wine is a very pale salmon color and offers up a very pretty bouquet of white cherries, nectarine, chalky soil tones, warm biscuits, just a hint of caraway seed and a gentle topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This is still a young wine, but so well balanced that it is quite drinkable right out of the blocks; it should age quite gracefully as well and will be more complex with some time in the cellar. 2020-2035. **90+.**

Mouzon-Leroux L’Incandescent Rosé Extra Brut NV (Verzy)

The Mouzon-Leroux L’Incandescent Rosé Extra Brut currently in the market is entirely from the fine base year of 2015. It is composed exclusively of pinot noir from Verzy, with twenty-five percent of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented, and the wine takes its salmon color from twenty-five hours of maceration at the start of fermentation. It was disgorged in January of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. The bouquet is a lovely and vinous blend of cherries, rhubarb, stony minerality, rye bread, orange peel and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, brisk acids, fine focus and mineral undertow, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a great bottle of Rosé for serving throughout the meal and will work just fine with red meat. 2020-2045. **92.**

Bruno Paillard “Rosé Première Cuvée” Extra Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of Bruno Paillard “Rosé Première Cuvée” is from the base year of 2015, with its customary generous foundation of reserve wines dating back to 1985. The wine is primarily pinot noir, with a minor percentage of chardonnay included. The wine was disgorged in October of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of less than six grams per liter. The color is its customary pale salmon and the nose offers up a very refined blend of tangerine, wild strawberry, a hint of watermelon, chalky soil tones, brioche and a touch of rose petal in the upper register.

On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, outstanding balance and grip, fine mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, refined and vibrant finish. This is stellar juice. 2020-2050. **93+**.

Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Rosé NV (Ludes)

The current release of Laurence Ployez's non-vintage Extra Brut Rosé is from the base year of 2016. The *cépages* this year is fifty percent chardonnay, thirty-seven percent pinot noir and thirteen percent pinot meunier. Ten percent of the pinot noir is still red wine, giving the wine its lovely salmon color. The wine was disgorged in March of 2020. It offers up a really lovely bouquet of white cherry, orange peel, a touch of rhubarb, chalky minerality, caraway seed, gentle spice tones and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely mineral undertow, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. As this is fairly low in *dosage* (I do not have the exact number), it is still a bit young and will be even better when the acidity relaxes a bit more with some bottle age. First class Rosé. 2020-2045. **92+**.



Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence Rosé” Extra Brut NV (Pierry)

Jean-Marc Sélèque's “Solessence Rosé” now in the market is from the base year of 2017, with forty percent of this blend from a solera of perpetual reserve wines. The *cépages* is forty-five percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent pinot noir, with some of the meunier seeing some maceration time and a bit of the pinot noir being still red wine. The

wine was aged *sur latte* two years and disgorged in March of 2020, with a finishing *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. The wine is a lovely, delicate salmon color and delivers fine aromatic complexity in its constellation of strawberries, tangerine, a hint of watermelon, wheat toast, chalky soil tones and a nice hint of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with fine mineral drive, a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, nascently complex finish. This is an excellent wine, but still young, and I would give it a couple of years' worth of bottle age before broaching it, as the slightly lower percentage of reserve wines in the blend makes it just a touch more tensile out of the blocks than the regular Solescence Extra Brut this year. 2022-2045. **91+**.

Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs

2015 Adrien Renoir “les Montants” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Verzy)

This *lieu à dit* bottling from les Montants in Verzy is produced from *selection massale* chardonnay vines that were planted all the way back in 1961. The soil in this vineyard is pure chalk and the *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel, bottled in May of 2016 and given two and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in December of 2019. The finishing *dosage* this year was 2.5 grams per liter. The wine delivers fine aromatics in its bouquet of apple, pear, hazelnut, complex, chalky minerality, brioche and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, a very good girdle of acidity and very good balance and grip on the long and classy finish. The Montagne de Reims village of Verzy is usually pinot noir territory, so it is fascinating to taste a Blanc de Blancs from fruit grown solely in this village. Fine juice. 2020-2045. **92**.

2014 Doyard “Clos de l’Abbaye” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Vertus)

The Clos de l’Abbaye is an actual walled-in vineyard in Vertus, just behind the Doyards’ winery. The chardonnay vines here are all at least sixty years of age and are farmed biodynamically. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and aged in cask, do not go through malolactic fermentation and aged for four-plus years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The 2014 Clos de l’Abbaye offers up a superb bouquet of pear, fresh almond, limestone minerality, incipient notes of pastry cream, just a whisper of buttery oak and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, great mineral drive and grip, zesty acids, very refined *mousse* and a long, extremely refined finish that closes still with a bit of buttery oak influence. The touch of oak influence will eventually be subsumed in the other elements of the wine with further bottle age, but it is hardly obtrusive, for the intrepid who might like to enjoy a bottle of this excellent Blanc de Blancs on the early side! 2020-2050+. **94**.

2014 Sébastien Mouzon “L’Angélique” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Verzy)

Sébastien Mouzon has discontinued his participation in the Special Club group, as he is opposed to having to use the extra heavy gauge bottles for these wines, feeling that they have a heavier carbon footprint than is good for the long-term health of the planet. But, he still has a few wines in the cellar that were bottled in these bottles prior to his decision to suspend his participation, such as the 2014 L’Angélique Blanc de Blancs. The wine is composed entirely of chardonnay grown in Verzy, with the wine having spent four years aging on its fine lees prior to its disgorgement in July of 2019. The finishing *dosage* here was 1.5 grams per liter. The bouquet is beautifully refined, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, fresh almond, bread dough, steely minerality, a touch of oak and a discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp,

full-bodied and totally defined by its underlying minerality, with a lovely core of fruit, pinpoint bubbles, excellent focus and balance and a very long, nascently complex and racy finish. Due to its quite low *dosage*, this wine really needs some more bottle age to blossom properly, but all of the constituent components are in place for future brilliance! 2025-2055+. **93.**

2013 Ayala Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

Though Ayala is based in the beautiful town of Aÿ, their vintage Blanc de Blancs all hails from vineyard sources in the Côte des Blancs. The wine was disgorged in November of 2018 after four and a half years aging *sur latte* and offers up a refined bouquet of pear, apple, lemon blossoms, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the precise, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This bottling has an excellent track record for aging, so I would tuck it away for three to five years and let the girdle of acidity relax a bit more and allow the wine to fully blossom. Fine juice. 2023-2055. **92+.**

2012 Doyard Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Vertus)

The 2012 Doyard Blanc de Blancs vintage Extra Brut is composed entirely from vineyards that are at least fifty years of age, with seventy percent of fruit from their vineyards in Avize and ten percent each from Oger, Cramant and Mesnil-sur-Oger. The *vins clairs* do not undergo malo and are raised solely in used Burgundy casks. The wine spent more than seven years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in February of 2002 and was finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, gentle smokiness, warm biscuits, chalky soil tones and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely depth at the core, fine soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and lovely balance and grip on the long, refined and nicely mature finish. I love the 2012 vintage in Champagne, but most of the bottlings have already come and gone, except for some of the priciest *Têtes de Cuvées*, so this is a golden opportunity to still latch onto one of the stars of the vintage without wiping out the bank account! 2020-2045+. **93.**

2012 Pierre Gimmonet et Fils “Cuvée Oenophile” Brut Nature Millésime (Cuis)

The 2012 Pierre Gimmonet et Fils “Cuvée Oenophile” Brut Nature is composed entirely of chardonnay from the villages of Oger, Cramant, Avize and Cuis. The *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel and go through full malo. The 2012 version and was disgorged in October of 2019, after six and a half years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined bouquet of pear, golden delicious apple, almond, a fine base of chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely balance and grip, frothy *mousse* and a long, classy finish. The combination of the ripeness of the 2012 vintage’s fruit and fully six and a half years aging prior to disgorgement allows this wine to drink beautifully, without any *dosage*. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2040. **92+.**

2012 Pierre Gimmonet et Fils “Spécial Club” Extra Brut Millésime (Cuis)

This bottling is labeled as the cuvée of “Grands Terroirs de Champagne”, as it is composed of a blend of sixty percent fruit from Cramant, thirty percent from Chouilly and ten percent from Cuis. It was aged *sur latte* for six years prior to its disgorgement in January of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of pear, delicious apple, pastry cream, chalky soil tones, brioche and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On

the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and classy, with fine depth in the mid-palate, lovely mineral undertow, frothy *mousse* and lovely focus and balance on the long, complex and quite elegant finish. This is very refined. 2020-2045+. **92+**.

2012 Sébastien Mouzon “L’Angélique” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Verzy)

Sébastien Mouzon’s 2012 vintage bottling of L’Angélique was bottled prior to his brief enrollment in the Special Club team, so this vintage is in one of his regular bottles. Fifty-five percent of the *vins clairs* were raised in oak casks and the wine was disgorged in October of 2018, after five-plus years of aging *sur latte*. This particular release of the 2012 is non-*dosé*. The bouquet is starting to show some lovely secondary layering in its blend of pear, apple, hazelnut, warm bread, a beautiful base of minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature and grip, very refined *mousse* and a long, complex and focused finish. I am usually one lobbying for a bit more *dosage*, but here, there is no need, as the combination of the riper character of the 2012 vintage and the extended time aging on the fine lees has produced a wine of impeccable balance without any *dosage*. 2020-2045+. **94**.

2012 Pierre Péters “Les Chétillons” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The 2012 vintage of Les Chétillons from Rodolphe Peters is an outstanding wine. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a ripe and pure constellation of pear, fresh almond, chalky minerality, brioche, white flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still nicely tensile, with a marvelous core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow and grip, impeccable balance, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and still climbing finish. At eight years of age, the 2012 Les Chétillons is quite approachable, but in reality, is still a fairly young wine and will be even a better drink five to ten years down the road. First class juice. 2020-2055+. **94**.

2007 Marcel Moineaux Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Chouilly)

The 2007 Marcel Moineaux Blanc de Blancs is all produced from the family’s vineyards in the grand cru village of Chouilly. The *vins clairs* are fermented and aged in stainless steel and do not go through malolactic fermentation. The wine at thirteen years of age offers up baked apple, orange zest, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This is drinking very nicely today and seems to be at its apogee. 2020-2030. **91**.

Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut

2015 Chartogne-Taillet “Les Couarres” Extra Brut Millésime (Merfy)

Alexandre Chartogne’s 2015 Les Couarres is composed entirely of pinot noir. He barrel-ferments the *vins clairs* for this wine and gave them a bit of extra aging in the cellar prior to bottling them up for secondary fermentation in July of 2016. It aged four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in June of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of “approximately” six grams per liter. The wine delivers a superb bouquet of apple, white peach, a touch of hazelnut, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a bit of oak influence showing up on the backend, a fine core, lovely soil signature, refined *mousse* and a long, classy finish. This is certainly quite drinkable today, but the bit of palate oakiness it shows today might be a good reason to give it a few years in the

cellar, just to allow this element to integrate as well on the palate as it already has on the nose. 2023-2055. **92+**.

2015 Marc Hébrart “Spécial Club” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2015 Champagne Marc Hébrart “Spécial Club” Brut Millésime is comprised of a blend of sixty-one percent pinot noir and thirty-nine percent chardonnay. The *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel and go through full malo. The wine was aged for just over three years *sur latte*, disgorged in July of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. It offers up a fine nose of apple, white peach, warm bread, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and wide open in personality, with good depth at the core, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and very tasty finish. Good juice. 2020-2045. **92+**.

2015 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Soliste Meunier” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime (Pierry)

Jean-Marque Sélèque’s “Soliste Meunier” hails from a parcel of vines in the *lieu à dit* of les Gouttes d’Or in Pierry, which was planted to *selection massale* cuttings of pinot meunier all the way back in 1951. The *vins clairs* were all raised in three hundred or three hundred and fifty liter *demi-muids* until July of 2016, without going through malolactic fermentation. The wine was aged *sur latte* for three and a half years (under cork) and finished with a *dosage* of 1.5 grams after its disgorgement in January of 2020. The wine offers up a beautifully expressive nose of white peach, apple, a potpourri of meunier floral tones, hazelnut, a gorgeous base of minerality and just a hint of buttery oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, vibrant and full-bodied, with elegant *mousse*, a great core and mineral drive, zesty acids and laser-like focus on the long, perfectly balanced and complex finish. Pure pinot meunier-based Champagne simply does not get any better than this! Despite its low *dosage* level, the wine is already drinking very nicely, though the energy wrapped up within will carry it very far into the future! 2020-2055+. **94**.

2014 Sébastien Mouzon “L’Ineffable” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime (Verzy)

Sébastien Mouzon 2014 L’Ineffable Blanc de Noirs is another wine bottled in Special Club bottles, so there are still some of these heavier bottles to work through in his cellars, though they are not labeled as Special Club cuvées. I should mention that this wine is also not labeled as a vintage-dated wine, but this information appears on the back label, so I have taken the liberty. The wine is entirely composed of Verzy pinot noir, was aged *sur latte* four-plus years and disgorged in November of 2019, with a finishing *dosage* of 1.5 grams per liter. The bouquet offers up a pure and complex combination of white peach, apple, sourdough bread, gorgeous minerality, a whisper of buttery oak and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a lovely core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, complex and still quite youthful finish. This is a great wine in the making, but to my palate, it needs four to five years in the cellar before starting to drink it. 2025-2065. **93+**.

2014 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Partition 7 Parcelles” Extra Brut Millésime (Pierry)

Jean-Marque Sélèque named this cuvée for the seven different plots of vines he uses each year to make up this bottling. These include chardonnay from les Frileux in Épernay, Moque-Bouteille in Dizy, la Justice in Vertus, Bases Ronces in Mardeuil and les Porgeons in Pierry. Pinot meunier comes from les Gouttes d’Or in Pierry and pinot noir from les Gayères (also in Pierry). There are seven barrels of *vins clairs* here- one from each *lieux à dits*, with the 2014 version ending up with a *cépages* of seventy-two percent chardonnay and fourteen percent each

of pinot meunier and pinot noir. The wine was aged under cork, rather than crown cap, for four and a half years prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of two grams per liter. The wine offers up a beautiful bouquet of apple, pear, hazelnut, a very complex base of soil tones, dried flowers, gentle smokiness and a discreet foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core, lovely soil signature and cut, refined *mousse* and a long, perfectly balanced and zesty finish. This is an outstanding bottle! 2020-2050+. **94.**

2013 Marc Hébrart “Rive Gauche-Rive Droit” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2013 “Rive Gauche-Rive Droit” Brut Millésime from Jean-Paul Hébrart is a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, with all of the grapes hailing from grand cru vineyards. The pinot noir comes from Aÿ and the chardonnay from the Côte des Blancs villages of Oiry, Avize and Chouilly. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented for this cuvée and aged in cask prior to bottling up for the secondary fermentation. The wine spent five years aging *sur latte* and was disgorged in April of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of white peach, apple, a fine base of soil, fresh-baked bread, a touch of oak influence and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine core of fruit, impressive mineral drive and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is still youthful, but is so impeccably balanced that it is already very easy to drink- though it is bound to further improve with cellaring. Fine juice. 2020-2045. **92.**

2013 Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “La Blanche Voie” Extra Brut Millésime (Verzy)

The 2013 La Blanche Voie is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir from this *lieu à dit* in Verzy. This vintage was bottled in a Special Club wide bottle. The *vins clairs* all go through malo and were raised half in older cask and half in stainless steel; the wine was given fifty-six months aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in July of 2019; it received no *dosage*. The bouquet is pure and very refined in personality, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, brioche, chalky minerality, dried flowers and the faintest suggestion of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, young and full-bodied, with a superb core, great Verzy mineral drive and cut, elegant *mousse* and a very long, complex and nicely balanced finish. I would have loved a few grams of *dosage* for this bottling, just so one would not need to defer gratification for any extended time. The wine is beautifully made, but to my palate, still a tad young for primetime drinking and I would opt to cellar it for at least a few more years. 2024-2055. **93+.**

2012 Bollinger “la Grande Année” Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The 2012 vintage of “la Grande Année” from Bollinger is composed of a *cépages* of sixty-five percent pinot noir (primarily from Verzenay and Aÿ) and thirty-five percent chardonnay (from Mesnil-sur-Oger and Oiry). The *vins clairs* are all barrel-fermented and aged in cask and *demi-muids* for six full months prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The wine was given just over six years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in July of 2019; it was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. It offers up a pure, complex and nicely maturing bouquet of apple, peach, hazelnut, gorgeous soil tones, brioche and just a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine acids and grip, very elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This has the classic, elegant and very discreetly oxidative Bollinger style to it, coupled to the excellent girdle of acidity of 2012. First class juice. 2020-2040. **93+.**

2012 Philipponnat Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2012 Philipponnat Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime is composed entirely of pinot noir, with all of the fruit hailing from vineyards on the Montagne de Reims or the *maison's* vineyards in Mareuil or Aÿ. Part of the *vins clairs* are raised in stainless steel and go through malo, with the other portion of the blend barrel-fermented and not undergoing malolactic fermentation. It was disgorged in May of 2020 after seven years aging *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The bouquet is flat out beautiful, wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, apple, brioche, chalky soil tones, raw almond and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and refined, with a superb core of fruit, great mineral drive and bounce, very elegant *mousse* and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is drinking very, very well out of the blocks, but has the balance and structure to also cruise along superbly well for several decades in the cellar. 2012 was a great year for pinot noir and this is abundantly clear in this outstanding wine! 2020-2050+. **93+**.

2012 Philipponnat “Cuvée 1522” Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2012 vintage of the Cuvée 1522 from Philipponnat is made primarily from fruit grown in their superb *lieu à dit* of le Léon in Aÿ, with a bit more pinot coming from Mailly and the chardonnay from the village of Verzy. The *cépages* is seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* treated the same as with the 2012 Blanc de Noirs (a portion barrel-fermented, without malo, and the rest fermented in stainless steel). The wine was aged seven years on its fine lees and disgorged in February of 2020, with the finishing *dosage* being 4.5 grams per liter. The wine is beautifully refined on the nose, offering up scents of apple, nectarine, fresh-baked bread, a beautiful base of soil, dried flowers, just a whisper of oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and has as fine spine of acidity, with a lovely core of fruit, great mineral drive and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, youthful and very promising finish. The 2012 vintage of Cuvée 1522 is a touch more youthful than the lovely Blanc de Noirs bottling out of the blocks, and deserves a couple of years in the cellar to relax structurally and really blossom. This is going to be a gorgeous bottle in due course. 2022-2055. **93+**.

2011 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2011 vintage of Clos des Goisses is quite unique in the annals of this great single vineyard Champagne, as it is composed solely of pinot noir in this year! This the first vintage to ever be crafted exclusively from pinot noir. While the 2011 vintage favored the pinot noir grape here, the decision to only utilize this variety was also predicated on four parcels of chardonnay having to be replanted in the hillside vineyard prior to the 2011 growing season. Eighty percent of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented and none went through malolactic fermentation. The wine was aged *sur latte* for fully eight years prior to disgorgement in March of 2020. It was finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautifully refined blend of white peach, a hint of fresh apricot, a gorgeous base of chalky minerality, almond, brioche and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly suave in personality, with a superb core, great mineral drive and bounce, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is a stunning vintage for Clos des Goisses and it is going to be fascinating to watch this wine age over the coming decades and see how its exclusively pinot noir foundation evolves as the underlying *terroir* here grows in its influence in the blend with extended bottle age. A stunning wine! 2020-2075+. **97**.



2010 Philipponnat “Les Cintres” Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2010 Les Cintres from Champagne Philipponnat is also composed entirely from pinot noir in this vintage, though this is more customary, as the two *lieux à dits* of les Grandes Cintres and les Petits Cintres in the heart of the Clos des Goisses are pinot noir parcels. The *vins clairs* are raised entirely in cask for this wine, do not go through malo and were aged *sur latte* for fully nine years before disgorgement in March of 2020; it was finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The nose delivers a superb aromatic constellation of apple, fresh apricot, warm bread, a complex base of limestone, a bit of buttery oak and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with excellent mineral undertow, a gorgeous core of fruit, a zesty girdle of acidity, elegant *mousse* and a very long, complex and superbly balanced finish. The 2010 Les Cintres is a bit more tightly-knit out of the blocks than the 2011 Clos des Goisses, and I would be inclined to not touch a bottle of this beautiful wine for at least another five years and really let it blossom properly! 2025-2085. 96.

2009 Philipponnat “La Rémissionne” Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The Philipponnat family’s parcel of “La Rémissionne” lies adjacent to Clos des Goisses, but is not one of the *lieux à dits* that make up the Clos. It is just below the Clos des Goisses, down close to the canal that runs just south of the town center. The exposition turns slightly to the southeast. The parcel is planted entirely to pinot noir and the *vins clairs* here do not go through malolactic fermentation and are raised entirely in casks. It was aged *sur latte* more than eight and a half years and disgorged in October of 2019, with a finishing *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and pure, offering up scents of apple, white peach, bread dough,

chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and snappy, with a lovely girdle of acidity, a beautiful core of fruit and mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is not quite as weighty at the core as the various Clos des Goisses bottlings (probably due to more morning sun), but it is an utterly beautiful bottle of bubbly and will age gloriously well. In a perfect world, this would receive three to five more years' worth of bottle age prior to broaching. 2023-2075+. **94.**

Vintage-Dated Rosé

2015 Doyard “Oiel de Perdrix” Extra Brut Millésime (Vertus)

The 2015 Doyard Oiel de Perdrix Extra Brut Millésime is composed from a *cépages* of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay, with the pinot noir hailing from Aÿ and the chardonnay from Avize. The *vins clairs* do not go through malolactic and are given some extended aging in old Burgundy casks prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation in September of 2016. The wine was aged thirty-six months *sur latte* and disgorged in September of 2019, with a finishing *dosage* of three grams per liter. It is quite pale in color and offers up a beautiful bouquet of white cherry, peach, rye bread, chalky soil tones, dried flowers, discreet spice tones and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with fine mid-palate depth and soil signature, bright acids, frothy *mousse* and a long, vibrant finish. This is a beautiful wine that is absolutely built for the table! 2020-2040+. **93.**

2015 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Infusion Meunier” Rosé Extra Brut Millésime (Pierry)

The 2015 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Infusion Meunier” vintage Rosé is from *selection massale* vines planted in 1964, from the les Charmiers vineyard in Pierry. The grapes are destemmed and the wine is given twenty-four hours of maceration (prior to crushing) and then raised in cask for nine months prior to bottling. It is aged under cork for three and a half years, disgorged in December of 2019 and given a *dosage* of 1.5 grams per liter. The wine is a fairly deep cherry red in hue and delivers beautiful aromatics in its constellation of blood orange, rhubarb, a complex base of soil tones, rye bread, gentle smokiness, dried rose petals and a nice topnote of spice. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely vinous in personality, with a lovely core and soil signature, refined *mousse*, bright acids and a long, nascently complex and quite open finish. This wine will develop more complexity with bottle age, but structurally, it is already quite accessible and will be hard not to drink in the first blush of youth. It being composed of solely old vine pinot meunier gives it an admirable lightness of step on the palate that is not always replicated with vinous style Rosé Champagne made solely from pinot noir. 2020-2045+. **93.**

2012 Bollinger “la Grande Année” Rosé Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The 2012 Bollinger “la Grande Année” Rosé is a blend of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay. Five percent of the pinot noir is added as still red wine to provide the wine's beautiful salmon color. The *vins clairs* are all barrel-fermented and the wine was aged *sur latte* under cork, rather than crown cap, for more than six and a half years prior to its disgorgement in January of 2020. The finishing *dosage* for the 2012 vintage is eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a beautifully refined aromatic constellation of strawberries, tangerine, a hint of watermelon, chalky soil tones, wheat toast and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and stunningly balanced, with a superb core, great mineral drive and focus, very elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and very, very complex finish. This is the epitome of refinement and is absolutely stunning this year! 2020-2045+. **94.**

2009 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2009 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” Extra Brut is composed of a blend of sixty-four percent pinot noir and thirty-six percent chardonnay this year. The *vins clairs* are all barrel-fermented and raised in cask, without going through malolactic fermentation. The wine was aged *sur latte* for ten years, prior to its disgorgement in March of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The wine offers up a complex and utterly refined bouquet of tangerine, *fraises du bois*, a gorgeous base of chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread, a hint of the caraway seed to come with bottle age, gentle smokiness and spice tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with a superb core, outstanding mineral drive, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and a very long, vibrant and still quite youthful finish. This is already a joy to drink (believe me, I did not spit this sample!), but the wine is only beginning its journey and will be even more compelling to drink a decade or two down the road! It is one of the most elegant examples of the 2009 vintage I have had the pleasure to taste. 2020-2075+. **96+**.

RECENTLY-TASTED BEAUJOLAIS THE VERY FIRST STELLAR 2019S AND MORE 2018s



The first examples of the 2019 vintage in Beaujolais are beginning to arrive here in New York, as well as some of the later-released Cru bottlings from the 2018 vintage. The 2019 growing season was not an especially easy one for *vignerons* in the region, as an early bud-break was threatened and in some places seriously damaged by bouts of early April frost in certain sectors of the region. This cut back potential yields from the bountiful crop of 2018 in areas affected by these cold spring temperatures. The frost hit on the evening of April 5th and where it affected vineyards, the resulting loss of crop was dramatic. Xavier de Boissieu of Château de Lavernette, which is located in the very northern part of Beaujolais (with vines also across the border in Saint-Véran and Pouilly-Fuissé) reports that due to the frosts “we lost about seventy percent of our crop in Beaujolais Blanc, forty percent in Pouilly-Fuissé and fifty percent for the Beaujolais reds.” Fortunately for others, the frost damage was not uniform across all of Beaujolais, so many were spared from such serious damage from the freezing temperatures. Once the spring frost damage was past, the early summer unfolded into one of very good weather, with plenty of sunshine and high temperatures, but without any precipitation of any kind once June arrived, so that drought conditions prevailed throughout much of the summer. The growing season was certainly shaped to some extent by the robust summer heat, but hydric

stress was an equally serious factor in the equation until it was alleviated by heavy rain storms that swept through most of the Beaujolais region in mid-August. For most of the vineyards across the region, this was just what was needed to relieve the drought conditions, plump up the desiccated berries and get the vines rolling again to ripen up their bunches properly leading into the harvest. Most importantly, the mid-August rains were able to bring the bunches back into the balance, which prior to the rain had been very concentrated with sugars and tannin, but with a real paucity of juice.

It should be noted that this series of August storms was far from consistent from north to south in Beaujolais, and unfortunately, these rains arrived accompanied by heavy hail across a wide band in the southern half of the region, where Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages level vineyards are located, and the hail damage in these areas was extensive. The band of hail hit on August 18th and cut across the southern end of the region centered on the east-west line that runs from just north of the town of Chazay-d'Azergues in the east (about fifteen kilometers due south of the regional center of Villefranche) to the sector known as Pierres Dorées in the west, which is very close to where the Chermette family's Domaine du Vissoux is located. For vineyards hit by the August hail, the crop was decimated and potential yields were reduced by as much as seventy-five percent. This was the opposite of the hail damage in both 2016 and 2017, which had been centered on the Cru of Fleurie in the northern half of the region and affected primarily the Cru Beaujolais vineyards in Fleurie and neighboring villages, whereas the southern half of Beaujolais had not had to deal with hail in either vintage. But, in August of 2019, it was sadly the south's turn to be pummeled by hail. I have not yet tasted many examples of 2019 Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages from the southern half of the region, as most of the straight Beaujolais bottlings which have arrived on my desk thus far are from growers in the north who happen to have vines outside of the delimitations of their Crus, so that I have not yet had a chance to assess how the hail damage of August has shaped the style of the surviving wines from the south.

However, where these August storms did not come accompanied by hail, the rains were most welcome, as they alleviated the stress the vines had been under from the drought conditions and the sometimes extreme heat of midsummer of 2019, as temperatures topped one hundred degrees Fahrenheit on several occasions during July and early August. The rains were able to lower potential alcohol levels dramatically, as the stressed bunches were able to plump up nicely by soaking up the precipitation and the berries regained a far more ideal juice to skin ratio as the vines happily absorbed the beneficial water. But, even where there was no hail, the August rains were not consistent. While the southern end of the region was pummeled with hail on August 18th, the far northern Crus of Beaujolais: Juliéna, Chénas and Saint-Amour, suffered inversely from not getting anywhere near as much precipitation from these rainstorms as most of the rest of the Beaujolais region, so the wines here in these three Crus are far more shaped by the drought conditions and baking heat of the summer than anywhere else in Beaujolais in 2019. Though I have not tasted all that many examples from these three Crus yet, the few I have tried bear witness to reports that these communes have wines with firmer tannins and higher alcohol levels than what is found throughout most of the rest of the Cru region. So the lack of consistency of precipitation with these August rainstorms would contribute to heterogeneity of both style and quality in the wines of 2019. This lack of consistency of style would be further complicated when harvest time rolled around, as the baking heat of July and the first half of August returned for the picking, so that everything was often ripe and demanding attention at the very same time,

forcing *vignerons* to make tough decisions about which vineyards to harvest first and which would have to wait until the frenzied picking teams could get around to clearing the bunches in the parcels that could not go first. Consequently, there are also a few examples of 2019 Beaujolais that show overt signs of *sur maturité* from having to wait for the teams to have time to harvest their crops.

Despite there having certainly been a litany of challenges posed by Mother Nature during the growing season of 2019, the end result is that there are also an awful lot of really excellent wines which have been crafted in this vintage. The August rains not only brought back better balance to the grapes, lowering sugar levels and adding far more juice to the berries, but they also brought down acidity levels to a more moderate range. The drought conditions and heat had concentrated both sugars and acids as the grapes shriveled up a bit during the heatwave, but, where the precipitation was copious, the berries settled into a very good state of ripeness and balance prior to picking, albeit with slightly lower acidity than we have seen in most recent top flight vintages of Beaujolais. The results are wines of plush textures, sappy fruit tones and plenty of early generosity- at least where there were no issues with hail damage in the south or more pronounced hydric stress in the far northern Crus. As alluded to above, with everything coming ripe at the same time, not all parcels could be harvested at the ideal moment, so there is some variation introduced to quality and style also based on when the pickers could get to a given parcel. But, all things considered, the 2019 vintage in Beaujolais is truly excellent and there are a very large number of bottlings that are going to rank right up there with the finest from the best vintages of recent memory. The best of 2019 share a succulent generosity and sappy core of fruit that is utterly charming right out of the blocks, with lovely underlying *terroir*, suave structural elements and impeccable balances that should carry them nicely in the cellar- if anyone can be persuaded to keep their hands off of the wines and let them age! It has been a long time since I can recall a vintage like 2019 in Beaujolais, where the wines are so overtly seductive out of the blocks that it is going to be very, very hard not to drink them up in the blush of youth.

As I wrote extensively about the 2018 vintage in Beaujolais back in February of this year, I will not go into great detail about the growing conditions of this season, but just provide a thumbnail sketch of the summer conditions and style of the resulting wines. There was plenty of winter and early spring rain in 2018, which allowed groundwater reserves to be quite sufficient to face the heat of the summer months (in contrast to 2019). There was also plenty of heat in Beaujolais in 2018, as the month of August was the hottest on record ever in the region. But, with the vines recovering from the frost and hail damage of both 2016 and 2017, there was a big, beautiful crop of bunches out on the vines, sufficient water in the soils to keep hydric stress at bay, and the crop ended up ripening beautifully and harvest began at the end of August in the region, with most *vignerons* having finished their picking by the end of September's first week. But, as I noted in February, the 2018 crop of Beaujolais can be, in certain instances, a big, broad-shouldered and powerful vintage for Beaujolais, with straight Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages cuvées benefiting from this characteristic to pack more mid-palate stuffing than is often customary. As one ascends up to the level of the Crus, the added musculature of 2018 (often with a bit higher accompanying octane) is even more apparent for some of the wines and these can also be more black fruity in their aromatic and flavor profiles than is the case in more classically-inclined vintages. This is particularly true of some of the more typically red fruity communes such as Brouilly, Morgon and Saint Amour, which often have quite black fruity elements to them

in 2018. However, not all of the 2018s are bigger and more powerful than usual, as some *vignerons* clearly decided to bring in their fruit on the earlier side and guard against higher alcohol and out of character power in their wines. So, though the 2018 vintage is not homogenous in style in Beaujolais, it is generally another high quality vintage and one can dance around the wines that may not be stylistically in one's wheelhouse and find others that are guaranteed to please.

The following notes are organized in my customary pattern, with notes on Beaujolais Blanc and Rosé appearing first, followed by notes on Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages bottlings. Within each section, the wines are listed first by vintage, and then alphabetically by producer. After the Beaujolais section, each Cru has its own grouping, running geographically from north to south. Within each Cru subsection, the notes are again organized first by vintage and then alphabetically by producer.



Beaujolais Blanc and Rosé

2019 Beaujolais Rosé “Griottes”- Pierre-Marie Chermette (screwcap)

The 2019 Beaujolais Rosé “Griottes” from Pierre-Marie Chermette is a very pretty wine, offering up a vibrant bouquet of melon, strawberries, a hint of orange peel, a nice base of soil and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and succulently ripe, with a plump core, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the juicy finish. This is quite broad-

shouldered for a Beaujolais Rosé and will have no difficulty standing up to red meat dishes or sausages. Good juice. 2020-2023. **89.**

2019 Beaujolais-Villages Rosé- Laurent Gauthier

The 2019 Beaujolais-Villages Rosé from Laurent Gauthier is quite expressive on the nose, with a slightly candied element to its aromatic combination of strawberries, white cherries, a good base of soil and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and wide open in personality, with respectable depth at the core, fairly soft acids and sneaky length on the well-balanced finish. This is a good, honest example, but is a touch softer than I would optimally like. 2020-2022. **87.**

2019 Bourgogne Aligoté- Smith-Chapel

The 2019 Bourgogne Aligoté from Michele Smith-Chapel and David Chapel is produced from organically-farmed grapes that they purchase in Fixin. 2018 was the first vintage that they began producing this wine, which is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel tank prior to bottling unfinned and unfiltered. The 2019 version is an excellent wine, offering up a bright and nicely ripe bouquet of apple, citrus peel, a fine base of soil, dried flowers and a bit of Chablis-like straw tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and surprisingly rock solid at the core, with fine backend mineral drive, excellent acidity and grip and a long, focused and complex finish. This is first class Aligoté! 2020-2028. **90.**

2017 Beaujolais Blanc “les Vignes de la Roche”- Château de Lavernette

The 2017 Beaujolais Blanc “les Vignes de la Roche” from Xavier and Kerrie Boissieu is a rare example to hail from the very northern end of the Beaujolais region, near the Crus and not far from the border with Pouilly-Fuissé. The wine these days is raised in stainless steel tank for fully eighteen months prior to bottling, hence the reason the current release is the 2017 vintage! The wine is lovely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet showing the heavily limestone influenced soils here in its bouquet of apple, white peach, chalky minerality, spring flowers and just a hint of Mâconnais toastiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and still quite racy, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and grip, zesty acids and a long, vibrant finish. This is as good an example of Beaujolais Blanc as I have tasted in several years! 2020-2025+. **91.**

Pinot Noir

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

It has been about a year since I last tasted a bottle of the 2018 Pinot Noir bottling from Jean-Paul Brun and the wine continues to show very well in deed. The bouquet offers up a refined blend of cherries, strawberries, *pigeon*, lovely soil tones, raw cocoa, a bit of thyme and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and intensely flavored, with a good core and soil transparency, suave tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is a fine middleweight example of the vintage, tipping the scales at a svelte 12.5 percent alcohol and it will drink beautifully in due course, but still needs a few more years’ worth of bottle age before drinking. 2024-2045. **90.**

Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages

2019 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine Chapel (Nomacorc)

The Beaujolais-Villages bottling from Domaine Chapel all hails from vines in the high elevation village of Lantignié, which lies next door to the cru village of Regnié (and far removed

from the hail damage in the south). The wine is fermented with whole clusters in a semi-carbonic style and raised entirely in stainless steel tank. The 2019 version comes in at 14.1 percent octane and offers up a bright and bouncy bouquet of sweet cranberries, cherries, roses, a lovely base of soil tones, cinnamon and a gentle topnote of thyme. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and nicely transparent, with a lovely core of red fruit, good acids and grip, just a touch of backend tannin and a long, complex finish. This is very, very good Beaujolais-Villages. 2020-2030+. **91.**

2019 Beaujolais- Domaine Michel Guignier

The Beaujolais bottling from Michel Guignier hails primarily from vineyards around Morgon, so they are in the northern half of the region and did not have to face and depredation from the hailstorms that rolled across the southern half of Beaujolais in 2019. The vines here are forty years of age and the 2019 version offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, sweet cranberries, dark soil tones, bonfire, a bit of spit-roasted gamebird and a gentle topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with fine transparency and grip, modest tannin and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is outstanding Beaujolais! 2020-2030. **91.**

2019 Beaujolais-Villages “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Jean-Claude Lapalu

The 2019 Beaujolais-Villages “Vieilles Vignes” from Jean-Claude Lapalu is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a ripe, but not overripe nose of red and black cherries, cranberries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a hint of chocolate in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, fairly complex and nicely crunchy finish. Monsieur Lapalu bottles this wine with a minimum of SO₂ and there is just a whisper of natural wine wildness here on both the nose and palate. Good juice. 2020-2025. **88+.**

2019 Beaujolais-Villages “Wild Soul”- Domaine Julien Sunier

The 2019 vintage of Wild Soul from Julien Sunier is excellent on both the nose and palate. The bouquet delivers a complex and vibrant blend of black cherries, a bit of cassis, sweet cranberry, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, a touch of cumin and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite deep at the core for Beaujolais-Villages, with fine focus and balance, modest tannins and a long, wide open and complex finish. This has turned out beautifully in 2019! 2020-2030. **90.**

Cayenne 2018 Vin de France- Domaine Julie Balagny (Lot 0218)

It would seem that Julie Balagny was once again not given the AOC for this bottling, which comes in labeled simply as Vin de France this year. Yes, there is some volatile acidity here, but I have seen as much VA on wines with their appellation intact, so I am not really sure what the issue was for this wine. In any case, it comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and offers up a bright, gently volatile and quite complex bouquet of black cherries, bonfire, gamebird, dark soil tones, lovely spice elements (as well as the aforementioned VA. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plush on the attack and beautifully transparent at the same time, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. There is less volatile acidity on the palate than the nose suggests, and though the wine is not entirely stable, it is also quite complex and impressively long on the finish. I have to admit that I like it quite well. 2020-2028. **89.**

2018 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine Damien Coquelet

The 2018 Beaujolais-Villages from Damien Coquelet is nicely light in color and comes in listed at a quite low twelve percent octane in this vintage. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of strawberries, cranberries, fresh herb tones, a hint of white pepper, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy and medium-bodied, with moderate ripeness, good complexity, a bit of backend tannin and a long, vibrant and suavely low fat finish. How Monsieur Coquelet was able to pull this style off in the torrid summer of 2018 is a mystery to me, but I really like this wine for its brightness, intensity of flavor and low octane friendliness at the table. It is quite idiosyncratic in style, but also fine juice. 2020-2026. **90.**

2018 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2018 Beaujolais-Villages from Georges Descombes is a beautifully sappy example of this vintage, with a bit more mid-palate stuffing than in some years, which is all to the good. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a lovely blend of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, fresh thyme, a fine base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with very good soil signature, lovely focus and grip and just a whisper of backend tannin perking up the long and complex finish. This is a first class example. 2020-2028. **90.**

2018 Beaujolais “Cuvée Kéké”- Domaine Kevin Descombes

The 2018 Beaujolais “Cuvée Kéké” from Kevin Descombes is a very pretty example of the vintage, offering up a lovely *mélange* of red and black fruit tones in its bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, cranberries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nicely structured, with a good kernel of fruit at the core, fine mineral drive and grip, modest tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This too is quite low fat for 2018, coming listed at 12.5 percent octane. Good juice that could actually do with a year of bottle age. 2020-2028. **88+.**

2018 Beaujolais-Villages- Château de Lavernette (Xavier and Kerrie Boissieu)

The Beaujolais-Villages from Xavier and Kerrie Boissieu is hail from vineyards in the northern end of Beaujolais, in and around the village of Leynes, which have a combination of limestone and granite soils. Their 2018 is ripe and pleasantly light on its feet for the vintage, coming in at thirteen percent octane and offering up a sappy nose of red and black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a complex base of soil tones, raw cocoa, just a hint of stems and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and really quite solid at the core for Beaujolais-Villages, with fine focus and grip, a fair bit of ripe tannin and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. Structurally, this reminds me of a 2011 Beaujolais. A very serious Beaujolais-Villages that really deserves a year or two in the cellar to fully blossom! 2021-2035+. **90+.**

Saint-Amour

2019 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards

The 2019 Saint-Amour from Domaine des Billards is one of those crus from the vintage that did not benefit from the August rains, so this wine is stylistically reflective of the drought conditions that prevailed before more fortunate communes received their timely dose of precipitation. Consequently, the wine comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a deep and vibrant nose of pomegranate, red and black cherries, gamebird, bonfire, lovely soil tones, thyme and a nicely spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, powerful and rock solid at the core, with fine mineral drive, snappy acids and a long, tannic and slightly warm finish.

This reminds me a bit structurally of many of the better 2010 Bordeaux, with the depth of fruit, alcohol, acidity and tannin levels all revved up from the drought conditions. It is going to be nearly timeless and it will be interesting to see how it manages its octane level over the many decades that it will be alive. The wine will need a good decade to start to soften and is impressively pure and precise for the drought conditions here in Saint-Amour, but it is not a classic vintage for this wine. 2030-2075. **91+**.

2018 Saint-Amour “Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Georges Descombes

For those (like me) who cannot remember, the old vine bottlings from Georges Descombes are distinguished by a heavier bottle and are sealed with red wax (rather than a capsule), but the labels do not say Vieilles Vignes anywhere on them. The 2018 Saint-Amour old vine cuvée from Monsieur Descombes is a wine of stunning depth and impressive purity for the vintage, wafting from the glass in a constellation of plums, red and black cherries, gamebird, a superb base of soil tones, crushed violets and a bit of dark chocolate in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still has a bit of CO2 in solution, with a great core of fruit, fine mineral detail, a bit of ripe tannin and a touch of backend volatile acidity. For the moment, the VA dissipates nicely with air and the wine is drinking very well indeed. 2020-2030+? **91**.



A small chapel at the top of a hillside vineyard in Fleurie (courtesy Carrie Marchal).

Juliéna

2019 Juliéna “les Capitans”- Domaine des Bruyères (Nicolas Durand)

Nicolas Durand’s Juliéna “les Capitans” bottling is made from vines that average one hundred years of age, so it is not too surprising that they have handled the drought conditions in Juliéna in 2019 a bit better than his vines in Chéna. This is still a ripe, deep and fairly powerful example of its appellation, but the wine is pure, precise and nicely mineral at the same time, offering up a fine nose of raspberries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, fresh thyme and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent minerality and grip, ripe tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is approachable, but like Monsieur Durand’s 2019 Chéna, this deserves some bottle age to fully start to blossom. The old vines have done a good job of mitigating some of the hydric stress for this bottling. 2023-2045+. **92.**

Chéna

2019 Chéna- Domaine des Bruyères (Nicolas Durand)

Aromatically, the 2019 Chéna from Nicolas Durand is a beautifully elegant and complex example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, bonfire, a refined base of soil tones, gamebird and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. However, as Chéna is one of the northern Crus, one can see that here is a wine where the balancing rains of August did not fall anywhere near as heavily as a bit further south, so this wine is far more structured in the mouth than the bouquet suggests. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and youthfully peppery today, with a very good core, fine transparency and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. Given how inviting the nose is, the more structured and reserved palate comes across as a bit of a surprise at first, but this wine has all the constituent components to age gracefully. It will just require a bit of bottle age first. 2023-2045+. **90+.**

2018 Chéna- Domaine Damien Coquelet

Damien Coquelet’s 2018 Chéna is decidedly darker in hue and riper in personality than his Beaujolais-Villages and is far more at home in the style of the vintage. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of slightly roasted black fruit, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, a fine base of dark soil, a touch of chicory and a lovely blend of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a lovely core, excellent transparency and grip, modest tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This wine comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane and offers a lovely juxtaposition of ripeness on the nose and mineral drive and a taut structural chassis on the palate. This is quite good and will improve with a bit of bottle age. 2022-2035. **90+.**

Moulin-à-Vent

2019 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Bruyères (Nicolas Durand)

The 2019 Moulin-à-Vent from Domaine des Bruyères shows the more suave style of the vintage where the August rains were more generous, but this is not a weak-kneed example of the Cru that has plans to come and go before its twenty-fifty birthday! The bouquet is deep, complex and beautifully expressive out of the blocks, offering up scents of blackberries, cassis, coffee grounds, dark soil tones, gamebird and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and tangy, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, very promising finish. 2023-2055+. **92+**.

2018 Moulin-à-Vent “au Michelin”- Domaine Mee Godard

Mee Godard’s au Michelin bottling from this fine *lieu à dit* in Moulin-à-Vent is excellent in 2014, coming in nicely ripe at 14.1 percent octane, but not straying over the line into *sur maturité*. The bouquet is pure and refined, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, espresso, gamebird, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh thyme and a hint of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of black fruit, a fine base of soil, ripe, buried tannins and a long, perfectly balanced and complex finish. This wine is certainly approachable out of the blocks, but this is a classic example of Moulin-à-Vent and it is built to age, so I would be inclined to tuck it in a cool corner of the cellar for three to five years before really starting to drink it in earnest. I love this young woman’s aesthetic sensibilities! 2023-2065. **93+**.

2018 Moulin-à-Vent “les Michelin”- Yohan Lardy

As I have mentioned in the past, the Moulin-à-Vent “les Michelin” from Yohan Lardy hails from two parcels of vines, with one planted in 1950 and the other all the way back in 1911! The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in older Burgundy casks. The 2018 version is very good, offering up a ripe, but not overripe nose of dark berries, cassis, roasted venison, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee grounds and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This comes in listed at thirteen percent octane, but is probably a bit north of that in reality, but is nicely structured and will age gracefully. Good juice. 2020-2045+. **91**.

2018 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2018 Moulin-à-Vent from Domaine des Terres Dorées is another ripe, complex and very classy example of the vintage from Jean-Paul Brun. The bouquet offers up a complex combination of red and black cherries, cassis, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee grounds, roasted meats, bonfire and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite soil-driven in personality, with broad shoulders, fine focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and complex finish. This seems likely to become autumnal in personality fairly quickly in this vintage, but should age long and gracefully at the same time. 2022-2050. **92**.

Fleurie

2019 Fleurie “Charbonnières”- Domaine Chapel

The 2019 Fleurie “Charbonnières” from David Chapel and his wife Michele is an outstanding example of this superb vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and sappy, offering up scents of red and black cherries, beautiful spice tones, gamebird, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, orange zest and just a whisper of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with superb focus and grip, just a touch of tannin and a long, perfectly balanced and complex finish. Great juice. 2020-2040. **93**.

2019 Fleurie- Domaine Julien Sunier

Julien Sunier’s 2019 Fleurie is bright and already beautifully expressive on both the nose and palate. The bouquet hops right out of the glass in a blaze of cherries, raspberries, allspice, a touch of raw cocoa, a fine base of dark soil tones, sweet stems, a hint of oak and a topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with a lovely

core, fine soil signature, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is not powerful, but rather, intensely flavored and will age long and gracefully. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2040. **92+**.

2018 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine Pierre Marie-Chermette

The 2018 Fleurie “Poncié” from Pierre Marie-Chermette is a superb example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure, sappy and shows no signs of *sur maturité* in its combination of black cherries, black plums, bonfire, *pigeon*, dark soil tones and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a sappy core of black fruit, a modicum of tannin and fine balance and grip on the long, complex and focused finish. This is quite low in octane for the 2018 vintage (it comes in listed at thirteen percent) and is a bit more structured as a result, so I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a few years and let the tannins soften up completely. It is a very good bottle in the making. 2023-2045. **92**.

2018 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The 2018 Fleurie from the Château de Fleurie is a quite classic example of this vintage, showing a roasted character to its copious levels of black fruit, more structure than in most vintages, but also fine complexity and depth. The bouquet delivers scents of black cherries, cassis, roasted game, dark soil tones, bonfire and a topnote of thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and loaded with black fruit at the core, with broad shoulders, a good chassis of tannin and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is not a typical example of Château de Fleurie, whose wines can be amongst the most suave and perfumed in the appellation, but it is a very good wine that has handled the challenges of the vintage very well. 2020-2030. **90**.

2018 Fleurie “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2018 Fleurie “Vieilles Vignes” from Georges Descombes is a beautifully ripe, sappy and ever so slightly volatile example of the vintage, with loads of personality and a structure that may prove a bit fragile if forgotten in the cellar for too many years. The nose shows a bit of volatile acidity when first poured, but this eventually blows off to reveal a lovely and sappy blend of black cherries, plums, gamebird, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with good soil signature, a bit of chewy tannin and a long, complex finish that closes with just a whisper of carbon dioxide. This is very tasty juice right now, but I have no idea how long the structure is going to hold out before the whole thing implodes, as this wine is way out there on the natural wine edge. But, until that point, there is plenty to enjoy here! 2020-2023+? **89**.

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

The 2018 Fleurie from Domaine des Terres Dorées is an outstanding example of the vintage and has a nice touch of red fruit in its aromatic profile- no small feat in the torrid summer of 2018. The bouquet is bright and bouncy, jumping from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, pomegranate, *pigeon*, woodsmoke, a complex base of dark soil tones, a touch of coffee bean and a lovely topnote of baking spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and a touch chewy, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral undertow, modest tannins and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is going to age superbly well and really deserves a few years in the cellar to start to properly blossom on the backend and drink with true generosity. Expect it to cellar as well as the gold standard in the appellation, Clos de la Roilette. 2023-2050. **93**.



Chiroubles

2019 Chiroubles “Chatenay”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2019 Chiroubles “Chatenay” from Daniel Bouland is a beautiful example of the vintage, offering up a vibrant bouquet of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, a touch of orange peel, a fine base of stony minerality, violets and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full-bodied, with a succulent core, excellent mineral drive and grip, suave tannins and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This has some of 2019’s upfront charm, but is also built for the cellar and I would try hard not to drink too many bottles early on, as this is going to age superbly well. 2020-2045+. **93+**.

2019 Chiroubles- Domaine Chapel

The 2019 Chiroubles from Michele and David Chapel’s eponymous Domaine Chapel is outstanding. The 2018 vintage was the very first for the couple in Chiroubles, with their wine produced from one hectare parcels in two *lieux à dits* in the commune, Saint-Roch (fifty-five year-old vines) and Pouillet (forty to sixty year-old vines). The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in a semi-carbonic style and raised in stainless steel tank for eight months prior to bottling unfiltered. The bouquet of the 2019 Chiroubles jumps from the glass in a pure and sappy blend of red and black cherries, gamebird, a beautiful base of granitic soil, a bit of gamebird, rose petal, cumin and a topnote of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with lovely sappiness at the core, fine mineral drive and bounce, modest tannins and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is great Chiroubles! 2020-2030+. **93**.

2018 Chiroubles “L’Aurore des Côtes”- Domaine Fabien Collonge

The 2018 Chiroubles “L’Aurore des Côtes” from Fabien Collonge is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a deep, ripe and sappy nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a hint of cranberry, dark soil tones, bitter chocolate, woodsmoke and a bit of gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chewy in personality, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, complex and promising finish. Like many of the 2018 Crus, this deserves a year or two in the cellar to let its tannins fade a bit more, but it is certainly approachable already for those without the patience to tuck it away in the cellar. 2022-2040. **90+**.

2018 Chiroubles- Domaine Damien Coquelet

The 2018 Chiroubles from Damien Coquelet comes in listed at a modest twelve percent octane, and based on what is evident on both the nose and palate, this seems quite accurate. The wine is interesting in that it is quite dark ruby in color for such low alcohol, offering up a moderately ripe and quite complex bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, some weedy herb tones, dark soil elements and a bit of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, quite solid at the core, has good soil signature and a bit of tannin perking up the long finish. It is still quite a young wine and needs a year or two in the cellar to let its backend tannins relax a bit more. Stylistically, it is a fairly perplexing example of the ripe 2018 vintage, but, I have seen wines in this style in vintages like 2012 blossom into very good middleweights with a bit of bottle age and I do not see why this will not be the case here. 2023-2045. **91**.

2018 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2018 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes from Monsieur Descombes is an outstanding example of the vintage. This is a young wine on both the nose and palate and really will deserve some time in the cellar to blossom, as it is structured like a top flight example of Morgon in this vintage. The deep and pure bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, beautiful spice tones, a complex base of soil, *pigeon*, espresso, woodsmoke and a gentle topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with ripe tannins, a superb core of fruit, lovely mineral undertow and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. This is one of the most structurally stable of all the Vieilles Vignes bottlings I sampled from Georges Descombes from the 2018 vintage (though not without a whisper of backend VA), which augurs very well for its evolution in the cellar. 2023-2050. **92**.

Régnié

2019 Régnié- Domaine Antoine Sunier

Antoine Sunier’s version of Régnié in 2019 is a touch more robust in style than brother Julien’s this year, but equally compelling. The bouquet delivers a deep and pure blend of red and black cherries, cranberries, gamebird, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, roses and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, focused and full-bodied, with fine depth at the core, very good soil signature, lovely balance and a bit of tannin perking up the long, complex and quite classy finish. There is a bit of Morgon personality to be found here, as can often be the case with top flight examples of Régnié, such as this wine. It does not have the pure seductive charm of Julien Sunier’s Régnié right out of the blocks, but it is every bit as good and may well live a few years longer in bottle as well. But, I would opt to give this wine a year’s worth of bottle age before really sinking my teeth into it. 2021-2035. **92**.

2019 Régnié- Domaine Julien Sunier

The 2019 Régnié from Julien Sunier is a beautifully sappy and expressive example of the vintage. The bouquet hops from the glass in a vibrant blend of cherries, a touch of raspberry,

sweet cranberry, bonfire, very pretty spice tones and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and transparent, with a lovely core of red fruit, fine balance and grip, just a wisp of tannin and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is not a particularly concentrated example, but it has plenty of intensity of flavor and complexity and is really a refined bottle of Régnié. 2020-2030+. **92.**

2018 Régnié- Domaine Georges Descombes

The “regular” bottling of Régnié from Georges Descombes is very good in 2018, but like his Fleurie old vine cuvée, this is a touch on the edge with volatile acidity. For those not deterred by a touch of VA, the nose offers up a bright blend of black cherries, dark berries, bonfire, lovely spice tones and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is vibrant, tangy and full-bodied, with a quite refined profile for 2018, a good core of fruit and soil signature, modest tannins and a long, complex and gently volatile finish. There is a lot to like here, but one’s pleasure with the wine will be somewhat shaped by one’s feeling about a bit of volatile acidity in the equation. For the moment, I do not mind it and find that it tends to elevate the aromatics in the wine, but it will also probably impinge more upon this wine’s enjoyment as the years go by. But, to drink soon, this is quite tasty. 2020-2025+? **89.**

2018 Régnié “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2018 Régnié “Vieilles Vignes” from Georges Descombes is deep and more black fruity in personality than the younger vine version, and also has no issues with VA on the nose (though there is a whisper on the backend of the palate). The bouquet is outstanding, offering up a pure and complex blend of sappy black cherries, plum, dark berry, woodsmoke, gamebird, dark soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely plush at the core, with fine focus and mineral drive, just a whisper of tannin, a tickle of carbon dioxide and a long, complex and classy finish that shows a touch of volatile acidity at the close. I like the balance of this wine better than the regular Régnié for longer-term cellaring and is structured like a good bottle of Morgon. 2020-2035. **91.**

2018 Régnié “Sans Soufre”- Château de la Pierre (Jean Loron)

The 2018 Régnié “Sans Soufre” bottling from Château de la Pierre is nicely ripe and black fruity in this warm vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a wide open blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, *pigeon*, a touch of dark chocolate, bonfire and a superb base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a plush core, good soil undertow, a bit of backend tannin and a long, gently chewy finish. This comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane this year, but that seems to be a bit of wishful thinking, as there is just a touch of backend heat here perking up the finish. It is a very tasty wine for near-term drinking, but I do not think it will make particularly old bones in this vintage. 2020-2025. **89.**

Morgon

2019 Morgon “Pré Jourdan”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2019 vintage is only the second for the Pré Jourdan cuvée from Daniel Bouland, as this parcel was only purchased the year before. The 2019 version is a flat out gorgeous on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a beautiful, black fruity mélange of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, a superb base of granitic minerality and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovely mineral undertow, ripe, buried tannins and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and stellar finish. This is a great young bottle of Morgon. 2020-2060. **94+.**

2019 Morgon “Delys Vieilles Vignes de 1926”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The ninety-five year-old vines in Monsieur Bouland’s Delys parcel have also excelled in the beautiful vintage of 2019. The nose offers up a pure and sappy combination of sweet dark berries, black cherries, bonfire, spit-roasted gamebird, gorgeous soil tones, dark chocolate and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with a wonderful combination of old vine creaminess and stellar transparency. The finish is long, ripely tannic and properly youthful, with great balance and grip and a very long, complex and promising finish. This is a proper young Morgon and will want at least a handful of years in the cellar to start to soften a bit on the backend and really drink with generosity. Be patient. 2024-2060+. **94+**.



2019 Morgon “la Voûte Saint Vincent”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2019 la Voûte Saint Vincent bottling of Morgon from Louis-Claude Desvignes is a young and nicely structured example of the vintage, with a tightly-knit and well-balanced palate impression that should blossom beautifully with some bottle age. The bouquet offers up primary blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, still a bit of youthful stems, a fine base of soil and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and youthful, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, promising finish. This is a rare 2019 that will demand some bottle age before giving up the goods. 2023-2055+. **90**.

2019 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The Côte du Py bottling from the Desvignes family is produced from a parcel of seventy year-old vines, with the wine raised in cement vats for thirteen months prior to bottling. The 2019 version is fairly ripe for the vintage, coming in at fourteen percent octane and offering up a deep, pure and extremely promising bouquet of pomegranate, red and black cherries, *pigeon*, a gorgeous base of stony soil tones, a beautiful array of stem-generated, sweet spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, great mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and still a fair touch of backend stemminess from the whole clusters perking up the long and youthful finish. This is going to be a brilliant bottle of Morgon, but it will want some time hibernating in the cellar before it will start to drink with true generosity. 2025-2065+. **93+**.

2019 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

Javernières is a subsection of Côte du Py, with Louis-Claude Desvignes having sixty-five year-old vines in this part of the vineyard. This bottling is half de-stemmed and raised in cement for nine months, so it does not have quite as long of an *elevage* as the regular Côte du Py bottling. The 2019 Javernières is a touch more black fruity in profile than the above, offering up a pure and complex nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a bit of raw cocoa, gamebird, black minerality, discreet spice tones, violets and just a whisper of thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, tangy and full-bodied, with a great core of sweet black fruit, superb soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and very, very promising finish. As one might expect, with only fifty percent whole clusters, this is a bit more forward out of the blocks than the Côte du Py, but I would still give this at least a handful of years in the cellar to unlock its secondary layers of complexity. 2024-2065+. **93+**.

2019 Morgon “Corcelette”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2019 Morgon “Corcelette” from Domaine Desvignes is another beautifully youthful example of the vintage, offering up lovely purity to its red fruity aromatic constellation and fine structure for long-term aging. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of cherries, cranberries, vinesmoke, lovely minerality, a touch of sweet stem tones, spit-roasted *pigeon* and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and potentially sappy at the core, with great mineral undertow, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, nascently complex and tangy finish. This is a very young bottle of Morgon today, but all of the constituent components are in place for a long and beautiful life in bottle. 2027-2075. **93+**.

2019 Morgon “Montpelain”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2019 Montpelain from Louis-Claude Desvignes is noticeably darker in color than the Corcelette this year. The bouquet is equally precise and expressive, offering up a still youthful blend of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, a gorgeous base of dark soil tones, a bit of bay, gamebird, woodsmoke, fresh thyme and a gentle topnote of spice elements form the whole clusters. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still marked by its youthful stem tones, with a great core of fruit, stunning mineral drive and grip, tangy acids, suave tannins and a very long, pure and very promising finish. In due course, this is going to be brilliant Morgon! 2029-2075+. **94+**.

2019 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Michel Guignier (Nomacore)

The old vine bottling of Morgon from Michel Guignier is made from vines in three *lieux à dits*, including Côte du Py, with the vines averaging sixty years of age. Monsieur Guignier’s 2019 Vieilles Vignes offers up a beautifully bright and sappy nose of black cherries, sweet dark

berries, bonfire, *pigeon*, dark soil tones, a touch of espresso and a lovely topnote of thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, full and complex, with a good core of fruit, fine soil undertow, moderate, buried tannins and lovely length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This is a proper young bottle of Morgon that could do with a bit of bottle age to let those backend tannins start to completely soften up, but the wine is certainly approachable out of the blocks and plenty of folks are going to end up drinking their bottles on the early side, despite the excellent potential for aging in evidence here. Fine juice. 2023-2050+. **93.**

2019 Morgon- Domaine Antoine Sunier

Antoine Sunier's Morgon is also produced from sixty year-old vines, located in the *lieu à dit* of Croix de Chèvre (which is a section of the better known Grand Cras). His 2019 Morgon is an excellent wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in an expressive blend of cherries, cranberries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, violets, cumin and a lovely base of soil that seems likely to turn beautifully autumnal as the years roll by. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and tangy, with just a touch of natural wine wildness to its personality, a lovely core of fruit, fine minerality, suave tannins and a long and complex finish. This is an outstanding bottle of Morgon, that is quite tasty already, but will continue to improve with bottle age. I do not have a real sense of its potential longevity, due to that bit of natural wine wildness when it is first poured. But, there is a fine structural chassis and it seems that twenty years is at least likely. 2020-2040+? **93.**

2019 Morgon- Domaine Julien Sunier

I really like the style and grace of Julien Sunier's example of Morgon and the 2019 vintage is one of his finest examples from these fifty-plus year-old vines (half of which lie in la Corcelette). The bouquet here is beautifully red fruity in personality and nicely reserved for a 2019, offering up scents of cherries, strawberries, pomegranate, rose petals, a touch of allspice, lovely soil tones, thyme and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is young, tangy and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, excellent backend minerality, well-integrated tannins and a long, vibrant and still quite tightly-knit finish. This sense of reserve out of the blocks is fairly rare in the 2019 vintage and, to my palate, really augurs well for this wine's long future ahead of it. Give it a few years to unwind structurally in the cellar, as this has impressive acidity for the vintage, and then drink it over the ensuing thirty-plus years. 2023-2055. **93+.**

2018 Morgon 'Cuvée Vieilles Vignes'- Domaine de la Bêche (Olivier et Alexis Depardon)

The Vieilles Vignes bottling of Morgon from Olivier Depardon and his son Alexis is made from vines that average seventy years of age and hail from all six of Morgon's *lieux à dits*. The bunches are destemmed and ninety-five percent of the bottling is raised in old *foudres*, with only five percent being raised in used Burgundy casks. The 2018 version offers up a deep and black fruity nose of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, roasted game, dark soil tones and a bit of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is a proper *vin de garde* and will need three or four years in the cellar to start to really blossom. 2023-2055+. **92.**

2018 Morgon "Côte du Py"- Olivier et Alexis Depardon

The Côte du Py bottling from the Depardon family hails from their three hectares of vines on the summit of the vineyard. The grapes are destemmed, fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised entirely in old *foudres* prior to bottling. The 2018 Côte du Py delivers a refined bouquet of red and black cherries, gamebird, a bit of espresso, lovely minerality, a dollop of fresh thyme and

a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality (particularly for 2018), with a fine core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is an excellent example of Côte du Py. 2020-2055+. **93.**

2018 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Damien Coquelet

Damien Coquelet’s 2018 Morgon “Côte du Py” is also fairly modest in octane for the vintage, but this wine comes in listed at thirteen percent alcohol, which took a bit less wizardry than those closer to twelve percent octane in the domaine’s 2018 lineup. The bouquet is deep, bright and very expressive out of the blocks, offering up scents of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, *pigeon*, a superb base of soil and a lovely array of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy, full-bodied and has a bit of CO2 still in suspension, with a good core, fine mineral drive and grip, with moderate tannins, fine focus and a long, youthful finish that closes with a bit of volatile acidity. My gut feeling is that this wine will stay on track and blossom nicely with a bit of bottle age. 2023-2045+? **92.**

2018 Morgon- Domaine Georges Descombes

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

2018 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Georges Descombes

Georges Descombes’ 2018 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” is another excellent example of the vintage, with the same sort of structural stability found in his old vine Chiroubles from this year. The nose is deep, pure and sappy, wafting from the glass in a black fruity blend of sweet blackberries, black cherries, bonfire, roasted gamebird, a dollop of fresh herbs, raw cocoa and a superb base of granitic soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent down to its mineral foundation, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and very promising finish. 2025-2055. **92.**

2018 Morgon- Domaine Kevin Descombes

Kevin Descombes is a beautifully low octane example of the vintage, as this wine comes in listed at 12.5 percent and probably is pretty close to that. The bouquet is vibrant and very precise, offering up scents of red and black cherries, gamebird, a bit of raw cocoa, a fine base of dark soil, roses and a bit of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a good core, fine mineral drive, a good bit of backend, chewy tannin and a long, complex and bouncy finish. I really like this, but though it is quite light on its feet stylistically, it deserves some bottle age to soften up those backend tannins a bit before drinking it with wild abandon. 2023-2050. **93.**

2018 Morgon “Grand Cras”- Domaine Jean-Michel Dupré

The Morgon “Grand Cras” bottling from Jean-Michel Dupré is made from eighty year-old vines. His 2018 Grand Cras is an excellent example of this vintage, offering up ripe, but never overripe black fruit, fine soil signature and an impressively suave structural chassis for long-term aging. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gamebird, dark soil tones, bonfire and a gentle topnote of fresh-picked thyme. On

the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in profile (particularly for a 2018), with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and nicely soil-driven finish. This is an outstanding bottle of Morgon in the making! 2022-2055+. **93.**

2018 Morgon “Corcelette”- Domaine Mee Godard

The 2018 Morgon “Corcelette” from Mee Godard comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane and is a beautifully pure, sappy and nicely structured example of the vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of sappy black cherries, dark berries, espresso, just a whisper of fresh thyme, a fine base of granitic soil tones, *pigeon*, pungent violets and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and suavely balanced, with a great core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is ripe, but not overripe, and so well-balanced out of the blocks that it is eminently drinkable today, though it is really built for the long haul and the true fireworks will not begin for a full decade! I should mention that as I drank the wine over the course of a meal, the structure became more pronounced with air, so if you are inclined to drink this wine early on in its evolution, do not decant it, as it will start to close down on you. It will clearly be even better with bottle age! 2020-2070. **93+.**

2018 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Mee Godard

Mee Godard’s 2018 Morgon “Côte du Py” is a fine example of this vintage, with plenty of ripeness to its black fruit component, but also superb mineral undertow and balance. The wine comes in listed at 14.2 percent octane and offers up a deep and sappy bouquet of black cherries, cassis, dark chocolate, bonfire, roasted venison, a superb base of soil tones, a touch of coffee grounds, thyme and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a fine base of ripe tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is very much a creature of its vintage, but it is impeccably crafted in the riper personality of 2018 and seems perfectly well-balanced for long-term cellaring. It is drinkable today, but really deserves some time in the cellar to let its Morgon tannins soften up just a bit. 2023-2055. **92.**

2018 Morgon “les Charmes”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2018 Morgon “les Charmes” from the Wilding family at Château Grange Cochard is a beautifully sappy and black fruity example of the vintage, offering up a bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, bitter chocolate, bonfire, dark soil tones, gamebird and a topnote of violet. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a sappy core of fruit, fine soil undertow, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is quite low octane in personality for the 2018 vintage! The ripeness of fruit of the vintage here is harnessed beautifully in the soil tones and structural chassis of this wine, auguring for superb things down the road. 2023-2055+. **93.**

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

Jean-Paul Brun’s 2018 Morgon is another excellent example of the vintage. This is riper than in most years (I would guess in the fourteen percent range, the label notwithstanding), but also pure, defined by its underlying minerality and already beautifully complex on both the nose and palate. The nose wafts from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, pomegranate, spit-roasted gamebird, granitic minerality, vinesmoke, fresh thyme and a bit of incipient spice tones from the whole clusters. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully defined by its minerality, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish of impeccable balance. This is a touch heady by the standards here, but that is the nature of the

2018 vintage, and Monsieur Brun has made a beautiful bottle of Morgon in this year. 2023-2055+. **93+**.

2017 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Kevin Descombes

Kevin Descombes’ old vine bottling of Morgon from the 2017 vintage offers up a superb bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, dark soil tones and a topnote of marjoram. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully transparent down to its soil, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish that shows just a whisper of volatile acidity. I am pretty tolerant of VA and here it does not bother me particularly at the present time, but it may become a bit more pronounced with long-term cellaring. The wine is chewy enough to need at least a few years in the cellar to soften up on the backend, but if the VA stays modest, it will be a very good drink when the tannins relax a bit more. 2023-2040+? **91+**.

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

The 2016 old vine bottling of Côte du Py from Damien Coquelet is aging fairly gracefully and is starting to drink quite nicely, but it too is still plagued by a bit of volatile acidity on the palate, just like the range of 2018s that I tasted from the estate. The VA is fairly tame on the nose, so the wine offers up a complex bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, a lovely array of savory elements, dark soil tones, bonfire, roasted gamebird and a hint of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a good sappy core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex and gently volatile finish. I am slightly perplexed by this wine, as the raw materials here are flat out brilliant. Why a *vigneron* would take steps in the cellar (like a bare minimum of SO₂ at bottling) that would not necessarily safeguard these raw materials is really a mystery to me. It is not that this wine is a bad drink (particularly if your tolerance for VA is fairly high, as mine is), but it could have been flat out stunning and lived fifty years, instead of merely quite good in its idiosyncratic manner. 2020-2030+? **91**.

Brouilly

2019 Brouilly “la Croix des Rameaux”- Domaine Jean-Claude Lapalu

Jean-Claude Lapalu’s la Croix des Rameaux bottling of Brouilly hails from a parcel of fifty-plus year-old vines in this *lieu à dit*, which lies right on the boundary with Côte de Brouilly. Monsieur Lapalu raises this bottling in older Burgundy casks for six to eight months prior to bottling. The 2019 version is outstanding, offering a fairly black fruity interpretation of Brouilly on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, a bit of gamebird, dark soil tones and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, just a bit of tannin and a long, tangy and vibrant finish. Like his Beaujolais-Villages bottling, there is just a whisper of natural wine wildness here on the backend, but it is hardly distracting. 2020-2030. **92**.

2019 Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Jean-Claude Lapalu

The 2019 Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes” from Jean-Claude Lapalu, which hails from vines that are all fifty years of age or older, is a beautiful example of the vintage. The bouquet is bright, complex and classically red fruity in composition, offering up scents of cherries, sweet cranberries, lovely spice tones, a good base of soil, gamebird and a topnote of bonfire. On the

palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still has just a touch of spritz in it, with a lovely core, good soil signature, a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. A little time in decanter lets the spritz blow off and the wine is already drinking very well, but it clearly has the depth and balance to also age quite gracefully. 2020-2030+. **93.**

2018 Brouilly- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2018 Brouilly from Georges Descombes is a very pretty and expressive wine, with a bit more mid-palate stuffing and overall ripeness of personality than one would find here in most vintages, but no shortage of charm. The bright and red fruity bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, gamebird, lovely soil tones and a topnote of fresh-picked thyme. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with plenty of red fruit at the core, tangy acids and just a wisp of backend tannin perking up the long and complex finish. Fine juice. 2020-2030+. **92.**

2018 Brouilly “l’Enfer des Balloquets”- Domaine Robert Perroud

The 2018 Brouilly “l’Enfer des Balloquets” from Robert Perroud is a really superb example of this vintage, with a more black fruity personality than in most vintages, but coupled to great purity and transparency down to the soil. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a refined blend of black cherries, cassis, gamebird, woodsmoke, a dollop of fresh thyme, raw cocoa, discreet spices and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully sappy at the core, with fine soil signature, sound acids, just a bit of backend tannin and a long, balanced and complex finish. This is a bit more structured than most examples of Brouilly, but it is already approachable and will only improve with bottle age. First class juice! 2020-2035. **92+.**

Côte de Brouilly

2019 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

Daniel Bouland’s 2019 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie” is absolutely stunning on the nose, marrying beautifully pure and precisely ripe fruit with gorgeous transparency down the underlying minerality of this appellation. The aromatic constellation delivers scents of red and black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebird, stony minerality, a hint of raw cocoa and a topnote of violet. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and sappy at the core, with outstanding mineral undertow, tangy acids, suave tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Great juice. 2020-2050+. **94.**

2019 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Ambassades”- Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes

The 2019 vintage of Cuvée Ambassades from Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes is a beautifully sappy example of this outstanding vintage, which is a bit out of character for the normally more strait-laced appellation of Côte de Brouilly. The wine offers up beautiful aromatics in its bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, lovely spice tones, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, gamebird, stony soil tones, sweet stems and a bit of thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully solid at the core, with excellent mineral drive, modest, buried tannins and superb balance and grip on the long, complex and very classy finish. This is a classic example of Côte de Brouilly and will age very long and gracefully. Though it is approachable out of the blocks, I would give it three to five years in the cellar and really let it start to sing! 2023-2055. **93+.**



2019 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine Jean-Claude Lapalu

The 2019 Côte de Brouilly from Jean-Claude Lapalu is outstanding on both the nose and palate, with the spiciness and sappy element to the fruit tones of 2019 very much in evidence. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, allspice, woodsmoke, gamebird and a fine base of minerality. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and quite open in personality for a young Côte de Brouilly, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, just a wisp of tannin and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is a bit more open on the nose than the palate, so I would give it a year or two in the cellar for the palate to catch up. Fine juice. 2021-2040+. **92.**

2018 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Ambassades”- Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes

The 2018 version of Cuvée Ambassades from Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes is quite different stylistically from the 2019, but it is on the same quality level, albeit, with different vintage characteristics. The bouquet here is a bit more roasted in personality than the 2019, but equally complex, offering up scents of black cherries, black plums, bonfire, roasted meats, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee bean and a topnote of gentle herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a plush core of fruit, a bit of backend tannin and a long, focused and complex finish. This has the hallmarks of a more torrid vintage, with the wine broader-shouldered and more roasted in personality than the 2019, but without straying over the line into

sur maturité. It needs a few years for those moderate tannins to soften, but it will be a very good bottle in due course. 2023-2045. **90.**

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

The 2018 Côte de Brouilly from Jean-Paul Brun is quite black fruity this year, reflecting the torrid growing conditions of the summer of 2018. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex nose of roasted black cherries and black berries, hung game, a lovely base of soil, a touch of cola, curry, thyme and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a fine core, lovely mineral undertow, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and well-balanced finish that shows just a whisper of backend heat that firmly places this wine as from the vintage of 2018. I like this wine quite well, despite it being more a creature of its vintage than its appellation this year. 2023-2045+. **92.**

RECENTLY-TASTED BORDEAUX AND REVISITING THE 1855 LEFT BANK CLASSIFICATION



The lovely and tranquil entrance of Château Corbin in the graves sector of St. Émilion.

As readers know, I tend to drink a fair bit of older Bordeaux, as this was the leading wine region in the world when I was coming up through the ranks of the wine trade in the 1980s and most of my generation built the foundation of our cellars on claret. However, as I generally write about the Gironde these days as part of a vintage retrospective or as an historical profile of a single estate (such as the lovely wines from Château Haut-Bailly a few issues back), there are a lot of recent tasting notes that do not find their way into the pages of this publication. I thought this might be a good time to catch up with a more general feature on the wines of Bordeaux, as I do drink them quite often and hate to let those tasting notes just sit in my files unused! I did find time to write a piece on recently-tasted wines from the Right Bank back in February of 2018, but even that article is now more than two years old, and I have not done a similar Left Bank feature for far longer, so I have had a great many notes piling up here and in search of a home. Therefore, here is a compilation of Bordeaux that I have recently tasted over the last couple of years, with the balance skewed pretty dramatically towards the Left Bank, due to having written that feature on the Right Bank back in early 2018. A few of the notes may date back a bit longer than the last two years, for if a wine was sufficiently rare and at a proper stage of maturity, that it is unlikely to have changed all that dramatically between when I tasted it and today, I have

included it as well, with the date clearly indicating it as a slightly older tasting note, so that it too can see the light of day.

Putting this general feature together on the wines of Bordeaux also affords me the opportunity to write about something that I have been thinking about quite a bit over the last few years and have wanted to put into an article, and that is the prospect of revisiting the 1855 classification of the wines of the Médoc (and Château Haut-Brion) that has been pretty much set in stone in the region since that day. As most readers will already be aware, the only change that has ever been done to that 1855 classification was the promotion of Château Mouton-Rothschild from Second Growth to First Growth in 1973, after the estate's owner, Baron Philippe de Rothschild had spent most of his adult life lobbying for this change in the rankings. Other than Mouton's elevation, no other changes have been made to the 1855 classification, and anyone with sufficient experience with the wines of Bordeaux and a modicum of honesty has to admit that the 1855 classification is woefully out of date for several of the estates in the rankings. The fact that a great many of the rankings are still accurate (at least to my palate) is testimony to what a good job was originally done back in 1855, but one cannot deny that the landscape of winemaking in Bordeaux has changed profoundly since the mid-nineteenth century and it would make sense to not let the classification system devised in 1855 simply ossify into utter irrelevance.

Of course, given that Bordeaux is such a long-lived wine in the bottle, one has to begin any reassessment of the 1855 classification by deciding upon which historical standards and timeframes one is going to evaluate a given property and its wines, so as to place it more properly in its appropriate tier in an updated version of this system. One has to allow both for generational and ownership changes at certain estates, which may or may not improve or degrade the quality of the property's wines over an extended period of time, not to mention the flash and fade of stylistic trends from which the wines of the Gironde are certainly far from being immune. There is also the change of vineyard sources for many of the classed growths on the Left Bank, as the wealthier estates buy up additional vineyards from those with less deep pockets, so that there is hardly static vineyard sourcing behind the façade of each property's label. All of these changing factors need to be evaluated, but within a proper historical prism that allows for the long evolution of most of the classed growth' wines in bottle to also be taken into consideration, so that such changes can be viewed properly through the life cycles of several complete vintages of a given estate's wines. To give just one example, it is widely reported that the use of concentrators at Château Léoville Las Cases, which is alleged to have begun in the late 1970s, was heralded as a great innovation by the critics of the time (or at least the wines were immediately upgraded on their scorecards, whether or not a given critic was aware that concentrators were being used in the cellars to give Las Cases more stuffing each year). However, when one looks back on these wines from a perspective of thirty to forty years out, it is not so clear cut that this was a laudable change at the property and it may well have caused the wines to age less gracefully than was the case prior to the adoption of this cellar technique at Las Cases. With the widely-lauded 1982 Las Cases still caught in apparently endless adolescence, and the classically-produced 1966 drinking brilliantly for decades, it is not self-evident that the adoption of a more concentrated style for the wines here was positive in the long run.

Given the need for this historic lens with which to properly view the overall quality of a given property's wines, it seems to me that one does need a sufficiently long timeframe with which to attempt to revisit the classification of 1855, so as to give perspective to changes that occur at châteaux over the long haul, while still avoiding the ossification that we see in many of the original rankings today. With this in mind, I thought that perhaps a century would be a properly broad window with which to assess the wines of each of the Classed Growths, so as to allow the permutations in a property's wines to be given an appropriate historical context. If we can agree that one hundred years is a reasonable window of vintages with which to evaluate each property, then the logical thing to do would be to revisit the rankings of the original 1855 classification from 1955 to the present time. This would allow us today to try to place wines within a framework at the sixty-five year point of the second century of classification, with the idea that the next generation or two of claret lovers could revisit this again several more decades down the road and update the rankings. Of course, there have been many profound changes in the world of Bordeaux wine between 1955 and 2020, with some changes far more dramatic at one property than at another, and this will make the task of properly placing a given château at a certain level a bit more complicated, but it at least affords us the ability to evaluate a long string of wines at each estate and gives plenty of historical context for the proposed new rankings.

The choice of beginning another classification with 1955 has the added benefit of starting a decade out from the devastations of World War II, which should be a good point to begin to look at the wines from the region, as it was the slow start to the most affluent epoch in the history of the region. Certainly times were still hard at a great many châteaux in the region in the mid-1950s, and widespread financial security for property owners on the Gironde really did not firmly become entrenched until the magical run of vintages in the decade of the 1980s, but prospects were at least starting to brighten in 1955. Starting this far back also allows us to look at a given property's wines prior to the onset of global warming, whose origins can probably be traced to around 1990, or about halfway along our sixty-five year stretch of vintages with which to try and evaluate each estate's appropriate place in the rankings. Undertaking any such revisiting of the 1855 classification is fraught with difficulties (and bound to generate disagreement), but not doing so and just continuing on as if the original 1855 classification is still relevant to the quality of a given estate's wines this far out from the original rankings seems to me to be the greater of two potential follies. So, with that in mind, let us try and tackle the thorny issue of what might be a proper classification of the wines of the Left Bank from 1955 to the present time.

Here is the original 1855 classification of the Médoc (with Château Haut-Brion having been the only non-Médoc wine ranked), listed alphabetically and with Mouton's 1973 elevation included:

First Growths:

Château Haut-Brion
Château Lafite-Rothschild
Château Latour
Château Margaux
Château Mouton-Rothschild

Second Growths:

Château Brane-Cantenac
Château Cos d'Estournel
Château Ducru-Beaucaillou
Château Durfort-Vivens
Château Gruaud-Larose
Château Lascombes
Château Léoville-Barton
Château Léoville Las Cases
Château Léoville-Poyferré
Château Montrose
Château Pichon-Longueville-Baron
Château Pichon-Longueville Comtesse de Lalande
Château Rauzan-Gassies
Château Rauzan-Ségla

Third Growths:

Château Boyd-Cantenac
Château Calon-Ségur
Château Cantenac-Brown
Château Desmirail
Château Ferrière
Château Giscours
Château d'Issan
Château Kirwan
Château Lagrange
Château La Lagune
Château Langoa-Barton
Château Malescot-St. Exupéry
Château Marquis d'Alesme-Becker
Château Palmer

Fourth Growths:

Château Beychevelle
Château Branaire-Ducru
Château Duhart-Milon
Château Lafon-Rochet
Château Marquis-de-Terme
Château Pouget
Château Prieuré-Lichine
Château Saint-Pierre
Château Talbot
Château La Tour-Carnet

Fifth Growths:

Château d'Armailhac

Château Batailly
Château Belgrave
Château de Camensac
Château Cantemerle
Château Clerc-Milon
Château Cos-Labory
Château Croizet-Bages
Château Dauzac
Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste
Château Grand-Puy-Ducasse
Château Haut-Bages-Libéral
Château Haut-Batailly
Château Lynch-Bages
Château Lynch-Moussas
Château Pédesclaux
Château Pontet-Canet
Château du Tertre

It does not take a claret scholar to see that this ranking system is far, far removed from reality today, as there are several properties ranked as Second or Third Growths who have clearly not been producing wines at this perceived quality level for many decades, as well as some estates who have been making great wines for fifty years or more and are listed as Fourth or Fifth Growths! Clearly, the 1855 classification is long, long overdue for an update that more clearly mirrors the truth in the bottle. When I was typing out this 1855 list, what struck me first of all was that there are several estates here who, in my experience of drinking plenty of claret over the last forty years, should not merit any higher ranking than *Cru Bourgeois* and really do not presently belong on a classification of the best wines of the Médoc at all. And this assessment, would be based on the laid out 1955 to the present day timeframe that we discussed above. So, below, when we get around to trying to put together a more accurate classification of the Left Bank wines, I will demote them to *Cru Bourgeois* and remove them from our list. The other glaring omission in the 1855 classification is that Château Haut-Brion is the only estate included from the greater Graves region. Adding several other of the best red wine producers in this region will allow our new, proposed classification a more robust roster and fill in some of the holes left when underperforming estates are moved down to *Cru Bourgeois* status. The other notable shortfall of the 1855 classification is that several of the very good estates out towards Moulis, like Château Chasse-Spleen, Château Poujeaux and Château Gressier-Grand-Poujeaux were not included, but clearly merit to be in the classification if we look from the 1955 vintage forwards. Additionally, some *Cru Bourgeois* ranked wines, such as Châteaux Haut-Marbuzet, Meyney and Sociando-Mallet clearly deserve to be included in the rankings.

In the proposed update to the 1855 classification that follows, which we might call the 1955 classification (as the original was ostensibly based on the historical quality and pricing of the Left Bank estates going back several decades or more prior to 1855), I will try to explain my rationale for any changes to a given level in a short discussion following the classifications of the châteaux. If a winery remains at its same 1855 classification in this new listing, I will not bother to address those reasons and we can simply assume that they have continued to perform at the

expected level of quality for their tier since 1955 to the present day. As this is my personal classification update, it probably does not need mentioning that I will evaluate the quality based upon my old school claret sensibilities, so there will be certain châteaux that are venerated elsewhere whose wines I find hold little interest and will be ranked accordingly in the following classification. As there are some well-regarded estates who used to make great wines, and did so from 1955 up until fairly recently, and they will be the most vexing cases to peg in this hierarchy. They will be discussed in more depth below.



Updated Classification of the Left Bank (1955 to the Present)

First Growths:

- Château Ducru-Beaucaillou
- Château Haut-Brion
- Château Lafite-Rothschild
- Château Latour
- Château Margaux
- Château Pichon-Longueville Comtesse de Lalande

Second Growths:

- Domaine de Chevalier
- Château Gruaud-Larose

Château La Mission Haut-Brion
Château Montrose
Château Mouton-Rothschild
Château Palmer
Château Pichon-Longueville-Baron
Château Rauzan-Ségla

Third Growths:

Château Beychevelle
Château Calon-Ségur
Château Cantemerle
Château Cos d'Estournel
Château Haut-Bailly
Château Lagrange
Château La Lagune
Château Léoville-Barton
Château Léoville Las Cases
Château Léoville-Poyferré
Château Lynch-Bages
Château Pape-Clément

Fourth Growths:

Château Branaire-Ducru
Château Giscours
Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste
Château d'Issan
Château Prieuré-Lichine
Château Pontet-Canet
Château Rauzan-Gassies
Château Sociando-Mallet
Château Talbot

Fifth Growths:

Château d'Armailhac
Château Batailly
Château Brane-Cantenac
Château Chasse-Spleen
Château Clerc-Milon
Château Duhart-Milon
Château Haut-Bages-Libéral
Château Haut-Batailly
Château Haut-Marbuzet
Château Kirwan
Château Lafon-Rochet
Château Lascombes
Château La Louvière

Château Malescot-St. Exupéry
Château Marquis d'Alesme-Becker
Château Marquis-de-Terme
Château Poujeaux
Château Saint-Pierre
Château Smith Haut-Lafitte
Château La Tour-Martillac

De-Classified

Château Belgrave
Château Boyd-Cantenac
Château de Camensac
Château Cantenac-Brown
Château Croizet-Bages
Château Cos-Labory
Château Dauzac
Château Desmirail
Château Durfort-Vivens
Château Ferrière
Château Grand-Puy-Ducasse
Château Langoa-Barton
Château Lynch-Moussas
Château Pédesclaux
Château Pouget
Château du Tertre
Château La Tour-Carnet

First Growth Changes

First, the demotion. Though some of the greatest bottles of claret I have ever drunk have been certain vintages of Château Mouton-Rothschild, including the 1945, 1949, 1955, 1959, 1961, 1982 and 1985, one has to admit that the original classification of 1855 probably placed Mouton correctly as a Second Growth. The issue here is not one of excellence when everything works out perfectly in a given year (which is indisputable), but the inability of this estate to produce true First Growth quality wines with far more frequency. Wines like the 1978, 1979, 1981, 1983 and 1990 Moutons are really more like Fourth Growth in quality, and as most of their First Growth peers made very good to exceptional wines in all of those vintage, one starts to see that this is really not a First Growth estate. However, I should mention that there is a hole in my Mouton tasting experience, as I have tasted few of their wines from the decade of the 1990s and early vintages of the 2000s, so maybe I am missing some major wines from the estate. But, in that vein, I should mention that when I was doing the annual *En Primeur* tastings for the 2009 to 2012 vintages, I never tasted a Mouton I thought was exceptional. Better to place this as a Second Growth with the understanding that if the stars align here, the wine will be one of the best of the vintage on the Left Bank. But the stars have simply not aligned here consistently enough from 1955 to the present to merit First Growth status. I should mention that I deliberated quite some time about also downgrading Château Margaux as well from the First Growths, as since 1955, their record has been equally spotty. But, it is still probably too early to truly

evaluate the ultimate longevity and quality of the wines made here in the decade of the 1980s, as they are only really reaching the start of their peaks today, and they will be decisive on whether Margaux should stay or go in this rarefied air of First Growths.

Now, the additions. Château Ducru-Beaucaillou has been making stellar wines since 1955, and as good as past legends here like the 1959, 1961 and 1982 are, the wines made at Ducru in the last ten or fifteen years are probably the greatest ever made in the history of the estate. The property did have an alleged TCA issue in the cellars that tainted the initial releases of wines in the mid-to-late 1980s here, but as the notes below will attest, the re-conditioned 1986 Ducru is a superb example of the vintage and shows just how good the actual wines were being made here at that time. They were simply undone by a cellar problem with TCA (at least this is my opinion- it is important to note that, to my knowledge, the proprietors have never publicly acknowledged the issue, but it does seem probable that there was some contaminated wood in the cellars here, as there was at Contino in Rioja around a similar time). In any event, that challenge is long in the past now and the wines at Château Ducru-Beaucaillou are clearly of First Growth quality today. The same can be said for Château Pichon-Lalande, who is also making the finest wines I have ever tasted from the property in the last decade and a half, and one has to admire just how good they were leading into this past fifteen year stretch! Going back to the 1950s, the only Pichon-Lalande I have tasted from this era was the excellent 1959, but the decade of the 1960s produced a legend in 1961, a superb 1962, a classic 1966 and one of the very best Left Bank wines of the vintage in 1970. The estate was even stronger in the challenging decade of the 1970s, as the 1971 is an outstanding example of this underrated vintage, the '75 is a perfectly good wine in the context of that vintage, the 1978 excellent, the 1979 even better and the 1980 vintage of Pichon-Lalande was one of the very best two or three wines made on either side of the Gironde in that very difficult vintage. The decade of the 1980s was even better yet. If we are seeking to compare and contrast Mouton with Pichon-Lalande during this stretch, the 1982s are equals, the 1985 Mouton is better than the Pichon-Lalande, but in every other vintage of this legendary ten year stretch on the Gironde, Pichon-Lalande unequivocally outperformed Mouton. Thus, in my new classification, Pichon-Lalande moves up to First Growth and takes Mouton's place at that level.

Second Growth Changes

Again, first the demotions. Estates such as Brane-Cantenac, Durfort-Vivens, Lascombes and Rauzan-Gassies are clearly not making Second Growth quality wines today, nor were they back in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s or 1980s. Rauzan-Gassies is making very good wines today (and far better than the others in this group), but they are still not yet of Second Growth material. If we again look at the timeframe from 1955 to the present day, Château Cos d'Estournel does not merit inclusion in the Second Growths, as their track record seems more appropriately placed as a Third Growth. Maybe there is more potential to the *terroir* here than what has been coaxed out of it and put into bottle in the last sixty-five vintages, but for the moment, this estate is better placed as a Third Growth. Like Château Margaux, how the highly-touted vintages of the 1980s here at Cos ultimately perform will be telling. My last visits with the 1982, 1985, 1986 and 1989 vintages from Cos d'Estournel were not reassuring in this regard. Now we move onto the three Léoville estates. No doubt, the demotion of Léoville Las Cases to a Third Growth is even more controversial than that of Cos d'Estournel, but if we look at this estate from 1955 to the present day, the track record is not all that illustrious- particularly compared to other Second Growths.

The 1959 and 1961 are good, solid wines, but hardly stars of the vintage. I have had a few beautiful bottles of the 1966, but the 1970 and 1971 are not special, the 1978 Las Cases only solid and the 1979 is sub-par and seemingly stillborn. Which brings us to the decade of the 1980s, the peg on which the estate hangs its Super Second Growth hat. When vintages like 1982, 1983, 1985 and 1986 were young, I believed all of the hype surrounding the wines and thought that they would be excellent in due course. Maybe they still will blossom, but all of my recent tastings of these vintages from the 1980s have been relatively disappointing, revealing overly extracted, relatively unevolved and ham-fisted wines that also seem to be stuck in neutral, much as is the case with the 1979 Las Cases. I liked the wines here I tasted from 2008 to 2012 when doing *En Primeur* visits, but they are very young and the same caveats have to be attached to these as the wines from the decade of the 1980s- until any of these wines blossoms and really delivers on their seeming early promise, it is impossible to honestly say that the cellar techniques currently practiced at Las Cases are truly successful in producing top quality and classically-styled examples of claret. So, for the moment, Third Growth seems a more appropriate placement for Léoville Las Cases, while the jury remains out on the decade of the 1980s here.

Regarding the other two parts of the former Léoville estate, though I have had some truly beautiful examples of older Léoville-Poyferré, the wine has never been consistent enough in its excellence from vintage to vintage to merit inclusion in the Second Growths. Like Mouton and the First Growths, Léoville-Poyferré in its very finest vintages is clearly of Second Growth caliber, but not so in the less successful vintages here and it is just not consistent enough to merit that ranking. And, of course, one should mention that the wine today is now overtly modern in style and nowhere near the same quality as it was in the less consistent days of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Based on the most recent vintages here, one should expect it to be further downgraded when the younger modern wines fail to deliver with bottle age. But, for the moment, the excellence of vintages like Léoville-Poyferré like the 1964, 1966, 1982, 1986 and 1990 merit its inclusion amongst the Third Growths. For Château Léoville-Barton, I hovered between Third and Fourth Growth for this wine, but the excellence of this estate's wines in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s finally persuaded me to leave it ranked alongside of its former stable-mates from the old Léoville estate. That said, I have been less than impressed with the wines I tasted from the estate during my four years of doing the *En Primeur* tastings and I could well imagine this wine being downgraded to Fourth Growth in the future.

Now for the additions to the Second Growth roster. Château La Mission Haut-Brion is a no-brainer and the only real question here is whether this is a First or a Second Growth. In the end, I like it as one of the very best of the Second Growths, but it is close, as one cannot dispute just how great the wines are at this estate in their finest vintages. Part of my hesitation with making La Mission Haut-Brion a First Growth is the impression I have that the wines since the property was sold to the Dillon family in 1983 have not quite kept up the quality and consistency of the estate as when it was owned by the Woltner family. Château Palmer is also a very easy addition to the Second Growths, and again, this wine hovers on the cusp of being elevated to a First Growth. It is the timeframe that we are looking at, from 1955 to the present time, that keeps this wine firmly ensconced in the rankings as a Second Growth. Like Mouton-Rothschild, the high water marks at Palmer are truly celestial, but for every vintage such as 1959, 1961, 1966, 1970 and 1983 here, there are vintages that are less impressive in the contexts of their respective vintages and keep the estate from moving into the ranks of the First Growths. However, much

like Château Pichon-Lalande, Château Palmer has been making consistently superb wines for the last fifteen years and perhaps when those wines have stood the test of time, Palmer could move up. Domaine de Chevalier also clearly deserves Second Growth status for the wines from 1955 forwards- at least, until quite recently. However, in recent times, the wines have been “pumped up” and modernized, to their detriment, and as these more recent vintages start to mature and disappoint in comparison to the firmament of great past wines crafted here, then DDC may have to be moved down accordingly. But, for the moment, the new vintages are too young and the library of magical wines from the *ancienne regime* here is too voluminous to not rank Domaine de Chevalier as a Second Growth.



The lovely, vaulted cellars at Château Gruaud-Larose in St. Julien.

Third Growth Changes

For the 1855 Third Growths demoted, I cannot believe that anyone (other than the owners) will have issue with removing Châteaux Boyd-Cantenac, Cantenac-Brown, Desmirail, Ferrière, Kirwan, Langoa-Barton, Malescot-St. Exupéry and Marquis d’Alesme-Becker from the ranks of the Third Growths. Moving Château Giscours and Château d’Issan down a peg to Fourth Growth will be a bit more contentious, as Giscours made some great wines in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, but fell flat in the glorious decade of the 1980s and has still not regained the form that made them so good in the ‘60s and ‘70s, so Fourth Growth seems more appropriate. Château d’Issan is almost the inverse of Giscours, as they hardly had a special run from 1955 to 2000, but have been making very, very strong wines in the twenty-first century. However, given the timeframe of vintages that we are looking at for the classification, it strikes

me as better to place them amongst the Fourth Growths for the moment, with the expectation that when the most recent vintages have had a chance to prove their quality over many decades in bottle, the estate would most likely be moved back up to the Third Growths.

Amongst the estate that I would elevate to Third Growth from their previous classification in 1855, Châteaux Beychevelle and Lynch-Bages are easy and uncontroversial additions to this strata of the classification. Château Cantemerle has been making outstanding wines from 1955 to the present day, and they are clearly of Third Growth quality to my palate. The same can be said for Château Haut-Bailly, which I just discussed in great detail a couple of issues back. The other new addition to Third Growth status is a bit more problematic to my thinking, as Château Pape-Clément was quite clearly making wines of Third Growth quality from 1955 up until the departure of long-time Cellar Master Bernard Pujol after the 1998 vintage, but the new style here since that day I find far less convincing than those great old vintages produced here. But, based on the weight of excellence from 1955 to 1998, one has to give the estate Third Growth status, at least for the time being.

Fourth Growth Changes

First, the demotions out of this level of the classification. Châteaux Duhart-Milon, Lafon-Rochet, Marquis-de-Terme, Pouget, Saint-Pierre and La Tour-Carnet are all estates whose wines from 1955 to the present day argue strongly for their classification to be other than Fourth Growth. Some of the producers are good enough to just slide down a notch to Fifth Growth, whereas others are really no better than *Cru Bourgeois* and should be removed from the ranks of the Classed Growths. With the new additions to the level of Fourth Growth, I cannot imagine that anyone will take issue with Châteaux Grand-Puy-Lacoste and Sociando-Mallet being elevated to this level, as they have been making very fine wines now for many decades and clearly deserve inclusion amongst the official classification of the Médoc. Château Pontet-Canet is a bit more of a stretch, as their track record prior to the twenty-first century is a bit more spotty than either Grand-Puy-Lacoste or Sociando-Mallet, but what has been crafted here since the switch to biodynamic farming methods has been very impressive and I had to place them at Fourth Growth.

Fifth Growth Changes

Looking first at the estates I would move out of the ranks of the Fifth Growths and declassify, the wines at Châteaux Belgrave, de Camensac, Cos-Labory, Croizet-Bages, Dauzac, Grand-Puy-Ducasse, Lynch-Moussas, Pédesclaux and du Tertre are all really at the level of *Cru Bourgeois* and do not belong in this classification. All can and have made good, solid examples of claret from time to time, but they are still a bit over their heads as Fifth Growths. However, there are some very worthy estates who were left out of the 1855 classification that merit elevation to Fifth Growths (with some of these on the cusp of Fourth Growth status), as they have been making very good to excellent wines for several decades and are really doing fine work today. These would certainly include Châteaux Chasse-Spleen, Haut-Marbuzet, La Louvière, Poujeaux, La Tour-Martillac and Smith-Haut-Lafitte. There are also estates like Château Gressier-Grand-Poujeaux, whose wines I liked very well in the decade of the 1980s, but I have not tasted enough of them either before or after that period to have a sense of whether or not they merit inclusion as a Fifth Growth, but certainly their wines in that stretch in the 1980s would have gotten them inclusion in this level. Château La Tour-Martillac is a bit of a stretch

here, as I am only really aware of the quality of their wines since the 2006 vintage (when they sent consultant Michel Rolland packing), but they have been so good since that time, I had to include them, even though I do not have any experience with their wines in vintages like the 1960s or 1970s. Château Smith-Haut-Lafitte is one of the inclusions here that I worry the most about, for though I really liked what was going on here for the red wines in the 1990s and early 2000s, they have chosen to alter course and make more pumped up, modern wines in recent times that are caricatures of the svelte, perfumed and beautifully elegant wines of the '90s and '00s, and probably will not age well and eventually drag the estate down and out of the classification. In a similar vein, the very fine Moulis estate of Château Poujeaux hired Stéphane Derenoncourt to screw up their wines beginning in 2009 or 2010 and they will probably be downgraded to *Cru Bourgeois* one day down the road, but for now, there were all those good wines made in the 1980s and 1990s to keep them listed amongst the Fifth Growths.

So, there is my proposed re-working of the 1855 classification of the Left Bank to try and bring it more in line with how the estates have performed from 1955 to the present day. There is no doubt that some will take issue with some of the placements, but I would happily argue that in its totality, the proposed reworking of the 1855 rankings is far more reflective of reality today than the original, and a far better guide to wine lovers of the relative merits of the wines of the estates included in the proposed new listing. I may have forgotten an estate or two along the way (for which I apologize), or not kept up on some change at some estate since I stopped attending the *En Primeur* tastings each spring after the debut of the 2012 vintage in April of 2013. But, as I noted at the outset of this article, I have been thinking about the classification system and how out of date it was for some time now and wanted to write an article to address how it might be improved and brought up to date. I have not taken into consideration in the updated classification any of the Second Wines now routinely produced at many of the very top estates in the Médoc, though several of these would merit inclusion in the classification system based on the consistent quality of their wines. I also do not have as much experience with the older vintages of some of the Fourth and Fifth Growths in my listing, as I am far more likely to cross paths with a 1955 or 1966 from one of the very top estates on the Gironde than I am with a vintage that old from estates such as Châteaux Chasse-Spleen, Haut-Marbuzet, La Louvière or Poujeaux, so I grant that these properties may not have been making wines in the '50s or '60s at the same levels as they have from the 1980s to today. Therefore, do not take the proposed classification as something set in stone (seemingly like the 1855 version), but simply as a point of departure to update what is becoming increasingly irrelevant and inaccurate, and my list can certainly be fine-tuned and amended as need be. But, we need to stop pretending that the 1855 classification is not wildly incorrect today, and has been for many decades.

The following notes are listed chronologically by vintage, with White Bordeaux notes listed first, followed by red wines. I have made no efforts to sort each vintage subset by region, but simply listed the wines alphabetically within each vintage grouping. As the notes stretch back to some quite old vintages, I have taken the liberty to list all wines from the former Graves region as such, though most would now be from the more selective appellation of Pessac-Léognan. But, as this distinction was not available for the older vintages, I have just used the moniker of "Graves" for all of the vintage notes that follow, for consistency within the article. A few vintages are not represented in the notes that follow, as I have plans still to write features in the near future on the 2001 vintage, the 1998s on the Right Bank and the brilliant and legendary

1961 vintage in Bordeaux, so I have kept my recent notes on wines from those years back to include in those works in progress. I also have plans to write an estate feature on Château l'Evangile sometime soon, so those notes are also not represented in the roster of tasting notes that follow. And of course, as I have quite recently written a feature on the 1982 vintage in Bordeaux, most of my recent notes on those wines were already published in that piece. I should also mention that I have included here some notes that date back to a superb vertical tasting of very old vintages of Château Gruaud-Larose that was held in the cellars of the estate in St. Julien back in the spring of 2012. I had always intended to use these notes within an historical feature on the property, but as I have not gotten around to writing it yet and did not want the notes to rest in obscurity any longer. At the time, the proprietors at Gruaud were organizing tastings that ended with the same digit as the year of the tasting, so all of these wines were from vintages that ended in "2" to match the spring of 2012 tasting date. I have included the notes from this tasting of the vintages that have not been covered in previous articles (like the vintage feature on 1982), just for curiosity's sake.

Bordeaux Blanc

2012 Ygrex de Château d'Yquem (Sauternes)

The 2012 Ygrex de Château d'Yquem is one of the finest young vintages of this wine I have had the pleasure to taste. The bouquet is flat out gorgeous in its youthful blend of lime, pear, a touch of botanicals, anise, citrus zest, a touch of petrol and a lovely, floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full-bodied, with a great core of fruit, crisp acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. This seems likely to eventually surpass the 1985 Ygrex (please see below). 2020-2040. **93+**.

2011 Château La Louvière Blanc (Graves)

The 2011 Château La Louvière Blanc is a lovely and classic example of this fine bottling. Today, the wine is wide open and drinking with distinction, offering up a fine bouquet of fig, petrol, beeswax, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine transparency and bounce, zesty acids and a long, complex and very satisfying finish. White Bordeaux, of course, has the same issues with premature oxidation as white Burgundy, so some bottles may not stand the test of time as well as others, but for bottles of the 2011 La Louvière which are spared, this wine will have plenty of longevity to it as well as delivering immense pleasure at the present time. 2018-2030+. **92**.

2010 Mouton Ail d'Argent Blanc (Pauillac)

Before this bottle, I had never encountered a vintage of the white wine from Mouton-Rothschild outside of the winery and I was very curious to see how the wine was developing at nearly eight years of age. The wine was still youthfully closed on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of lemon, petrol, beeswax, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core, a rather four-square personality and a bit of backend bitterness poking out on the finish. This was okay in December of 2017, but still needed a few more years in the cellar to start to blossom and show a bit of generosity on the palate. 2020-2040. **87+**.

2008 Château La Louvière Blanc (Graves)

Like the note on the 2011 above, this 2008 La Louvière Blanc was sealed under a natural cork. The estate has begun shipping this wine to the US under screwcap as well, so it now necessitates remarking on which closure the wine is sealed under. The 2008 is a very tasty bottle that is now fully mature, delivering a fine nose of grapefruit, fresh fig, chalky soil tones, a touch of petrol, a deft framing of vanillin oak and a nice topnote of damp grass. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core and soil undertow, fine focus and a long, classy and well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2017-2030+. **90.**

2007 Château Couhins-Lurton Blanc (Graves)

This is the sister property of Château La Louvière, as both are owned by the Lurton family. The Couhins-Lurton Blanc is composed entirely of sauvignon blanc and the 2007 version offers up a pretty nose of lime, fig, fresh-mown grass, petrol, a complex base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and shows off a good core, with lovely, tangy acids, very good focus and grip and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is good juice and one of the white Graves producers that tends to fly below the radar these days. 2016-2027. **90.**

1993 Château Haut-Brion Blanc (Graves)

1993 is a very important vintage in the annals of white Bordeaux, as it is the last of the non-premoxed vintages in the region (as it is for white Burgundy). When the wines were released, I only bought a small handful for my cellar, as the 1994 white Bordeaux were already being widely touted and everyone in the trade recognized that the 1994s were from a slightly superior vintage. Except that they were also the first premox vintage of white Bordeaux! In any event, all I have left from 1993 in my cellar is Haut-Brion Blanc, which granted, if one has to have only one example of white Bordeaux from a vintage, this would be it! The wine is stunning and currently drinking beautifully, offering up a deep, refined and complex bouquet of fresh fig, lime peel, green apple, gentle notes of cut grass, a touch of petrol, chalky soil tones, vanillin oak and a beautiful topnote of fresh mint. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and sports superb mid-palate depth, with zesty acids, lovely balance and grip and a very long, complex and stellar finish. Great wine. 2017-2050. **95.**

1992 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc (Graves)

In the Graves, 1990, 1993 and 1994 are the great white wine vintages from this era, and the 1992s are not in that same league. However, the 1992 DDC Blanc continues to drink nicely and is still quite enjoyable, offering up a complex and tertiary nose of lemon oil, chalky soil tones, fresh fig, a discreet touch of petrol, beeswax and a delicate framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core, lovely focus and grip and a long, finish that is just starting to show the first cracks in the foundation, as the alcohol is just beginning to come uncovered a bit on the finish as the fruit starts to fade a touch. This is a lovely wine for drinking over the next few years, but do not lose it in a dark corner of the cellar, as it is getting fragile. 2018-2022. **90.**

1989 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc (Graves)

The 1989 vintage of Domaine de Chevalier Blanc is excellent and drinking at its apogee today. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and classic blend of fresh fig, tangerine,

chalky soil tones, a touch of petrol, gentle grassiness, toasted coconut and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and zesty, with a superb core of fruit, fine focus and grip, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, poised and vibrant finish. This is really, really good juice! 2018-2040. **93.**

1989 Château Couhins-Lurton Blanc (Graves)

The 1989 Château Couhins-Lurton Blanc is an excellent example of the vintage and the wine is still cruising along at its peak and drinking with breed and complexity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fully mature blend of candied lemon, coconut, orange peel, a lovely base of soil, vanilla custard, a whisper of new oak and incipient notes of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely balance and grip, still good, zesty acids and a long, classy finish. I had the pleasure to drink this wine once previously, when staying at Château La Louvière during a UGC event, and if they had not served it then, I would have passed this lone bottle by and never known what I was missing. Fine juice. 2019-2030. **91.**



1985 Château Haut-Brion Blanc (Graves)

This is one of the wines that I never bought enough of for my own cellar and only have a few bottles left these days. This was a major mistake. So, every time I get to drink one at a tasting or dinner, it is an immense pleasure. This most recent bottle of the 1985 Haut-Brion Blanc, which was served as a warm up for a dinner with members of the Confrérie des

Chevaliers du Tastevin in Atlanta (thank you again gents!), was right at its apogee and absolutely singing, offering up a pure and classic bouquet of apple, fresh fig, petrol, paraffin, a lovely touch of grassiness, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and a suave framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, zesty acids and a very long, complex and utterly refined finish. Lovely juice. 2016-2040+. **94.**

1985 Ygrec de Château d'Yquem (Sauternes)

I do not often drink Ygrec, but have always enjoyed the wine when I am fortunate enough to cross paths with a bottle. This lovely 1985 offers up a bright and complex nose of pineapple, grapefruit, chalky soil tones, citrus peel, beeswax and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, deep and full-bodied, with impressive complexity and grip, fine balance, good, but not particularly strident acids and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. Good juice. 2017-2030. **92.**

1969 Pavillon Blanc du Château Margaux (Margaux)

It is hard to believe a good friend served this to our tasting group blind, as there was zero chance any of us might guess this wine! It was quite surprising, as the wine turned out to be really quite good, making it the only example of the 1969 vintage in Bordeaux that I have ever been able to say that about! The bouquet is complex and still quite vibrant, offering up notes of lime peel, a touch of grapefruit, paraffin and a good base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, moderately complex and still nicely balanced, with well-integrated acids and quite good length and grip on the moderately complex finish. Not a great wine, but a good wine and a huge surprise. 2019-2030. **87.**

1969 Château Laville Haut-Brion (Graves)

This was a complete surprise, as my friend Paul bought it simply on the premise that there are more good surprises than bad from “off” vintages of Laville in this era. It turned out to be really lovely, once it had been given thirty minutes in decanter to shake off the vestiges of old age and blossom. The wine offers up a fine, mature nose of baked peach, dried orange, sweet walnut, a touch of toasted coconut, lemon peel, salty soil tones and a gentle topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very complex, with bright, well-integrated acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complete and beautifully balanced finish. This is really good and an absolute revelation for the vintage. 2018-2030. **88.**

1964 Château Laville Haut-Brion (Graves)

It had been quite a few years since I was last treated to a bottle of the magical 1964 Laville Haut-Brion, so I was thrilled to see the wine continuing to cruise along at its apogee and showing no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The gorgeous bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of orange, fresh fig, lemon, gentle notes of beeswax, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and a citrus peel topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fresh and complex, with a great core, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and impeccable focus and balance on the long, pure and dancing finish. This wine has seemingly not moved since the first time that I drank it, all the way back in the late 1980s! This particular bottle was actually a touch reductive and we had to decant it for fifteen minutes before serving it! 2017-2035+. **96.**

1947 Château La Haye Blanc “Grand Vin de Graves” - Roger Lafage (Graves)

This bottle of 1947 Château La Haye Blanc was bottled by a Libourne-based *négociant* from this era, Roger Lafage. The note goes back to the spring of 2014, but it was drinking so

well and still had plenty of life ahead of it at the time that I have printed the note in this feature, as it has been languishing in my files since that time. The nose offers up a deep, complex and nice old white Graves blend of tangerine, dried apricot, a touch of beeswax, gentle notes of petrol, chalky soil elements and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and still fresh and complex, with a good core, lovely focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. I do not know anything about either the estate or the *négociant* in this era, but this wine is testament that they both knew what they were doing back in the late 1940s! 2014-2030+. **90.**

Bordeaux Rouge

2008 Château Beychevelle (St. Julien)

I have liked the 2008 Beychevelle since I first tasted it and the wine continues to age beautifully and will clearly deliver on all of its early promise. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows a lovely touch of “cooler fruit tones” in its mix of cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf, a touch of cigar ash, gravelly soil tones and a suave foundation of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a deep core of fruit, lovely transparency and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and very refined finish. All this needs is a bit more time in the cellar to fully blossom! 2025-2075. **93.**

2008 Château Cantemerle (Haut Médoc)

I continue to have a very strong preference for the 2008 vintage in Bordeaux over either of the following two years of 2009 and 2010, despite most commentators being swayed by the more obvious power and ripeness of the latter two vintages. This most recent bottle of the 2008 Cantemerle was excellent and beautifully classical in profile, offering up a still fairly youthful bouquet of cassis, black cherries, coffee bean, dark soil tones, cigar wrapper and a tasteful framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, well-measured tannins and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is still quite youthful in its profile, but it is not particularly closed, and one can see all of its future detail quite clearly. It is a first class bottle in the making. 2023-2060. **93.**

2008 Château Phélan-Ségur (St. Estèphe)

While the 2008 Château Phélan-Ségur is not quite at the level of the 2005, this is another very strong wine from this fine estate. The bouquet is bright, deep and nicely transparent in personality, delivering scents of black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones and a deft touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, fine-grained, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is very tasty and is a fine value. 2020-2035+. **89.**

2006 Château Brane-Cantenac (Margaux)

I have friends who are fairly big fans of this property, but I have never been able to warm up to its stylistic signature. The 2006 is a good vintage of Brane-Cantenac, offering up a classic nose of cassis, cigarette ash, dark soil tones, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, moderately complex and a bit hollow in the mid-palate, with some ripe, well-integrated tannins perking up the fairly short finish. This is an okay wine that still needs a bit of time in the cellar to soften completely, but is also fairly underwhelming from what is a pretty good vintage. That said, it is also very much consistent with my experience with this property in other vintages. 2022-2050. **86.**

2006 Château Corbin (St. Émilion)

The 2006 Corbin is one of my favorite recent vintages from this underrated estate. The bouquet is still youthful, but already beautifully expressive, offering up scents of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, coffee bean, a nice touch of fresh herbs, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core of fruit, good soil undertow, fine-grained tannins and a long, promising and beautifully classical finish. Corbin does not have the greatest *terroir* in St. Émilion, but it does have some of the finest winemaking. This is approachable already, but I would try to give it at least a few more years in the cellar and let it blossom more completely. Good juice. 2021-2045. **91+**.

2006 Château Dauzac (Margaux)

I do not cross paths with Château Dauzac very often, but this 2006 version is a good, solid wine. The nose is black fruity and reasonably complex, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, coffee grounds, dark soil tones, cigar ash, a bit of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely solid at the core, with modest tannins, good focus and grip and a fairly long, balanced finish. This is not the most complex bottle of Margaux, but it is a good, honest example of this classic vintage. 2017-2040+. **88**.

2006 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou (St. Julien)

The 2006 vintage in Bordeaux will ever have to live in the long shadow of the superb 2005s, but I like this vintage very much and feel it has a long and promising future ahead of it. The 2006 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou is a superb example of just how good this year is on the Gironde, as it offers up a youthful and beautifully precise bouquet of sweet dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, that signature base of gravel, a touch of tobacco leaf and a suave foundation of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a superb core of black fruit, lovely soil signature and a long, ripely tannic and focused finish that will be superbly complex in due course. A first rate vintage at Ducru. 2030-285. **94**.

2006 Château Lagrange (St. Julien)

The 2006 Château Lagrange is still quite youthful in profile, but it is a very nicely balanced wine that will blossom in due course to provide plenty of enjoyment and a nice, long life in the cellar. The nose wafts from the glass in a primary blend of cassis, dark berries, espresso, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones and just a touch of nutty new oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with ripe, buried tannins, a fine core of black fruit and good soil tones in the making on the long and nascently complex finish. All this needs is a bit more time to blossom. 2024-2060. **91+**.

2006 Château Rauzan-Ségla (Margaux)

Rauzan-Ségla made a very fine example of the 2006 vintage, and this will be starting to really drink with generosity in the not too distant future. Today, the bouquet offers up a refined and classic aromatic constellation of cassis, black raspberries, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, a well-done framing of nutty new oak and still a whisper of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of pure fruit, good soil signature, suave, buried tannins and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. Give it just a few more years to fully blossom. 2024-2060. **92+**.

2005 Château Lagrange (St. Julien)

I really like the 2005 vintage of Château Lagrange, which will be an outstanding example of the vintage in due course. The bouquet is starting to show some nice secondary signs of development, though the wine remains still quite youthful on the palate. The nose wafts from the

glass in a mix of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, nutty new oak and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, nascent complexity and a long, ripely tannic and tangy finish. The 2005's fairly firm tannins and good acidity are going to make this an extremely long-lived wine, but they will also demand a bit more patience before starting to drink the '05 Lagrange. 2025-2085. **92+**.

2005 Château Phélan-Ségur (St. Estèphe)

The 2005 vintage of Château Phélan-Ségur is one of the finest I have ever tasted from this property, and this has to be one of the great sleepers of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, offering up scents of sappy black cherries, sweet cassis, cigar smoke, a fine base of dark soil, incipient notes of truffles and a nice touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a really solid core of fruit, fine focus and grip, firm, but well-integrated tannins and a long, quite serious finish. This is punching above its weight class in 2005! 2020-2045+. **91**.

2005 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

It is still very, very early days for the 2005 VCC, but its future glory is already very much apparent. The youthful bouquet delivers a lovely constellation of black cherries, cassis, bitter chocolate, cigar smoke, a superb base of dark, gravelly soil tones and a nice touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, primary and full-bodied, with outstanding mid-palate depth, a vivid display of *terroir*, a sappy core of black fruit, tangy acids, suave tannins and a long, precise and very, very refined finish. This is a true long distance runner and it is going to need plenty of cellaring time to blossom, but it is going to be flat out brilliant when it is ready to drink. 2030-2100. **95+**.



2003 Château Branaire-Ducru (St. Julien)

I am still surprised that no one has started a campaign to bring up Robert Parker on charges for recommending the abysmal 2003 Bordeaux vintage so highly and taking so many of his subscribers for a ride (and wallet fleecing). I am yet to taste even a single example of 2003 claret that is remotely interesting, and this Branaire-Ducru is hardly an exception to the sordid experience I have had with the wines from this vintage. The nose is a blend of chocolate, overripe notes of black raspberries and prunes, cigar wrapper and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit alcoholic on the backend, with a dull, flat and ponderous finish that is not quite dead, but certainly knocking on heaven's door. The wine seems still a decade or so away from total collapse, but that does not mean that it will provide any enjoyment before the end. If I had this in my cellar, I would simply dump it down the sink. 2018-2030? **61.**

2002 Château Corbin (St. Émilion)

The 2002 vintage of Corbin is really quite good, though I do not have a lot of experience with this vintage, so I do not know whether there are many other 2002s that also are drinking well today. In any event, the '02 Corbin is now quite nicely mature, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, a good base of dark soil tones, coffee and a nice topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good deep core of black fruit, melting tannins and good length and grip on the focused finish. This is nicely velvety on the palate with a bit of air, and though it is not as complex as top vintages here such as 2001 or 2005, it is an eminently satisfying glass of St. Émilion. 2018-2030+. **88.**

2002 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

The 2002 Gruaud-Larose is quite attractive on the nose, but lacks a bit of the customary Gruaud's style on the palate. The classy bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of dark berries, cassis, coffee grounds, tobacco smoke, a bit of tariness and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full and a bit weedy on the backend, with good depth, but currently in a bit of an awkward state and not showing much delineation. The finish is still fairly tannic and shows good length and grip, so perhaps this is just a cranky, adolescent phase for the wine and more detail will emerge with further bottle age. But, at the moment, the fairly attractive nose is far more interesting than the lumpy palate impression. 2016-2035? **84+?**

2000 Château Brane-Cantenac (Margaux)

The 2000 vintage of Château Brane-Cantenac has a bit more mid-palate stuffing than the 2006 version, but still does not rank in the top division to my palate. The bouquet remains fairly youthful, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, moderately complex and shows respectable length on the backend, with a good, but not great core of fruit, ripe tannins and a solid, youthful finish. This will be better than the 2006 and probably one of the top recent vintages of Brane-Cantenac. 2024-2060. **88+.**

2000 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)

The 2000 Château Figeac is one of the strongest examples of the vintage I have tasted in quite some time. The wine remains youthful, but its promise is self-evident, as it delivers a refined aromatic constellation of black cherries, dark berries, cigar wrapper, a superb base of soil tones, a touch of youthful Figeac herb notes, smoky new oak and an exotic topnote of celery seed. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, lovely

balance and grip, suave, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and very, very promising finish. This is very elegant for an example of 2000 claret. 2025-2075+. **94.**

2000 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

The 2000 vintage of Vieux-Château-Certan is quite shut down at the present time and is not too interested in being bothered during its hibernation. It may end up being in the same league as the 2000 Figeac, but for the moment, it is hard to see all of its facets, as it is compacted down on itself and rather grumpy. With some extended aeration, the wine reluctantly offers up scents of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, a fine base of dark soil tones and a bit of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plenty structured, with a rock solid core, firm, well-integrated tannins and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. It is possible that this wine will end up being even better than I predict, as it is sleeping deeply at the moment, but it seems to me that this may well be one of those wines from 2000 that never quite sheds the more sullen side of the vintage. Time will tell. 2030-2085+. **92+?**

1996 Château Lanessan (Haut Médoc)

My introduction to Château Lanessan was their lovely 1982 wine, which was one of the 1982s that a young university student could effortlessly afford, even back in those good old days when Bordeaux offered great value. But, I have not seen it with too much regularity since those vintages of the first half of the 1980s, so I was delighted to see just how good the 1996 has turned out. The wine is deep, ripe and nicely complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a fine mix of sweet cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, chipotle pepper, dark soil tones and a nice touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and blossoming nicely, with a good core, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the nicely balanced finish. This is a very good wine and still a good value in the context of today's pricing. 2019-2050. **90.**

1996 Château Lynch-Bages (Pauillac)

Prior to this tasting, I had never had the opportunity to taste the 1996 vintage of Lynch-Bages and I quite liked the wine, though it is still a ways away from really starting to drink well. The blossoming bouquet delivers a combination of cassis, cigar smoke, a fine base of gravelly soil tones, French roast, toasty new oak and still a dollop of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with firm, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, promising finish. All of the constituent components are in place here to make a fine bottle with a bit more bottle age. 2026-2075. **92+.**

1996 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

When I wrote my domaine feature on Vieux-Château-Certan back in 2009, I did not have a chance to include a note on the 1996 vintage here, which is really lovely. At age twelve, the wine is still on the youthful side, but is starting to stir nicely and all of its future complexity is already very much in evidence. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine, black fruity mix of cassis, dark berries, cigar wrapper, a fine base of gravelly soil tones, smoky new oak and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth of fruit, with well-integrated, ripe tannins, excellent balance and grip and a long, soil-driven and very classy finish. This may not quite scale the heights of the 1998 VCC at full maturity, but it is going to be an outstanding wine in its own right. 2023-2070+. **94.**

1995 Château Calon-Ségur (St. Estèphe)

The 1995 vintage is one I would like to do a retrospective feature on, but as it was the first year in Bordeaux where wines took a steep increase in price from their 1980s levels, I did

not buy the vintage for my own cellar, even though the isolated examples I tasted early on I always found quite promising. In any case, this 1995 Calon-Ségur (which a friend recently blinded me on), was excellent in quality and starting to really drink nicely. The bouquet is precise and pure, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, cigar smoke, a complex base of dark soil tones, a suave foundation of nutty new oak and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, melting tannins and lovely focus and grip on the complex finish. Whether or not the overall vintage of 1995 is top flight or not, the Calon-Ségur is certainly a superb wine. 2019-2050. **93.**

1995 Château Haut-Brion (Graves)

The 1995 vintage of Haut-Brion is excellent, though still a few years away from primetime drinking. The bouquet is deep, pure and classical in profile, delivering scents of cassis, sweet dark berries, singed tobacco, a touch of coffee bean, fresh herb tones, a complex base of gravelly soil tones, cedary oak and just a hint of the more red fruity elements that are sure to emerge here with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep, complex and seamlessly balanced, with ripe, buried tannins, fine focus and grip and outstanding length on the vibrant and very classy finish. This is a superb Haut-Brion in the making. 2025-2085. **94+.**

1995 Château Lagrange (St. Julien)

The 1995 vintage at Château Lagrange was in many ways a watershed year for the estate, as I would peg this vintage as the one where the new regime really settled in and cemented the excellent, classical style for which this house has now become so well-known. The wines here from the late 1980s are very good, but 1995 is where everything seems to have fallen into place. The '95 Lagrange today is starting to really drink well, offering up a refined bouquet of cassis, gravelly dark soil tones, still a dollop of fresh herbs, cigar wrapper, a deft framing of new oak and a topnote that suggests black truffle tones are just around the corner. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of black fruit, good soil signature and grip, moderate, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and promising finish. This is quite approachable, but will be even better with a bit more time in the cellar. It is a very good 1995 claret. 2023-2055. **92.**

1995 Château La Louvière (Graves)

At least here in the US, the white wine at Château La Louvière is far better known than the *rouge*, but I have had some absolutely lovely bottles of this house's red wines over the years. The 1995 is an excellent wine for its price, offering up a wide open and now fully resolved bouquet of black cherries, plums, chocolate, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This has the nice, tangy acids of the vintage and plenty of mid-palate depth. A fine example of the vintage and a great value. 2018-2040+. **90.**

1995 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

In my historical feature on the estate back in 2009, I really liked the 1995 vintage of VCC and this most recent bottle, drunk in 2018, was still showing beautifully and perhaps, even a touch better with the passage of nine more years of cellaring. The bouquet is very deep and refined, delivering a fine combination of plums, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a deft framing of nutty new oak, cigar smoke and just a touch of youthful cabernet sauvignon herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of black fruit, moderate, suave tannins and outstanding

focus and grip on the long, superbly balanced and vibrant finish. This is a beautiful, beautiful vintage of VCC that is getting awfully close to its plateau of maturity. Give it just a few more years. 2023-2085. **95+**.

1993 Château Haut-Brion (Graves)

I have only had the pleasure to taste the 1993 Château Haut-Brion on a single occasion, and this is another note that dates back fully a decade. However, I have no doubt that the wine will still be drinking well today and is completely under the radar, so I thought I should include the note here so that readers can be made aware of its fine quality. The bouquet offers up a very red fruity interpretation of Haut-Brion, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, red berries, mint, brick dust, cigar smoke and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and was just starting to drink with generosity back in 2010, with a surprisingly good core, fine soil signature, modest tannins and lovely balance and grip on the long and complex finish. As I said, I have only drunk this wine back in 2010, but it was quite good and I was completely unaware that Haut-Brion had made a successful red wine in this vintage to go along with the stellar white 1993, so I am finally posting the note in this article. 2010-2035+. **90**.

1992 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

I had never tasted the 1992 Gruaud previously (this is one of the wines shown during their deep vertical tasting held at the estate in 2012) and I was surprised by how concentrated the wine showed. The nose is an extracted blend of cassis, dark berries, leather, weedy cabernet tones, dark soil and a touch of meatiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit ham-fisted in style, with solid depth and moderate tannins on the long, slightly forced finish. Did the estate use concentrators or reverse osmosis for this wine? It is not bad, but charming it will never be. 2012-2035+? **85**.

1990 Château Palmer (Margaux) served from magnum

I get the distinct feeling that I have not been drinking enough Château Palmer in recent times! This magnum of the 1990 Palmer was absolutely stunning, jumping from the glass in a beautiful blend of black cherries, mulberries, black truffles, cigar smoke, a fine base of dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and a well done framing of toasty new oak. On the palate the wines is pure, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with extra depth and grip clearly apparent from the magnum format. The finish is very long, complex and still moderately tannic, with very buried tannins, a velvety palate texture and great lift and bounce on the backend. This is simply gorgeous in magnum! 2019-2060. **94**.

1989 Château Pape-Clément (Graves)

The 1989 Château Pape-Clément is a fine example of this lovely vintage. The wine offers up a deep and still fairly youthful bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, a fine base of gravelly soil tones, coffee and toasty oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and will eventually be nicely plush on the attack, but it is currently still just a tad bound up in its structural chassis of tannin. The wine has a fine core, good soil signature and well-integrated, ripe tannins, and all it really needs is a bit more bottle age to start hitting on all cylinders. It is already approachable, but it remains essentially a young wine and I am still going to leave my

bottles tucked away for another four or five years and really let it soften up completely. 2020-2060. **92.**

1988 Domaine de Chevalier (Graves)

I have not drunk the 1988 vintage of Domaine de Chevalier with anywhere near the same frequency as I have other vintages of the 1980s here, but the '88 vintage is one I like far more than many commentators and I had high expectations for this wine at our vertical tasting of the property held in the summer of 2017. The wine did not disappoint, as it is complete on both the nose and palate and was just about ready to start drinking beautifully as it neared its thirtieth birthday. The nose delivers an aromatic constellation of red plums, a touch of blood orange, cigar wrapper, that inimitable DDC soil, cigar smoke, a bit of vanillin oak and a lovely topnote of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is pure, deep and full-bodied, with lovely focus and soil signature, still a bit of moderate, buried tannins and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. When I tasted this in June of 2017, I felt two or three more years would be perfect for it, so I would anticipate that it is now squarely into its apogee of peak drinkability. Fine juice. 2020-2060. **92+.**

1988 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

This particular bottle of the 1988 Château Gruaud-Larose was very interesting, in that it was quite open and appealing for twenty to thirty minutes after I decanted it, and then closed down hard and went into deep hibernation again! During its open phase, the wine offered up scents of cassis, blackberries, cigar ash, damp soil tones and tobacco leaf- not to mention a fair bit of *brettanomyces*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite youthful, with the tannins becoming more pronounced as the other elements shut down. The finish is long, nascently complex and chewy, and I have to imagine that this wine will eventually be quite interesting, but unless my bottle was particularly recalcitrant, this wine needs a bit more time in the cellar. It will always be a bit marked by its *brett* I imagine. 2015-2040+? **88.**

1988 Château Pape-Clément (Graves)

The 1988 Château Pape-Clément is one of the few vintages from the decade of the 1980s that I did not buy in depth from the estate, so I do not get a chance to drink this wine as often as I do some of the other vintages of this property. The wine is yet another outstanding example of this underrated vintage, offering up a classic nose of cassis, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a very refined sense of balance, a great core of black fruit, good transparency and grip and a long, modestly tannic and well-balanced finish. This is a very strong vintage of Château Pape-Clément which may ultimately outpace the more highly touted 1986 (which I still have a case of in the cellar). I should have bought a box of the 1988 when I was selling it. 2017-2050. **93+.**

1988 Château Rauzan-Ségla (Margaux)

According to Robert Parker back in the late 1980s and early 1990s (the era when I used to read him regularly), the 1988 Château Rauzan-Ségla was the second great vintage produced here during the estate's renaissance, with the 1986 the first superb wine here in a generation to his mind. While I would peg the renaissance here back to at least the 1982 (as the 1983 and 1985 vintages of Rauzan-Ségla are also stellar wines), I do share Monsieur Parker's unbridled enthusiasm for the 1988. This most recent bottle was beautiful and just starting to really hit on all cylinders, wafting from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, cigar ash, charred hardwood, dark soil tones and gently toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just reaching its plateau of maturity, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, very well balanced finish. This is a lovely wine. 2020-2060. **92.**

1986 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou (St. Julien) Re-Furbished at the Château in 2011

Ducru-Beaucaillou has recently re-released several vintages from the era when there was some sort of TCA contamination (in my opinion) in the cellars here, such as there was in Cuné's property of Contino. The refurbished bottles can be distinguished by a back label that gives all of the details. The first releases of 1986 Ducru had been plagued by some sort of TCA taint, but the underlying wine was always very strong, and the re-furbished bottles from the estate are stellar. The wine offers up a pure, precise and very deep nose of sweet cassis, cigar ash, a very complex base of gravelly soil tones, a nice touch of cedar and a topnote of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with outstanding focus and bounce, a lovely core of fruit, ripe, well-measured tannins and a long, complex and very soil-driven finish. This is a classic vintage of Ducru-Beaucaillou in the making, and the re-released bottles are stellar. The wine is just starting to drink, but like so many of the top 1986 wines from the Médoc, it still has room to grow and would continue to benefit from further cellaring. 2023-2075. **96.**

1986 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)

The 1986 Château Figeac is one of the finest wines of the Right Bank in this vintage and it starting to really drink beautifully at age thirty-three. The bouquet is deep, pure and utterly classical Figeac in its mix of red and black cherries, a touch of menthol, cigar smoke, chocolate, a lovely base of soil tones, black truffles, a whisper of vanillin oak and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pure on the attack, with a very good core of fruit, fine focus and grip and still a touch of moderate tannin perking up the beautifully balanced and complex finish. This is an outstanding Figeac with decades of life still ahead of it. 2019-2050. **93.**

1986 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

This was one of the most popular wines of the vintage when it was first released, as the quality was self-evident and the price was quite reasonable. At age thirty, it is still a few years away from really blossoming, but the high level of quality here remains very easy to see and all that is needed is a bit more patience to let the vintage's tannic backbone soften up further. The bouquet is classic Gruaud, delivering scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a bit of charred wood, plenty of smokiness and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely robust in personality, with a rock solid core, fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is starting to get approachable at age thirty, but I would still give it another five to ten years' worth of bottle age, just to let those tannins melt away further and the wine really start to fire on all cylinders. It is a very good vintage of Gruaud-Larose. 2023-2065. **92+.**

1986 Château Léoville Las Cases (St. Julien)

The 1986 Château Léoville Las Cases remains a stubbornly backward wine at age thirty-two, and I am beginning to wonder if it is just stuck in a seemingly endless adolescence or if the wine is going to turn out to be stillborn and never blossom. The bouquet offers up a still quite youthful blend of black cherries, cassis, a touch of mint, Galloise cigarette smoke, dark soil and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, simple and powerful in personality, with a rock solid core, firm tannins and a long, four-square and recalcitrant finish. Maybe this will blossom one day, but I do not have a ton of faith in the wine anymore. And, even if it does one day start to blossom, it still seems likely to not be a particularly complex example of Las Cases in the making. If it does one day start to soften up and open, it should merit a score at the top of my range, but that seems less than a fifty-fifty proposition at this point. I should mention that I have tasted this wine three or four times in the last decade and my impressions have been

consistent, so this is the wine, rather than a reflection of a possibly atypical bottle. 2025-2075? 84-92?

1986 Château Meyney (St. Estèphe)

The 1986 Château Meyney has been one of the great values of the vintage since its release and it has fulfilled all of its early promise and continues to cruise along very well indeed. To give younger readers some idea of just how good a value this wine was on release, I sold it for \$11.99 a bottle and one received ten percent off if they bought a case. Needless to say, I sold a ton of cases of this wine. Today, it is drinking very nicely, offering up a complex bouquet of cassis, dark berries, a nice touch of new leather, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still gently chewy, with nicely buried, suave tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and well-balanced finish. This really is a very good example of the vintage. 2019-2045. **91.**

1986 Château Rauzan-Ségla (Margaux)

The 1986 Château Rauzan-Ségla continues to deliver on all of its early promise and is one of the loveliest of the Left Bank wines of this vintage. This most recent bottle was getting close to its plateau, but still deserves at least a few more years to soften up a bit further. The bouquet is already gorgeous, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of black raspberries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a fine framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a fine core of sweet black fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, complex and focused finish. This is certainly approachable with half an hour in decanter right now, but just a little bit more patience will really let it blossom completely. 2022-2075. **93.**

1985 Château Lynch-Bages (Pauillac)

I seem to recall quite a bit of chatter about bottle variation plaguing later releases of the 1985 Château Lynch-Bages, which used to circulate about the market in the early to mid-1990s. I recall the wine vividly from its first arrival in the US, when it was absolutely stellar and one of the best young vintages of Lynch-Bages I had ever tasted. I bought a case of this wine upon release, based on those early tastings, but that box is long gone now and I had not tasted a bottle of the 1985 Lynch for many years. This most recent bottle was good, but not great, and reminded me of the rumors circulating back in the early 1990s about later releases. The bouquet is slightly tarry in personality, offering up scents of cassis, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, a slightly herbal streak, road tar and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still sporting a bit of backend tannin, with a good, solid core and fine length and grip. This bottle does not seem as refined or complex as the bottles I drank early on and makes me wonder if this was one of those later releases that the market was not all that sanguine about back in the day? It is still a good solid wine, but I have to admit I was expecting something a bit more refined and complex. 2019-2045. **89.**

1985 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

When I wrote my articles a few years back on the 1985 vintage, I did not have a recent note on the 1985 Vieux-Château-Certan, which was too bad, as this is a really strong example of this most elegant of claret vintages. At age thirty-three, the wine is drinking extremely well today, offering up a refined and utterly classical bouquet of dark berries, cigar ash, espresso, dark, gravelly soil tones, a nice framing of cedary oak and a touch of botanicals in the smoky upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully transparent down to its soil, with a fine core, melting tannins and a long, elegant and vibrant finish. This is a

beautiful 1985 that is now squarely into its plateau of peak drinkability, but still has decades and decades of life ahead of it. Great juice. 2018-2055+. **94+**.



1983 Château Canon (St. Émilion) served from a half bottle

In half bottle, the 1983 Canon is beautifully vibrant and tertiary in personality, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of black cherries, menthol, sweet dark berries, a touch of chocolate, sealing wax, chalky soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has lovely mid-palate depth, with melted tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and absolutely *à point* finish. This is a very underrated vintage of Canon, who had a wonderful run throughout the entire decade of the 1980s. 2019-2040+ (and out to 2055 for full bottles). **92.**

1983 Domaine de Chevalier (Graves)

The 1983 vintage at DDC is top flight and this is one of my favorite wines here from the very successful decade of the 1980s. At age thirty-seven the wine is drinking splendidly, wafting from the glass in a complex and beautifully transparent blend of red plums, black cherries, a touch of chocolate, cigar wrapper, a superb base of soil tones, a dollop of walnut and a lovely topnote of incipient black truffles that no doubt will become far more pronounced with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a nicely plump core, fine soil signature, melted tannins and a long, *à point* and very classy finish. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2050. **93.**

1983 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou (St. Julien)

The 1983 Ducru-Beaucaillou is one of the finest wines of the vintage on either bank of the Gironde and it is now just starting to drink at its apogee. The utterly refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, a touch of nutskin, a beautiful base of gravelly soil tones, cigar ash, a touch of juniper berry and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is svelte, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This still has several decades of fine drinking ahead of it, but the 1983 Ducru is now entering its peak period and is an outstanding glass of claret. 2020-2050. **94.**

1983 Château Latour (Pauillac) served from magnum

The 1983 Château Latour has never had a great reputation, and I probably had not tasted the wine since close to its release back in the mid-1980s. I was very surprised to see just how stunning the wine has turned out to be, given that Robert Parker only gave it 87 points back in the day. However, this particular magnum was absolutely stellar, offering up a deep, complex and classic nose of cassis, black cherries, dark gravelly soil tones, tobacco leaf, cedar and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine structure and grip, excellent gravelly undertow, still moderate tannins and a long, complex and perfectly balanced and classic Latour finish. This is a very, very underrated vintage of Latour. 2018-2075. **95.**

1983 Château Margaux (Margaux)

I very well remember just how beautiful the 1983 Margaux was a couple of decades ago, when it really had few challengers for the mantle of the wine of the vintage (maybe Ausone, Cheval Blanc and Lafleur could also lay claim to that title back in the day), but the wine has lost a bit of mid-palate amplitude and perfume since those days and seems to have now peaked. The wine is still very lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, summer truffles, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil tones (with that touch of limestone unique to this property), nutskin and a suave framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and elegant, with good, but no longer great depth at the core, lovely grip, fading tannins and a long, focused and well-balanced finish. This remains a very tasty bottle, but it was a bit deeper and more vibrant a decade ago. 2019-2040. **92.**

1983 Château Palmer (Margaux) served from magnum

This particular magnum was served with dinner after a full afternoon spent tasting through Klaus-Peter Keller's brilliant range of 2018ers, so it was just icing on the cake! This is another legendary vintage at Palmer and it always lives up to its exalted reputation, with this magnum absolutely singing on both the nose and palate. The bouquet soars from the glass in a refined blend of mulberries, black cherries, cigar wrapper, summer truffles, a beautiful base of gravelly soil tones, violets and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with seamless balance, perfect focus and grip and a very, very long, vibrant and utterly suave finish. This is starting to really show the classic Palmer velvety texture on the palate, but out of magnum, this is synthesized to a beautifully refined structural chassis that gives the wine outstanding backend lift. Great juice. 2019-2075. **96.**

1983 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

This particular tasting in 2018 was the first time I had ever tasted the 1983 Vieux-Château-Certan. The wine is now fully mature and drinking at its peak, offering up a complex nose of cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, cigar ash, cedary oak and that inimitable touch of fresh herbs from the cabernet sauvignon portion of the blend. On the palate

the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a good, but not great core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and meltingly tannic finish. The 1983 vintage is not particularly strong in Pomerol, so this is not one of the great vintages of VCC during the decade of the 1980s, but, that said, this is still a very good bottle that is drinking nicely today. 2018-2045. **91.**

1981 Domaine de Chevalier (Graves)

The 1981 vintage of Domaine de Chevalier is another very strong wine and seemingly was harvested before the heavy autumn rains changed the fortunes of so many estates' 1981s. The bouquet is beautifully expressive today, offering up a refined blend of black cherries, plums, bitter chocolate, nutskin, that DDC signature base of soil and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and complete, with fine complexity and grip, lovely balance and a long, soil-driven finish of melted tannin and bright acids. This does not have quite the mid-palate weight of a top vintage of DDC like the 1983, but other than a touch less mid-palate weight, it is lacking in no other aspects and is a joy to drink. 2017-2030+. **92.**

1981 Domaine de Chevalier (Graves) served from magnum

I do not usually list the same wine from regular-sized bottles and magnums, but in the case of the 1981 Domaine de Chevalier, it makes sense, as these wines are now qualitatively different. Some Bordeaux estates will often put their favorite casks or older vines into their magnums and perhaps this was the case at DDC with the 1981, or simply the larger bottles have allowed the wine to age even more gracefully. In any case, the 1981 DDC out of magnum is excellent and a cut above the regular bottles today, offering up a super nose of red and black cherries, plums, a touch of orange peel, cigar wrapper, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, an incipient note of walnut, a deft foundation of vanillin oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and tangy, with a lovely touch of sappiness at the core, impeccable balance and grip. fine-grained, melting tannins and a long, complex and very refined finish. This is gorgeous juice in magnum. 2018-2050. **93+.**

1981 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

I very much like the 1981 vintage at Vieux-Château-Certan, which is a classic example of this vintage- which is so much better in Pomerol than in any other section of Bordeaux. This most recent bottle was showing beautifully, with the nose delivering a beautifully refined constellation of sweet dark berries, black plums, cigar ash, gamebird, gravel, a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and complex, with impeccable balance, a good core and fine length and grip on the very classy, intensely flavored finish. A lovely VCC. 2018-2035+. **93.**

1979 Domaine de Chevalier (Graves)

Back in my last year or two as a wine merchant, I sold a big cellar of impeccably-stored Bordeaux that included at least ten cases of the 1979 DDC. Sadly, I did not have enough disposable wine income in those days to buy enough of all the wines I would have liked to have added to my cellar, so I only purchased a few bottles of this wine and drank them pretty quickly. It is one of the great vintages of Domaine de Chevalier and its quality far transcends the general level of the vintage. The bouquet is bright, expressive and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, chocolate, lovely soil tones, sweet nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and really shows off great mid-palate depth, with outstanding focus and grip, still a bit of suave tannin and a long, tangy and superbly complex finish. Such a lovely vintage of DDC. 2017-2040. **94.**

1979 Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste (Pauillac)

The 1979 Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste is exactly what might expect from a successful example of this more middleweight vintage. The bouquet is bright, complex and fully resolved today, delivering a fine blend of black cherries, gentle meaty tones, dark soil elements, cigar ash and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and nicely balanced, with good intensity of flavor, melted tannins and a long, eminently satisfying finish. This is not as powerful as a vintage like 1982 or 1985 here, but it hits a lot of sweet notes on the way by. 2016-2035. **89.**

1979 Château Haut-Marbuzet (St. Estèphe)

I purchased a few orphaned bottles of the 1979 Château Haut-Marbuzet at auction a while back, as I liked the wines immensely here in the stretch from 1982 to 1990 and wondered how they were in the late 1970s. This wine turned out to be really, really good and far exceeded my expectations. The bouquet is beautifully spicy today, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, smoked meats, dark soil tones, cigar ash, orange peel and a wide array of different spice tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and at its apogee, with a solid core, lovely soil signature, melted tannins and a long, vibrant and very well-balanced finish. This is one of the best examples of 1979 claret I have drunk of late, outside of the Graves region. Who knew? 2019-2030+. **92.**

1979 Château Léoville Las Cases (St. Julien)

The 1979 vintage of Château Léoville Las Cases is a chunky and rather over-extracted example of the vintage, and one gets the sense that Michel Delon was looking to put a bit more meat on the bones through cellar techniques in this vintage. I liked the wine better in the late 1980s and early 1990s than I do today, as it is showing a rather forced stylistic bent now, offering up scents of cassis, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a bit of bell pepper and a topnote of cigarette ash. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and quite simple, with a reasonable core for the vintage, but zero developmental complexity and a long, chewy finish. When one contrasts this with a wine like the 1979 Pichon-Lalande, the Las Cases is really found wanting. 2018-2040? **86.**

1979 Château Montrose (St. Estèphe)

The 1979 Montrose is truly a fine example of the vintage and a wine that continues to drink beautifully, despite it having been fully mature for quite some time. The nose is deep, complex and quite classy in its mélange of cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, a touch of spice, lovely, gravelly soil tones, coffee bean and a lovely, weedy cabernet topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and complex, with solid depth, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and stylish finish. This is cut very much in the style of the vintage, but it is a middleweight of impressive vibrancy and complexity. 2017-2030. **91.**

1979 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

The vertical VCC tasting I spoke at in 2018 was the first time I had tasted the 1979 vintage from this property, and I very much liked this wine. It is not quite as complex as the best vintages of Vieux-Château-Certan, but it is a suave middleweight that delivers plenty of enjoyment. The bouquet offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, espresso, charred wood, gravel, nutskin and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fairly complex and nicely soil-driven, with lovely focus and grip, melted tannins and a long, suave and perfectly resolved finish. I would be happy to drink the 1979 VCC anytime! 2018-2035. **90.**

1978 Château La Conseillante (Pomerol)

If memory serves me correctly, I had reported on the 1978 Château La Conseillante the last time I did a feature on the wines of the Right Bank, but as this cork started to leak (not an unheard of event once a cork gets to be more than forty years of age), I felt it was better to open and drink it now, rather than try to hope for the best down the road. The wine is very lovely, but as the 1978 vintage was one whose ripeness arrived at the last moment, the La Conseillante has plenty of Pomerol herb tones to it this year. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of plums, black raspberries, fresh herb tones, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, lovely spice elements, cigar ash and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and velvety, with a good core, lovey soil signature and complexity, melted tannins and a long, tangy and very nicely balanced finish. This is not a classic vintage of La Conseillante, but it is a very complex wine that has plenty of this estate's charming character, but with the spice and tobacco tones played up a bit and the fruit playing more of a supporting role than in riper vintages like 1982 or 1985. A lovely middleweight. 2020-2045. **90.**



1978 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou (St. Julien)

I have always liked the 1978 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou, as the wine was already starting to drink very nicely at age ten and I have been a frequent visitor to its doorstep over the years. Though this wine has been drinking with lovely generosity and breed for many years already, it shows no signs of slowing down and remains smack dab in the middle of its plateau of

maturity, offering up a complex and very classic nose of cherries, a touch of juniper berry, cigar wrapper, a fine signature of soil, summer truffles and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still shows lovely depth at the core, with impressive focus and grip, lovely balance and a long, tangy finish that still sports a touch of tannin on the closing notes. There are many 1978s that show just a tiny streak of greenness for the late-arriving ripeness of the “miracle vintage of ‘78”, but this is not the case with the Ducru, which is just a classic and fully mature vintage of this fine estate. 2019-2040. **93.**

1978 Château Haut-Brion (Graves)

The 1978 Haut-Brion is another example of this vintage that I have often drunk and always enjoyed. The wine today is fully mature and quite classy on the nose, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of sweet dark berries, cassis, Cuban cigar wrapper, a touch of mint, summer truffles, a beautiful base of gravelly soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and velvety, with a good core, lovely focus and grip, melted tannins and fine backend intensity of flavor and bounce on the refined, balanced and classy finish. This is not a great vintage of Haut-Brion, but a very, very good one, that still has plenty of pleasure to deliver over the coming decades. 2018-2040+. **93.**

1978 Château La Lagune (Haut Médoc) served from magnum

The 1978 Château La Lagune is drinking splendidly out of magnum today, offering up a bright and complex nose of cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a nice touch of graphite, cedar and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core, tangy acids, fine focus and grip and still a touch of tannin (in magnum) on the long and complex finish. This is a very strong vintage for La Lagune and is a prime example of why this property remains a very fine Third Growth. 2017-2040. **92.**

1978 Château Montrose (St. Estèphe)

The 1978 vintage is almost never mentioned when one speaks of the top vintages of Montrose from the decade of the 1970s, but I have been consistently impressed by this lovely wine. The deep, elegant and *à point* nose offers up a classic mélange of cassis, gravel, cigar ash, a touch of brick dust, fresh herb tones, hints of cinnamon and a fine framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with a beautifully reserved profile that speaks profoundly of old school claret sensibilities. The wine shows off good mid-palate depth, bright acids, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and classy finish. A sleeper vintage of Montrose that is at its apogee, but shows no signs of slowing down any time soon. 2017-2035+. **92.**

1976 Château Lafite-Rothschild (Pauillac) served from magnum

In my experience, there are two wines that utterly tower above the crowd in the vintage of 1976 in Bordeaux, with Lafite-Rothschild and Ausone truly excellent and complete examples of their respective *terroirs*. This most recent magnum of the '76 Lafite was every bit as refined as one a friend served on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday a few years back, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a superb blend of red berries, orange peel, coffee, cigar ash, a marvelously complex base of gravelly soil tones, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and *à point*, with a lovely core, excellent transparency and focus and a long, complex and utterly suave finish that closes still with impressive grip and bounce. Just a lovely vintage of Lafite. 2018-2040+. **94.**

1975 Château Branaire-Ducru (St. Julien)

The 1975 Château Branaire-Ducru is not one of the Médocs from this vintage that is going to surprise tasters with how it has finally blossomed, as the wine has not really managed to pull that off in this overrated vintage. The bouquet today is tertiary and a bit rusty in personality, offering up scents of dried black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones and rusty pipe. On the palate the wine is fullish, attenuated and a bit bitter on the backend, with a scrawny core and a short, still modestly chewy finish. This wine has started to dry out without ever offering up even a brief window of drinkability. 2018-2030+. **81.**

1975 Domaine de Chevalier (Graves)

The 1975 vintage at Domaine de Chevalier is quite successful, and though I would not rank it as one of the best years here in the decades of the 1960s or 1970s, it is one of the top wines of the 1975 vintage on the Left Bank. The bouquet is refined and nicely mature today, offering up scents of dark berries, plum, cigar ash, walnuts, chocolate, dark soil tones, a hint of chipotle and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and vibrant, with fine mid-palate depth, melted tannin and very good length and grip on the nicely balanced finish. This has none of the issues of dry-edged tannins that one still finds in some 1975s from the Médoc and is really quite a tasty drink today. 2020-2040. **91.**

1975 Château Le Gay (Pomerol)

This was the first time I had ever tasted the 1975 vintage of Château Le Gay. It is a vintage that I simply adore in Pomerol, and the 1975 Le Gay is a good, solid example of the year that offers up a deep and robust bouquet of black plums, cigar ash, chocolate, a good base of dark soil, gentle herb tones, a bit of shoe polish and a topnote of gentle meatiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely broad-shouldered, with a good core of fruit, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex finish. Le Gay is always one of the more nobly rustic wines of Pomerol and this characteristic is certainly in evidence here, but the wine is quite good and a fine synthesis of the house style and this fine vintage. 2019-2050. **89.**

1975 Château Montrose (St. Estèphe)

The '75 Montrose is not quite as refined as the '79, which may represent a slower pace of development or just a slightly less successful result in this more problematic vintage. The nose is currently a bit adolescently grumpy, but offers up weedy notes of black berries, cherries, road tar, a bit of balsam bough, damp earth and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and complex, but also shows its damp earth character a bit more than is customary for mature Montrose, with good acids, fine focus and good length and grip on the moderately tannic finish. There is a bit of brett floating around here on both the nose and palate that is also distracting. Not a great example of the '75 vintage, but with enough stuffing and nascent complexity to still make it potable. 2018-2035. **87.**

1975 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

I have drunk bottles of the 1975 Vieux-Château-Certan on two or three occasions since I wrote my historical feature on the estate back in 2009, and each bottle has been superior to the one I reported on in that article, so I am very happy to finally have a chance to print this note and set the record straight. The note from 2009 was from a small cache of a couple of cases of the 1975 VCC that I found in Europe and split with friends, and I clearly did not give the wine enough time to settle in from its cross-ocean voyage before opening a bottle, so the wine was still a bit unsettled. A decade down the road, the wine is far superior to what I reported on back in 2009, as it today offers up a deep, still fairly youthful, but utterly classical bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, gamebird, dark, gravelly soil tones, a touch of chicory, espresso

and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and rock solid at the core, with a very soil-driven personality, still a bit of backend tannin and a very, very long, complex and well-balanced finish. This has the stuffing of the best of the 1975 Pomerols and is just starting to really drink at its apogee. 2018-2065. **94.**



Lunch is served after the vertical tasting at Château Gruaud-Larose back in April of 2012.

1972 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

I cannot recall ever having tasted an example of the difficult 1972 vintage before, and this Gruaud, though fairly green, is not without interest. The nose offers up a modestly ripe blend of cigar ash, cassis, gravelly soil tones, saddle leather and a dollop of dried herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full and fairly angular, but also showing good complexity and a bit of style on the solid and modestly long finish. This is not a strong vintage of Gruaud by any stretch of the imagination, but the wine is eminently drinkable and still has a couple of decades of life in it. 2012-2030+. **84.**

1971 Château Cos d'Estournel (St. Estèphe)

The 1971 vintage of Château Cos d'Estournel is a fine old wine that is still drinking with plenty of personality and is quite enjoyable. Back in this era, Cos was a fairly broad-shouldered and almost meaty example of St. Estèphe and this is true even of the 1971, which was a vintage that was a bit more delicately structured than one might assume from drinking this lovely

example of Cos d'Estournel. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a deep and still fairly powerful blend of baked black cherries, a touch of roasted meats, dark soil tones, iron filings and a topnote of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core of fruit, fine complexity, melted tannins and a long, not overly elegant, but quite satisfying finish. Good, old-fashioned St. Estèphe! 2017-2035. **90.**

1971 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)

The 1971 vintage at Figeac is a lovely example of this underrated year and is drinking with great style and distinction at age forty-eight. The bouquet is pure, complex and beautifully perfumed, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, chocolate, black truffles, a touch of celery salt, a fine base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a lovely topnote of sweet herbs. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, velvety and seamless, with a lovely core, melted tannins and a long, complex and utterly refined finish. This wine is still at its absolute apogee, where it probably has been comfortably resting for a couple of decades already! A beautiful wine that still has tons of life ahead of it. 2019-2045. **93.**

1971 Château Montrose (St. Estèphe)

I find the 1971 vintage to be one of the great sleeper vintages still to be found at auction, for top wines of the vintage, such as the Montrose, are truly excellent and still at their peak of maturity. This most recent bottle of '71 Montrose was wide open, complex and at its absolute apogee, wafting from the glass in a classy aromatic constellation of sweet cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of currant leaf and a nice topnote of black truffles. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with really beautiful balance, a good core, excellent soil signature and a very long, meltingly tannic and utterly poised finish. Just a lovely bottle of fully mature claret. 2017-2040. **93.**

1970 Château Boyd-Cantenac (Margaux)

I knew nothing of this era at Boyd-Cantenac, which is what prompted me to pick up this lone bottle of the 1970 at auction, just to see what might have been going on here back in the day. The wine turned out to be a decent example of the fine 1970 vintage, without a whole lot of weight or stuffing, but good balance and complexity. The refined and nicely tertiary nose offers up scents of cassis, cigar box, dark soil tones, a bit of hung game and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and silky, with sound structure, no remaining tannin and sneaky length on the well-balanced finish. This does not really have much stuffing left, but still has pretty good intensity of flavor and is not a bad drink. 2016-2025. **87.**

1970 Château Cos d'Estournel (St. Estèphe)

The deep vein of clay in the soils of Cos are beautifully presented in the 1970 vintage here, as this too is quite a classical expression of this time period at the estate. The wine offers up a truly soil-driven nose of cherries, iron-infused, dark soil tones, a touch of gravel, orange peel, cigar ash and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced finish, with a good core, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and complex finish. There was a certain noble rusticity to the wines at Cos back in this era and I liked them very much for their overt frankness and complexity. 2018-2040. **91.**

1970 Château Cantemerle (Haut Médoc)

I have a nice little cache of older Cantemerle in my cellar, so I have served the 1970 on a few occasions in recent times. The wine is fully mature and still at its peak, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of blackberries, cassis, charred wood, nutskin, dark soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and utterly suave on the attack,

with a good core, lovely intensity of flavor and grip, melted tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Despite the tannins having fallen away here, the 1970 Cantemerle retains lovely structural integrity and impeccable balance and still has tons of life ahead of it. 2020-2045. **92.**

1970 Domaine de Chevalier (Graves)

The 1970 vintage's velvety elegance is a perfect foil for the wines of Domaine de Chevalier and this bottle was absolutely singing at our vertical. The complex nose delivers a lovely constellation of plums, cherries, chocolate, sweet walnut, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and focused finish. I love the backend energy and lift the 1970 DDC still possesses. 2017-2045. **94.**

1970 Château Giscours (Margaux)

I have probably drunk more bottles of the 1970 Giscours over the years than any other example of the vintage on the Left Bank, and the wine never fails to disappoint. This hails from the era when Giscours was one of the very finest wines in the Médoc, offering a typically black fruity, slightly meaty and smoky example of Margaux, and this is certainly the personality of the outstanding 1970. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of sweet blackberries, cassis, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, a touch of meatiness and a topnote of violet. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core of black fruit, good soil signature and grip, still a touch of backend tannin and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice. 2018-2040+. **93.**

1970 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

To my palate, the decades of the 1960s and 1980s were far more successful at Gruaud than was the case here in the 1970s, and this is born out in this good, but not great bottle of the 1970 Gruaud-Larose. The nose here is deep and complex, but not overly elegant, delivering scents in a slightly barnyardy blend of cassis, hung game, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones and charred wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and slightly rustic in profile, with a good core, still a bit of moderate tannin and a long, tangy and gently bretty finish. This is okay, but not one of the stars of St. Julien in the 1970 vintage. 2019-2040+. **89.**

1970 Château Haut-Brion (Graves)

The 1970 vintage of Haut-Brion is an interesting wine, as in the 1980s and early 1990s, this wine was quite red fruity and seemingly a bit high-toned to be ranked amongst the top vintages of this fine First Growth. But time has worked its magic, and in the new century it became more classically black fruity in profile and seemingly put on a bit more weight in the mid-palate, to eventually offer up a quite classic bouquet of cassis, black cherries, brick dust, cigar smoke and a fine base of gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile (channeling both the style of the vintage and the property), with a good core, melted tannins and a long, silky and complex finish. Fine juice. 2017-2030+. **93.**

1970 Château La Louvière (Graves)

This particular bottle of the 1970 Château La Louvière had a good fill, at the base of the neck, and good color, but a crumbling cork, so there may well be even better bottles of this wine out there. This particular bottle offered up a deep, complex and tertiary bouquet of black cherries, plums, Cuban cigar, gravelly soil tones, plenty of cigar smokiness and a nice dollop of walnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still with plenty of mid-palate stuffing. The finish is long, well-balanced and continues to show a touch of backend tannin, with sound acids and a slightly four-square profile. This has aged very nicely,

and far better than that for which it was originally intended, and though it is now getting towards the far side of its plateau, it has not yet start its descent. It is not as complex as wines like 1970 Haut-Bailly or Pape-Clément, but it has stood the test of time just as well (and this is a bottle with a crumbling cork)! 2020-2035. **88+?**



1970 Château Lynch-Bages (Pauillac)

I used to drink quite a bit of Lynch-Bages back in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, but I seem to seldom cross paths with the wine these days, as it was not one of the estates I bought for my own cellar (other than the 1982 and 1985 vintages, which I prematurely drank up cases of in their youth). The 1970 vintage here has always been very strong and this most recent bottle was showing beautifully, wafting from the glass in a complex nose of cassis, black cherries, a touch of petroleum jelly, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely broad-shouldered in personality, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and a long, complete and classic finish. Fine juice. 2017-2040. **94.**

1970 Château Malescot St.-Exupéry (Margaux)

After drinking a few bottles of the sleeper and really lovely 1961 vintage of Château Malescot St.-Exupéry, I was intrigued enough to try this bottle of the 1970. The wine turned out to be pretty good, but had this slightly odd, weedy streak through both the nose and palate that seemed incongruous with the otherwise ripe and sappy fruit elements in the wine. The bouquet has an exotic touch to its *mélange* of sappy cherries, a touch of spiced meats, nutskin, a lovely

base of soil, cigar smoke and the aforementioned bit of weediness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and quite sappy at the core, with good length and grip, melted tannins and a long, well-balanced and velvety finish. Ever since drinking this bottle, I have been trying to reconcile the touch of weediness with the sappy fruit elements and I cannot come up with a reason for the seemingly incompatible aspects in the wine. In the end, this is okay, but not a patch on the really strong 1961. 2017-2035. **88.**

1970 Château Mouton-Rothschild (Pauillac)

I used to absolutely love the spicy, red fruity and svelte character of the 1970 Château Mouton-Rothschild, but this most recent bottle seemed to indicate that the wine had started to slide down the far side of its plateau and was now starting into slow and gentle decline. I realize it could just be this particular bottle, which I bought at auction, but it had a good fill level and reported provenance, so my gut feeling is that this is where the wine now stands in its evolution in regular-sized bottles. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of cassis, cigar ash, Mouton spices, gravelly soil tones and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and getting a bit four-square today, with a solid core and good, but not great length on the well-balanced finish. It is not that the wine is collapsing, but it seems to be getting a bit chunky and has lost some of that vibrant red fruitiness that defined the wine for several decades. Perhaps it was just this bottle. In any event, if the wine is starting to slip into decline, it is still noteworthy for the beautiful Marc Chagall label in this vintage. 2017-2027+? **88+?**

1970 Château Palmer (Margaux)

The 1970 vintage of Palmer remains one of my absolute favorites from the estate in the post-war period and it has been drinking with great distinction for several decades already, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The bouquet is all perfumed Palmer magic, delivering a beautiful blend of plums, black cherries, summer truffles, a beautiful base of soil tones, a nice touch of chipotle pepper, cigar smoke, nutskin and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety, with stunning complexity and lift, tangy acids, faded tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, pure and utterly refined finish. Great wine. 2019-2045. **96.**

1970 Château Pape-Clément (Graves)

I am almost embarrassed how often I have drunk bottles of the 1970 Château Pape-Clément over the last few years, as this beautiful wine seems to keep popping up at auction at attractive pricing that I cannot resist or at tastings which I am attending. This most recent bottle was just lovely, offering up a bright, complex and *à point* nose of cassis, singed tobacco, gravelly soil tones, walnuts, salty minerality and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, melted tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice that remain still at its apogee. 2020-2040+. **92.**

1970 Château Prieuré-Lichine (Margaux)

The 1970 Château Prieuré-Lichine is a suave middleweight that has aged gracefully and is drinking very nicely today. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of cigar wrapper and a gentle topnote of violet. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and velvety, with a lovely core of black fruit, good soil signature, melting tannins and very nice complexity on the long and fully mature finish. Good juice. 2018-2025+. **89.**

1970 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

This is another vintage of VCC that I had not drunk with any great frequency prior to writing my article on the estate, and based on this most recent bottle, I clearly underrated the wine back then. This bottle had more depth at the core, more length and better structural conviction than previous examples I had drunk and was absolutely singing. The refined and perfectly mature nose delivers a fine constellation of black plums, dark berries, cigar ash, that great gravelly base of VCC soil, espresso and still a whisper of cabernet sauvignon botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great focus and grip, suave, fading tannins and a long, seamlessly balanced and complex finish. This is gorgeous. 2018-2040+. **94.**

1966 Château Cantemerle

The 1966 Château Cantemerle is a really marvelous example of this vintage and I am happy to still have a few of these in my cellar. Most claret collectors only look to Cantemerle from the 1982 vintage forwards (when they look to this estate's wines at all) and are unaware of just how good the wines were here in the decade of the 1960s (and maybe earlier, as I have never gone further back with vintages of Cantemerle than this lovely '66). This most recent bottle out of my cellar was showing all of the elegance and complexity that are the hallmarks of Cantemerle in the '60s, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, a lovely base of dark soil tones, a touch of walnut and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegant in profile, with a good core, lovely transparency, tangy acids, melted tannins and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Fine, fine juice with plenty of life still in it. 2018-2040. **93.**

1966 Château Cos d'Estournel (St. Estèphe)

I have a slight preference for the 1966 Château Cos d'Estournel over their wines from the both 1971 and 1970 vintages, as the inherent elegance of the 1966 vintage has given this wine just a bit more refinement than the very good wines made here in the latter two vintages. The bouquet of the 1966 Cos is fully mature and beautifully complex today, showing up a fine nose of sweet red cherries, summer truffles, iron-like soil tones, cigar smoke, orange rind, lovely spice tones and a bit of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, nicely integrated acids, melted tannins and a long, focused and classy finish. This has all of the red fruit and spice tones that Cos was famous for back in this era, coupled to a bit more polished refinement on the palate than is evidenced in the 1970 and 1971 versions. A lovely vintage here. 2019-2030+. **92.**

1966 Domaine de Chevalier (Graves)

The 1966 vintage of DDC is not quite as well known as the 1964, but this too is an outstanding wine that remains at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability and offers up superb complexity on both the nose and perfectly resolved palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, walnuts, charred earth and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and energetic, with a fine core of fruit, lovely transparency and grip, suave, fading tannins, still good acids and a long, poised and very complex finish. This is really almost as fine as the far better-known 1964! 2017-2035. **94.**

1966 Château Gruaud-Larose ((St. Julien) served from magnum

The 1966 Gruaud was served from magnum at the luncheon following the vertical tasting of very old vintages in early April of 2012, with the wine absolutely singing. The deep, complex and *à point* nose jumps from the glass in a classy and tertiary blend of cassis, cigar smoke, hints

of black truffle, fresh herb tones, cigar box and a lovely base of gravelly, dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, excellent complexity, melting tannins and truly fine length and grip on the focused and classy finish. The 1966 vintage is seldom mentioned amongst the great years at Gruaud, but it is one of my favorites from what is unequivocally one of the most successful decades in the property's history. This wine has a long future still ahead of it! 2012-2060. **92.**

1966 Château Pape-Clément (Graves) served from magnum

This is a beautiful vintage for Pape-Clément that I do not taste as often as I do the 1964 and 1970 vintages here. The bouquet is bright, complex and classically tertiary Graves today, offering up scents of dark berries, red cherries, cigar wrapper, gravel, juniper berries, tobacco leaf and a bit of brick dust in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still nicely tangy and plump at the core (especially out of magnum), with fine focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is first class juice. 2014-2040+. **93.**

1966 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

Ever since drinking my previous example of the 1966 Vieux-Château-Certan, I have been keeping an eye out for this wine at auction, as I would love to find a few more bottles to put in my cellar. Clearly, others value this wine every bit as much as I do, as I never see it available! As I mentioned back in 2009, this is one of the great vintages of VCC and quite underrated elsewhere. The bouquet is deep, complex and classic VCC, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of cassis, black cherries, lovely meatiness, black truffles, coffee bean, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones and a topnote of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and displays lovely plushness at the core, with superb complexity and balance, melted tannins, bright acids and a long, refined and *à point* finish. Just a great bottle of wine. 2018-2045+. **96.**

1964 Domaine de Chevalier (Graves)

The 1964 Domaine de Chevalier has long been recognized as one of the finest wines of this vintage and this most recent bottle was drinking beautifully. The bouquet is pure and perfumed, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark plums, black cherries, chocolate, a touch of violet, a lovely base of soil, cigar ash, sweet nuttiness, black truffles and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and plush on the attack, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core of ripe fruit, very good soil signature and a long, meltingly tannic, complex and beautifully balanced finish. A great bottle of DDC. 2017-2050. **95.**

1964 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)

Saint Émilion was one of the blessed communes in the 1964 vintage, and this is very much evidenced by all of the beautiful qualities of the '64 Château Figeac. The wine delivers a superbly perfumed and complex bouquet of plums, black cherries, black truffles, chocolate, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of celery seed. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a plush core, lovely focus and grip, melting tannins and a very long, complex and classy finish. A gorgeous vintage of Figeac! 2019-2050+. **95.**

1964 Château Léoville-Poyferré (St. Julien)

This was the only time I had ever tasted the 1964 Léoville-Poyferré, and though the note is now a few years old, I include it here, as the wine was excellent and I have little doubt it continues to drink very well today. As readers may recall, the 1964 vintage on the Left Bank was generally undone by heavy rains that started falling right after the French Ministry of Agriculture announced that the 1964 vintage in Bordeaux was destined for greatness. The Right Bank and the

Graves were generally able bring their bunches in ahead of the rain and it is truly an exceptional vintage in those regions, but on the Médoc, most properties were caught with most of their bunches still out on the vine when the heavy rains arrived. Previously, the only two Médoc estates that I knew had harvested ahead of the rains were Latour and Montrose, but this was apparently also the case at Léoville-Poyferré, as this wine is excellent. The bouquet offers up a complex and deep blend of cherries, summer truffles, fresh herb tones, a touch of meatiness, a beautiful base of soil and a topnote of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, a velvety texture, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the poised and *à point* finish. This is clearly one of the great sleepers of the decade of the 1960s on the Gironde! 2014-2035. **93.**

1964 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

This particular bottle of the 1964 Vieux-Château-Certan was actually drunk in Beaune with friends, and it was a lovely change of pace after a lot of hours in the cellar assessing young red and white Burgundies. The wine is a beautiful example of just how successful 1964 was on the Right Bank, offering up a deep, refined and vibrant bouquet of sweet dark berries, espresso, cigar smoke, dark, gravelly soil tones, a lovely touch of fresh herbs, chicory and just a hint of meatiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very complex, with a plush core of fruit, excellent transparency and grip, melted tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus on the long, seamlessly balanced and fully mature finish. Back in this era, the wines at Vieux-Château-Certan contained a bit more cabernet sauvignon in the blend than is the case today, and I love how this added another layer of fresh herb tones to the aromatics and flavors and really helped this wine stand apart from its brethren in Pomerol. Just a lovely bottle of VCC. 2018-2045. **94.**

1962 Château Montrose (St. Estèphe)

The 1962 Montrose is one of my favorite examples of this thoroughly underrated vintages. The brilliant nose soars from the glass in a blaze of sweet cassis, a discreet touch of black raspberries, cigar ash, wonderfully pure, gravelly soil tones, roasted coffee bean, a touch of mint and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a fine core of sweet fruit, tangy acids, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly focused finish. I love the '62 Montrose's combination of sweet fruit tones and a real spine of remaining structure (mostly acidity, rather than tannin) that will carry this beautiful wine still for many, many years to come. A great wine and one of the true sleepers from the decade of the 1960s in the Médoc! 2019-2040. **95.**

1962 Château Mouton-Rothschild (Pauillac)

1962 was still a decade away from when Baron Philippe de Rothschild's lifelong lobbying campaign to have Château Mouton-Rothschild elevated to the status of First Growth was to reach fruition, and back in this era, this was considered one of the Super Second Growths. As I noted in the introduction, to my palate, this is still where this wine belongs in the rankings, but that is not to say that the 1962 vintage of Mouton is not a very tasty and satisfying bottle of claret. The bouquet offers up a superb blend of red and black cherries, Cuban cigar, a touch of sage, a lovely base of soil tones, just a touch of oak and a lovely array of Mouton spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is suave, full-bodied and fully mature, with respectable mid-palate depth, melted tannins and good focus and grip on the long and seamless finish. This is a nice old Mouton that still has some life ahead of it. 2018-2035+. **91.**

1955 Château Haut-Brion (Graves)

The decade of the 1950s at Château Haut-Brion was one of its most successful in its history and the 1955 is a great, great wine. I do not get to drink it with a lot of regularity, which is too bad, as it ranks close behind the legendary 1953 and 1959 at this great property and is one of my all-time favorite wines from this era. This most recent bottle of the '55 Haut-Brion was stellar and at its peak, offering up a gorgeous aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, black truffles, a touch of fresh herbs, a complex base of dark, gravelly soil tones, gentle nuttiness and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and silky, with a full-bodied format that still has plenty of stuffing at the core, melted tannins, impeccable focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully elegant finish. A gorgeous Haut-Brion by any measure. 2018-2050. **95.**

1955 Château La Mission Haut-Brion (Graves)

The 1955 vintage of Château La Mission Haut-Brion is one of the finest wine I have ever tasted from this property, but when I wrote my feature on the property back in 2015, I had not tasted this wine since 2006. So, I was thrilled to see it included in a recent tasting lineup of old claret, so that I could reacquaint myself with this legendary wine. The bouquet is pure, vibrant and bottomless, wafting from the glass in a very complex blend of sweet blackberries, cassis, cigar smoke, a great base of dark, gravelly soil tones, sweet leather, discreet notes of nutskin, violets and a topnote of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very elegant in profile, with a sweet core of black fruit, great soil signature and grip, melted tannins and a long, very complex and absolutely seamless finish. This wine is so perfectly balanced that it is hard not to imagine it cruising along beautifully for another half century. This bottle is even better than the last one I drank and was well worth the decade of patience between sips of this magical wine! 2017-2065. **100.**

1953 Château Beychevelle (St. Julien)

This most recent bottle of the 1953 Beychevelle was just lovely. The wine wafts from the glass in a very refined and perfumed mix of desiccated red and black cherries, a touch of grilled meats, a superb base of soil tones, woodsmoke, lovely spices, summer truffles and a floral topnote redolent of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, deep and very elegant in profile, a lovely core of fruit, superb complexity, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant, velvety and perfectly resolved finish. This is one of my favorite vintages of Beychevelle and it continues to cruise along at the peak of its powers. 2017-2035+. **94.**

1953 Domaine de Chevalier (Graves)

1953 remains one of my absolute favorite vintages of the twentieth century on the Gironde, as the unsurpassed elegance found in so many wines in this vintage is what I love best about the wines of Bordeaux. I had never tasted the 1953 Domaine de Chevalier prior to this vertical DDC tasting in the summer of 2017 and it was absolutely brilliant! The bouquet is pure and stunningly complex, offering up scents of desiccated red and black cherries, violets, almost sweet notes of black truffles, a beautiful base of soil tones, walnuts, singed tobacco and a touch of blood orange in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still sports superb mid-palate depth, with seamless balance, impeccable focus, melted tannins and a long, vibrant and gorgeously complex finish. This is the best vintage of Domaine de Chevalier I have ever had the pleasure to drink! 2017-2040+. **97.**

1953 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

I have only had the '53 Gruaud-Larose on a few occasions over the years and I have always loved this vintage here at the property. This most recent bottle was superb and an absolute treat to share, offering up a deep and utterly refined nose of sweet, dark berries, mint, summer truffles, tobacco ash and a complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very silky, with lovely intensity in the mid-palate, beautiful focus and complexity and a very long, pure and exquisitely nuanced finish. The inherent elegance of the 1953 vintage is a perfect foil for the more robust style of Gruaud-Larose and the synthesis of the two is quite stunning. 2018-2035+. **94.**

1953 Château Lafite-Rothschild (Pauillac)

It is funny how each of our paths in the world of wine unfold, for though I have been extremely fortunate to drink a lot of great, great Bordeaux over the years, this particular tasting in 2017 was the very first time I had ever crossed paths with the legendary 1953 vintage of Lafite-Rothschild. I had probably drunk the equally magical 1959 Lafite close to a dozen times, but never the 1953! Given the inherent elegance of the 1953 vintage, it is not surprising that the synthesis of this year and Lafite is a match made in heaven. The bouquet is celestial, wafting from the glass in a brilliantly complex blend of cassis, black truffles, a touch of spiced meats, Cuban cigar, dark soil tones and a hint of mint in the upper register. Interestingly, as this wine sits in the glass, more red fruity tones come to the fore and one gets a lovely blast of summer truffles (which would be a perfect match with the wine). On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and the epitome of refinement, with a seamless palate impression, a lovely core of fruit, impeccable balance and a long, elegant and very, very complex finish. This is a wine that deserves every bit of the mountains of praised that have been heaped on it over the years. 2017-2050+. **98.**

1952 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

The 1952 Gruaud-Larose is a very good example of the vintage and still drinking quite well indeed. The deep, smoky and tertiary bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of dark berries, cigar ash, autumnal soil tones, a bit of spiced meat and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite black fruity and smoky, with a good core of fruit, still a touch of tannin perking up the finish and fine length and grip on the finish. This lacks just a bit of backend lift, but it is still a very sturdy old bottle of Gruaud-Larose and will continue to drink well for many decades to come. 2102-2050. **87.**

1950 Château Talbot (St. Julien) served from magnum

I shared this magnum of 1950 Talbot all the way back in 2012, but as I have never had a chance to post the note previously and the wine will still be drinking very well out of magnum, I am including it here, despite the note now being a bit out of date. I do not know anything about the 1950 vintage on the Left Bank, as most of the accolades for this vintage are reserved for the Right Bank, but at least the 1950 Château Talbot is worthy of your attention. The bouquet is suave and beautifully resolved, offering up a complex blend of sweet cassis, cigar box, dark soil tones, a touch of new leather, black truffles and a whisper of tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, vibrant and intensely flavored, with exquisite balance, fine focus and grip and a very long, poised and complex finish. At least in magnum, this still has decades of life in it! 2012-2040+. **92.**

1950 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

The 1950 vintage of Vieux-Château-Certan is rightfully considered one of the greatest vintages ever from this superb Pomerol estate. I do not get to drink this wine very often and this most recent bottle was absolutely pristine and equal to the legend, delivering a stunning bouquet of dark berries, menthol, a touch of spiced meats, a beautifully complex base of dark soil tones, espresso, tobacco leaf, smoke and a pungent topnote of black truffles. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and utterly seamless in its balance, with a great core of fruit, superb complexity and grip, still a whisper of backend tannin and a very, very long, velvety and energetic finish. All claret should be this brilliant and vibrant at age sixty-eight! 2018-2040. **98.**

1949 Château Calon-Ségur (St. Estèphe)

This was the first time I had the good fortune to taste the 1949 vintage of Château Calon-Ségur and the wine was excellent. The bouquet is pure and expressive, offering up a refined constellation of cassis, cigar wrapper, mineral salts, dark soil tones, gamebird, a hint of pepper and a smoky topnote more reminiscent of bonfires than cigars. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite rock solid at the core for a wine at age sixty-eight, with fine focus and grip, still a modest touch of backend tannin and a very long, classy finish. This is very, very good wine that still has at least a couple of decades of primetime drinking ahead of it. 2017-2040+. **93.**

1949 Château Cheval Blanc (St. Émilion)

I am probably in the minority in always having preferred the 1949 vintage of Cheval Blanc to the more famous and powerful 1947 here. However, this most recent bottle of the 1949 was not one hundred percent on form, at least to my palate, and was simply very good, rather than exhibiting its customary greatness. It was still a very enjoyable bottle, but peg it at the ninety-five percentile of quality for this wine, as it offered up scents of cherries, cigar smoke, orange peel, a fine base of soil tones, gentle herb tones and a topnote of oak that is more like mahogany than cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and gently autumnal in personality, with a good core, nice acids and grip and a long, complex and fairly gentle finish. I have had better bottles of this, but having not drunk the wine in quite a few years now, I was still happy to drink a slightly advanced bottle. 2018-2035. **92** (pristine bottles merit several more points).

1949 Château Mouton-Rothschild (Pauillac)

This particular tasting was the very first time I had ever tasted the 1949 vintage of Château Mouton-Rothschild and it now has to rank up there with my personal pantheon of the finest examples I have ever tasted from the property. The wine took about fifteen minutes in decanter to stretch its wings, but once it got rolling, it was stunning. The bouquet offers up a superb blend of cassis, a touch of Mouton red currant, cigar wrapper, summer truffles, a lovely base of soil, a discreet presentation of Mouton spices, tea leaves and a gentle topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is pure, elegant and full-bodied, with lovely focus and grip, a fine core, great balance and complexity and a very long, refined and silky finish. There is not a rough edge to be found anywhere here and I have little doubt the wine has been fully mature since its thirtieth birthday, but it continues to cruise along gracefully and is a gorgeous example of this *terroir*. 2017-2040+. **95.**

1948 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

When I wrote the historical feature on this estate back in 2009, I had to reach back to a note from 2001 for the 1948 VCC, as the last few bottles I had crossed paths with had not been well-stored. After writing my article on the property, I had not seen a bottle of the legendary 1948 VCC subsequently until this particular tasting in 2018, where the bottle was perfect and the wine was shining in all of its glory. The bouquet of the 1948 is deep, complex and sappy, soaring from the glass in a perfectly resolved blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, black truffles, dark chocolate, singed tobacco and a gorgeous base of the gravelly, dark soil tones of this estate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully old school Pomerol in its aesthetic sensibilities, with slightly broader shoulders than more recent top vintages, a bottomless core of fruit, great soil signature and great length and grip on the complex finish that still retains a whisper of its tannin! This is such a great, great vintage of Vieux-Château-Certan. 2018-2050. **97.**

1947 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

The 1947 Gruaud-Larose is a fine and still quite vibrant example of the vintage, with its fully mature aromatics and flavors still buttressed nicely by mid-palate stuffing and fine structural integrity. The deep and complex nose is quite smoky in personality, delivering a complex and classic mélange of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, herb tones, a touch of meatiness, gravel and the aforementioned tobacco smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very suave on the attack, with a very good core of fruit for a sixty-four year-old wine, with melted tannins, lovely focus and balance and a long, black fruity and very smoky aftertaste. Classic old Gruaud, the 1947 still has decades of life ahead of it. 2011-2040. **92.**

1947 Château Lafleur-Pétrus (Pomerol)

I had never previously drunk a bottle of the 1947 Château Lafleur-Pétrus and I was very much impressed with this wine and how well it was still drinking today. The bouquet offers up a really refined blend of red plums, beautiful spice tones, nutskin, cigar smoke, summer truffles, lovely soil tones and a topnote of walnut. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very pure, with still a good core of fruit, a fine base of autumnal soil elements, fine focus and grip and a long, silky and utterly refined finish. I just love old Pomerol! 2018-2040. **92.**

1947 Vieux-Château-Certan (Pomerol)

Unlike the 1948 vintage of Vieux-Château-Certan, where I had bad luck with a few bottles after a great showing in 2001, with the legendary vintage of 1947 here, I had never, ever had a pristine bottle (despite probably trying the wine four or five times). This has always been an even more famous vintage of VCC than either the 1948 or 1950 here, with all of the attendant risk of bottles of the 1947 being widely swapped at the bazaar and running the risk of mishandling, so I suppose it is not too surprising that this Irishman had only previously had bad luck with this wine. However, at our vertical Vieux-Château-Certan tasting in 2018 the long hitless streak with the '47 was resoundingly ended, as this was a perfect bottle, offering up a deep, ripe and powerful bouquet of cassis, black cherries, a nice touch of balsamic overtones, cigar ash, dark soil tones, singed tobacco and a topnote of bitter chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered (even for an old school Pomerol vintage), with a superb core of fruit, excellent length and grip and still a bit of remaining tannin perking up the complex finish. This is a superb example of the 1947 vintage and a wine (when pristine) that fully merits all of its accolades. 2018-2050. **96.**

1924 Château La Conseillante (Pomerol)

This is the first example of the 1924 vintage in Bordeaux that I can ever recall tasting and I was very pleasantly surprised with how good this wine was drinking still, at age ninety-six! The bouquet is a lovely, tertiary blend of red berries, summer truffles, cigar smoke, a touch of acorn-like nuttiness, gentle meatiness and a topnote of orange zest and discreet Pomerol herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and intensely flavored, with lovely purity to its fruit component, excellent soil transparency and a long, bouncy and beautifully focused finish. This was probably not the ripest vintage of the decade in Pomerol and the wine shows this a touch on the backend, but this just adds a nice touch of savory elements to the complexity on the palate. A lovely old middleweight Pomerol. 2018-2035+. **90.**

1882 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

The 1882 was a bit more vigorous on the palate than the 1862 (served ahead of it at this vertical- please see below), but it was again essentially only of interest aromatically, as the nose was lovely, but the wine was cracking up on the palate. The really complex, old claret bouquet offers up notes of dried cherries, a hint of cigar wrapper, nutty tones, dried leaves and acorns. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and gently faded, with still nice acids and a semblance of structure on the silky backend. This is another very old Gruaud-Larose that might still be shockingly tasty out of magnum, but it is more of academic interest than truly captivating out of regular-sized format. 2012-2020? **84.**

1862 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

1862 was an important year in winemaking in France, as this was the first year in which there was working knowledge of malolactic fermentation, which had been a complete mystery to winemakers prior to this year. Like many really old wines, the 1862 Gruaud-Larose is still quite interesting aromatically, but the wine is pretty much gone on the palate at this point in its evolution. The beautiful, old and delicate nose offers up scents of strawberries, a touch of grilled meat, sweet walnuts, a bit of orange peel and very pretty, dusty soil tones. On the palate the fruit is pretty much faded away today, with the other structural elements intact, but the wine is past its best. Like the 1842, this could still be really quite special in magnum (if they were even produced), but this bottle was over the hill on the palate by at least a few decades. ??? **82.**

1852 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

The 1852 Gruaud-Larose is one of the more exotic old clarets I have ever tasted, as it shows a distinct touch of botrytis to its aromatic and flavor profiles and really tastes today much like a very old Sauternes. The bouquet is a very idiosyncratic, but also attractive in its blend of dried apricot, a touch of honey, tea leaves, dried cherries, barely sugar and soil. On the palate the wine is deep and quite full for its age (one hundred and sixty years old is no spring chicken!), with good focus and balance, but a touch of residual sugar now showing on the long finish. The grip and complexity here are outstanding for such an old wine, which I assume is the result of a bit of a concentrating effect from some botrytis way back when. I like this quite well, but would probably choose to serve it with a cheese course now, as it really is a touch sweet. 2012-2040. **88.**



1842 Château Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)

The 1842 Gruaud-Larose only lasted about fifteen minutes in the glass before starting to fade, but it really was a pretty interesting and surprisingly tasty glass of very old claret for those fifteen minutes. The beautiful, autumnal nose offers up scents of fallen leaves, desiccated cherries, red currants, heather, walnuts and dried roses. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and still quite structurally sound, with gently faded fruit, a nice spine of well-integrated acids and not too bad length on the gentle, lacy finish. I would love to taste this vintage out of magnum, as just a bit more vibrancy to go along with the really pretty complexity this wine offers up would be a winning combination. Despite this bottle fading pretty briskly, I suspect that the best bottles of the 1842 Gruaud-Larose could still last another fifteen or twenty years, as the structural skeleton here is still quite sound and it was only the fruit that faded in this bottle pretty quickly. 2012-2030? **87.**