

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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CHÂTEAU FIGEAC
ANOTHER ST. ÉMILION EXEMPLAR OF ELEGANCE



Château Figeac is one of the great, traditionally-styled Premier Grand Cru Classés of St. Émilion. Located in the “Graves” section of St. Émilion, lying along the Pomerol border and quite removed from most of the Premier Grand Cru Classés that are to be found in the Côtes section of the appellation (many of which flank the old city on the top of the plateau), Figeac is one of the undisputed stars of the Right Bank. While the estate has one of the oldest histories in the entire Bordeaux area, with archeological evidence at the property dating its origins all the way back to Gallo-Roman times, its period of vinous excellence is much more a recent phenomenon, as the property has had a long history of absentee land management by local or Parisian-based nobility who demonstrated little real interest in pursuing the excellent potential of the vineyards on the estate. Today, while Château Figeac (with forty of its fifty-four hectares of land under vine) remains one of the largest single domaines in the appellation of St. Émilion, the present day estate is only a small percentage of what was once a vastly larger property. At its greatest extent, Figeac once comprised over two hundred hectares in the current communes of Pomerol and St. Émilion. Over the centuries, the lands of Figeac have been sold off by various ownership family members in need of hard cash to maintain a certain level of living standards in the wake of economic fluctuations, so that not only the eponymous neighboring St. Émilion estates of Chateaux La-Tour-Figeac and La-Tour-de-Pin-Figeac can trace their origins back to the former, more expansive Figeac, but also significant portions of the superb Pomerol estates that lie just over the border from Chateau Figeac, Chateau La Conseillante and Château Beauregard, also owe much their current vineyard patrimony to purchases from previous owners

of the property. And these are not the only neighbors who can trace their vineyard origins back to fire sales by previous owners of Figeac, as the property's closest neighbor, the First Growth, Château Cheval Blanc, is comprised primarily of vineyards purchased by the Ducasse family from the Figeac estate in 1832 and 1838. In fact, the first vintages of Cheval Blanc produced after the original 1832 sale were sold as "Vin de Figeac", as the moniker of Cheval Blanc was not established for some years after the purchase of vineyard land in 1832.

While Château Figeac has had a litany of noble and high bourgeois families owning the estate back through its history, it seems that one really only need look at two of the more recent families to hold the lease at Figeac to understand its history as it applies to its superb wines of today. At the start of the nineteenth century, Figeac was owned by the Comtesse Félicité de Carle-Trajet, who had been widowed at a fairly young age and was forced to sell off chunks of the estate from time to time to maintain her aristocratic lifestyle in the wake of her husband's death. At the time of her husband's passing in the early nineteenth century, Château Figeac still comprised fully one hundred and seventy-five hectares of land, with much of it still woodlands or pastures that had not yet been planted to vines. The Comtesse's first sales were soon after her husband's death, and these included the parcels over the Pomerol border that would eventually find their way into today's vineyard holdings of Chateau La Conseillante and Château Beauregard. After these parcels were sold off from the furthest reaches of the estate, the next chunk of land to be sold off by the Comtesse were the two important parcels in the 1830s to the Ducasse family that would form the nexus of Château Cheval Blanc. These two sales of six hectares of vines in 1832 and an additional fifteen hectares in 1838 included some of the very finest vineyard land that the Figeac estate owned, as they are part of the core section of the property that lies on a series of gravel terraces that define this section of St. Émilion (and which are remarkably similar to the *terroirs* of the greatest estates in the Pessac-Léognan appellation across the Gironde in Graves). The section of the commune where Figeac and Cheval Blanc lie is known as the "Graves" of St. Émilion and takes its name from these terraces, which are unequivocally the home to the finest *terroirs* to be found in this commune outside of the limestone slopes of the plateau that surrounds the town of St. Émilion itself and which are known as the "Côtes". The "Côtes" section houses such great *terroirs* as Ausone, Magdelaine, Canon, Bélair-Monange and Pavie. And while both these section of St. Émilion possess superb *terroirs*, the two could not be more different, with the "Côtes" section of the appellation of the plateau extremely dominated by the limestone soils of the "*Calcaire à Astéries*" (comprised of fossilized starfish and which also are the underlying geological foundation of the greatest estates in the Sauternes and particularly Barsac regions), while the "Graves" section of St. Émilion is much more defined by its soil mixtures of gravel, clay and sand that is also found on the plateau of Pomerol. In fact, the Graves section of St. Émilion is for all intents and purposes simply a continuation of the plateau of Pomerol.

Eventually, what remained of the Figeac estate of the Comtesse Félicité de Carle-Trajet was sold off in its entirety in 1838, with the property passing through a series of hands throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, with further parcels sold off later in the century into what would become the neighboring châteaux of La-Tour-Figeac and La-Tour-de-Pin-Figeac. Of the myriad of different owners of Château Figeac between 1838 and the last decade of the nineteenth century, no one seemed even remotely interested in championing the vinous potential of the property, so that while nearby estates such as Cheval Blanc, La

Conseillante and Vieux Château Certan began to garner quite a reputation for the outstanding quality of their wines (particularly in the Benelux countries), Château Figeac really continued to languish under its succession of disinterested and absentee owners and remained in relative oblivion. It was not until the estate eventually passed into the hands of the Villepigue family in 1892 that Figeac's future showed some light on the horizon. The current owners of the estate trace their family's involvement in the estate to this time. However, it was still to take another fifty years of missed opportunities and false starts before the history of this great property as we know it today finally began to be written.

Ada Elizabeth Manoncourt, *née* Villepigue, acquired the title of Figeac from her brother, Robert Villepigue, sometime in 1942, during the tumultuous last chapter of France's participation as a combatant in the Second World War, and it is from this point forwards that the true history of Figeac as we know it today can really be said to commence. But, it still waited for the Manoncours' son, Thierry to take control of Figeac in 1946 for the renaissance of the estate to actually start and the true quality of the wines from this estate to begin to be realized. Thierry Manoncourt had served in the French Army during World War II and was a prisoner of war for some years, before returning to St. Émilion in 1943 and enrolling in the *Institut National Agronomique* in Paris. Monsieur Manoncourt eventually received a degree in Agronomical Engineering from this prestigious institution. Once he had received his degree, Thierry Manoncourt returned to the property and took to resurrecting the estate with great vigor, adapting early on many of the cutting edge innovations in both viticulture and vinification that were to sweep through Bordeaux in the 1950s and 1960s, and almost overnight the reputation of Château Figeac began to rise and take its rightful place amongst the very finest estates in St. Émilion. In fact, the renaissance began almost immediately at Figeac after Monsieur Manoncourt took over, as the 1947 Figeac reportedly remains one of the greatest wines ever produced at the estate in the twentieth century. I have never had the pleasure to taste the '47, but the wines I have tasted from the 1950s forward clearly demonstrate just how brilliant the *terroir* is at this great estate and how skilled the team at Figeac has been since 1946 in getting this beautiful *terroir* expressed clearly and elegantly in the wines of the domaine. The château had long been uninhabited at the estate, but Monsieur Manoncourt undertook a renovation of the house and *chais* soon after assuming control in 1946, and in 1953, he and his newlywed wife, Marie-France, moved into the home on the property.

Thierry and Marie-France Manoncourt were tireless ambassadors for Château Figeac throughout their professional lives, and they were joined in the running of their beloved family estate in 1988, soon after their daughter Laure married Eric d'Aramon in 1987. Monsieur d'Aramon worked alongside Thierry Manoncourt from 1988 until 1997, when Monsieur Manoncourt decided to fully step into the background and Monsieur d'Aramon assumed the title of Director of the estate. So, as Eric d'Aramon likes to say, the 1998 is really "his" first vintage at Figeac, but it is pretty difficult to see any stylistic difference between this wine and the "fully Manoncourt" vintages that preceded it. Despite having passed the baton at Château Figeac in the late 1980s, Thierry Manoncourt and his wife Marie-France remained intimately involved in the estate for many years after the formal transition of the directorship of the property. Monsieur d'Aramon has been quick to maintain the great traditional style at Figeac, and while so many of his neighbors succumbed to the temptation to craft modern-styled and brazenly obvious wines from their own estates in St. Émilion during the decade of the 1990s, Château Figeac has

remained a beacon of classicism since the start of the tenure of Eric d'Aramon. Thierry Manoncourt passed away in 2010 at the ripe old age of ninety-three, leaving behind a legacy at Château Figeac that will last far, far into the future. Without the great efforts of Monsieur Manoncourt and his wife, it is entirely possible that the great promise of Figeac and its inimitable *terroir* might still be lost in history's shifting sands.

As touched upon above, Château Figeac's vineyards lie on a series of gravel mounds that really define the *terroir* of the estate and contribute both to the grape variety blend that the Manoncourt family selected for the vineyards and the ultimate style and quality of the wine. At the time of the Comtesse in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the filet section of Figeac's vineyard land was comprised of five distinct "gravel mounds" that are really a continuation of the Pomerol plateau and share much more in common with the *terroirs* found at La Conseillante, Vieux Château Certan and Trochanoy over the communal boundary than with most of the other estates in St. Émilion. Two of these prized gravel mounds- made up of Gunzian "*Graves de Feu*" were sold off to form the nexus of Cheval Blanc, and the other three remain as the vineyard heart of Figeac. The three gravel terraces here vary in depth from six to eight meters of gravelly topsoil, before one strikes the underlying subsoils. These are soils which are certainly defined by their fairly thin layers of gravel, laid over this base of sandy marl, with a sufficient streak of clay to provide backbone and structure to the wines of Figeac. This concentration of gravel appears almost nowhere else in the commune of St. Émilion other than at the small handful of estates that lie along the border of Pomerol. As the name implies, the "*Graves de Feu*" contains a noticeable strain of iron in the soil, which is often found in evidence in both the bouquet and flavors of the wines of Figeac (as well as those of the neighboring Pomerol of La Conseillante). It is a soil that favors cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc over merlot, and the advantage of the cabernet grapes at Figeac is reflected in the planting percentages of thirty-five percent each of cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc, with only thirty percent of the vineyards here planted to merlot (a very low percentage for the commune). Given the rather unique *cépage* of Figeac, it really can be said to bear a strongest resemblance to the nearby wines of Châteaux Cheval Blanc, La Conseillante and Vieux Château Certan, and really to be rather unique beyond this small constellation of Pomerol and St. Émilion properties and to not have a whole lot of stylistic similarities with the rest of the wines of the commune.

Thierry Manoncourt from his earliest days at the head of the estate, sought to elevate Figeac from the level of wines that had defined the estate in the first half of the twentieth century and to fully capitalize on the superb *terroir* which he had inherited at Figeac. He was rather unique for his time, having been formally trained in agronomy, which was certainly not the case with most of the owners of other prestigious properties in Bordeaux in this epoch. Almost immediately he set about replanting sections of the *vignoble* at Figeac, pulling out malbec vines that had been planted here previously and committing a much higher percentage of the land under vine to both cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc during the decades of the 1940s and 1950s. This was not done by happenstance, as Monsieur Manoncourt began bottling sample lots of single varietal wines from different sections of the vineyard, so that he could follow how each individual grape variety might evolve with time in bottle. The results of these experiments eventually produced the vineyard plantation ratio of thirty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-five percent cabernet franc and thirty percent merlot that has been the blend at Figeac since the 1950s. During this same decade, Thierry Manoncourt was also instrumental in creating the

first classification of the wines of St. Émilion, which was undertaken for the first time in 1954 and which is now revisited every ten years. In addition, he was also a founding member of the “Union des Grands Crus” organization which is so well-known today as the chief organizer of each year’s *En Primeur* tastings of the most recent vintage during the first weeks of April.

As has been the case with several of the other neighboring properties, such as La Conseillante and Cheval Blanc, the quite unique style of Château Figeac has often posed problems for commentators on the wines of the estate, as the higher percentage of cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc used in the blend here will often produce a much more structured and reticent wine out of the blocks than many of the more voluptuous examples of St. Émilion to be found around the commune. Couple this with the Manoncourt family’s desire to craft Figeac as a wine that is long on elegance and finesse, and it has often been erroneously said of Figeac that this is a more middleweight wine that really could do with just a bit more “stuffing”. In addition to the supremely elegant profile of Figeac since Thierry Manoncourt took the helm in 1946, the young wines here have on occasion shown a faint touch of herbaceousness out of the blocks from the high percentage of cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc utilized in every vintage of Figeac. This, of course, is quite natural for wines based on these two cabernet varieties, and it is generally only in extraordinarily ripe vintages that this touch of youthful “weediness” is not in evidence in a young vintage of Figeac. However, just because several vintages each decade of Figeac have started out life marked by a slight, youthful whiff of *herbacité* does not mean that this is a characteristic that is great evidence once the wine has blossomed from its period of youthful adolescence, and this trait is simply a very traditional and transient quality associated with wines based primarily on cabernet grapes and is not a quality that one finds in the vast, vast majority of vintages of Figeac ones the wines have reached maturity. Given the fact that this touch of *herbacité* has also often been found in the young wines from neighboring estates such as Cheval Blanc, La Conseillante and Vieux Château Certan (funny, but these are four of my absolute favorite producers in all of Bordeaux!), one is tempted to think that this shading is one of the signature elements in the best wines from the shared *terroirs* of these sections of Pomerol and St. Émilion- at least where one of the two cabernet varieties plays a key role in the blend.

Sadly, a well-known Bordeaux commentator has written in the past that the very natural, reticent quality in young Figeac in most vintages is emblematic that Figeac “tends to be a more herbaceous-scented, lighter wine...(which) lamentably, only in a handful of recent vintages- 1964, 1970, 1975, 1982 and 1990- have exhibited the stuffing to suggest (that) they can stand the test of time.” To be fair to Robert Parker, he wrote this back in 1991 and perhaps he has learned better once he had a bit more experience with the wines of Figeac! In point of fact, I have never found this description of Figeac to be even remotely accurate, as the wine invariably blossoms into a beautifully concentrated, pure and complex example of each respective vintage and is clearly one of the greatest and most consistent wines of Bordeaux. Additionally, it is far from a light wine in all but the leanest of Bordeaux vintages. As Figeac contains a vastly higher percentage of cabernet sauvignon than its neighbor Cheval Blanc (where much more cabernet franc is relied upon in the blend), the two wines tend to resemble each other quite a bit in terms of structural elements- particularly out of the blocks (and which I attribute to their shared *terroirs*)- though they are not particularly similar in terms of aromatic or flavor profiles, as

Figeac's thirty-five percent cabernet sauvignon in the blend makes for an utterly unique (as well as compelling) wine of great individuality and charm.

The wines of Château Figeac have been quite traditionally vinified since the very early days of Monsieur Manoncourt, so that this remains one of the most beautifully classic examples of claret to be found in the Right Bank. In the first few decades of Thierry Manoncourt's tenure at the head of the estate, the wine would be fermented in open top, old oak fermenting casks and then transferred after the malolactic fermentation for *elevage* in small, traditional Bordeaux casks. However, in 1971 Château Figeac was one of the first châteaux (alongside Haute Brion and Latour) to adopt stainless steel tanks for some of the fermentation needs of the estate, and since that day a combination of stainless steel and the old oak fermenters have been used for the fermentation at Figeac. Happily, no one at the estate has ever had any inclination to follow fashion and introduce a percentage of malolactic fermentation in small oak casks for Figeac, so that the wine remains a St. Émilion that is very much defined by its unique and utterly compelling *terroir*. For lovers of old school, traditional Bordeaux, Figeac remains one of the great estates whose wines can be purchased and cellared with complete confidence in their ultimate and quite classic brilliance. Robert Parker had written in 1991 that Figeac's "most recent vintages- even those admirably concentrated- have tended to be fully ready for imbibing by the time they were 5 or 6 years old" and "only the finest years of Figeac have had the cunning ability to last well in the bottle for 15 or more years." He concludes that "this shortcoming has not gone unnoticed." In my considerable experience with the wines of the estate, this is emphatically not the case and I find Figeac one of the longest-lived and most complete wines in the entire commune. I believe the notes that follow below will also attest to Figeac's long life in bottle. In fact, given the relatively reticent nature of Figeac out of the blocks- in all but the ripest vintages- drinking the wines from this estate on the early side is a mistake in my opinion and clearly misses the opportunity to enjoy what is clearly one of the most complex wines of St. Émilion at its apogee.

The percentage of new oak used for the *grand vin* at Château Figeac has been one hundred percent since the 1970 vintage, and yet, I have never encountered a vintage of Figeac post-1970 that I ever felt was even remotely over-oaked. The wine invariably takes a few years to absorb and integrated its new wood, so that early, "in the bottle" tastings of the wine can sometimes show a bit of spicy wood still in need of integration, but this characteristic is invariably ancient history by the time the wine reaches its fifth birthday. As Monsieur d'Aramon observes, "my father-in-law began using one hundred percent new wood for the wines of the estate in the 1970 vintage, but we have always taken into consideration the style of each year, and we do not hesitate to vary the duration of the stay of the young vintage in new oak, to make sure that the wine is never dominated by its wood." He continues, "for us today, and for my father-in-law before me, the most important thing has always been to guard the natural elegance of Figeac, and we make many of our decisions- when to pick, how long to macerate, how long to allow the young wine to remain in new wood- with an eye on maintaining the natural elegance of the wines of Figeac." One of the elements that really sets the wines of Figeac apart from so many of its Right Bank neighbors these days is the central role that good acidity levels play in the wines of Figeac, and this is not a coincidence, as Thierry Manoncourt and Eric d'Aramon have always sought to time their picking to maintain good acidity in their wines. Monsieur

d'Aramon observes that "without good acidity, a wine is never going to age truly gracefully and remain elegant throughout its long life."

As Robert Parker alluded to in his above comments about the estate's wines, in ripe vintages, there is a plushness to young Figeac that is not typical of the estate in more classic vintages, and for this reason, the wine can often offer up an early seductive immediacy that inexperienced tasters can often find irresistible in these more plush years. I say this as one who knows this to be the case only too well, as I purchased a case of 1982 Figeac for my own cellar early on in my career in the wine trade and drank up the entire dozen bottles before the wine had reached its tenth birthday! However, this youthful "plushness" is only really part of Figeac's personality in very ripe vintages such as 1982 or 1990, and in most other vintages, the wine's inherent structural integrity from its high percentage of cabernet sauvignon typically demands a solid decade and a half or two decades of cellaring to really reach its plateau of maturity. Before this time has elapsed, the wines of Figeac, even if structurally approachable, remain fairly straightforward and primary on both the nose and palate, so one should not confuse "accessibility" with "maturity", as there is an awful lot of complexity in a mature vintage of Figeac that is still hidden in a ten year-old wine from this estate. But, exercise a bit of patience and give a top vintage of Figeac a solid two decades of bottle age and the fireworks of complexity really start to shine.

The cellars at Château Figeac were expanded in 1971, adding a lower level that allowed the wines to be racked from cask by gravity and assembled as gently as possible for their bottling on the new lower level. The style at Figeac has never emphasized heavy extraction, late harvesting or extended macerations to create darker colors or heavy-handed palate impressions. As Monsieur d'Aramon likes to say, "my father-in-law before me believed that Figeac must always be a wine of elegance- a wine that invites drinking on its own or with a great meal- and should never be a wine that is too heavy, extracted or obvious." He concludes, "of course these are entirely my sentiments as well and you will never see Figeac change to follow a fashion that, in any case, seems to be swinging back from excess at this point in time." In this regard, Figeac has remained one of the classics of Bordeaux. Macerations typically run only seven days at the estate, and it is always one of the earlier estates to pick in St. Émilion. Eric d'Aramon observes that "we always like to time our picking to maintain good acidity and never let the pH get too high, as we need this acidity to maintain freshness and elegance as the wine ages in bottle." This translates into Figeac being a wine of great purity, nascent complexity and remarkable balance for long-term aging, and despite erroneous comments to the contrary, Château Figeac from the post-war period forward is one of the longest-lived wines on the Right Bank. In most top, well-structured vintages, I would not even consider opening a bottle of Figeac until it has had fully twenty years in the cellar (having learned my lesson rather painfully with my case of 1982 Figeac- though I must admit that every bottle I drank was delicious!), as this is a wine that is emphatically more complex and better at age twenty-five than it is at age ten or twelve.

At its apogee, Figeac is one of the most singularly beautiful wines of Bordeaux, delivering a stunningly pure mélange of red and black cherries, often augmented by a nice touch of plummy, black truffles, woodsmoke, notes of menthol, sweet tobacco tones and signature, St. Émilion nutskin- all layered over an always a beautiful base of soil. Riper vintages are often a bit chocolaty in profile as well, with the fruit components leaning towards the black fruity end of

this spectrum, while the less ripe years are often strikingly pure and red fruity. The gravelly base of soil and the high percentage of cabernet sauvignon used at Figeac always produce a wine that stands on its own, with a personality that is a little bit St. Émilion, a little bit Pomerol and a little bit Left Bank as well- but always singularly Figeac. In fact, tasting through a range of vintages of Figeac clearly demonstrates that this is one of the greatest *terroirs* in all of Bordeaux. Despite erroneous assertions elsewhere that Figeac matures at a brisk pace, this is emphatically not the case and it is really a waste to open bottles of a top vintage of Figeac before it has seen at least twenty years in bottle. While I have only drunk Figeac back to the brilliant 1953 vintage out of château-bottled examples and 1955 from a Belgian *négociant*, I have little doubt that all of the top vintages since Monsieur Manoncourt turned around this property in the mid-1940s remain great wines to drink. To take just a single example, a recent bottle of the 1962 Figeac- hardly the most structured of vintages from this superb decade for claret- clearly had a good thirty more years of potential life in the bottle, and this is of course dwarfed by vintages such as 1961 and 1964.



The vast majority of the following wines were tasted in the last couple of years, with a good dozen of the more recent vintages served at a Château Figeac vertical tasting organized by Panos Kakaviatos- a well-known wine journalist whose writings on Bordeaux often appear in Decanter- that he put together and co-hosted alongside Eric d'Aramon in Washington, D.C. in January of this year and was kind enough to invite me to attend. The notes on a couple of my favorite old vintages of Figeac are sadly a bit more out of date, as I have not had the pleasure to taste the great 1964 or 1953 in several years, but reprint the older notes below, as I have little doubt that the wines continue to drink even more splendidly today than they did several years

ago. Figeac is one of the greatest wines in all of Bordeaux and under the stewardship of Monsieur Eric d'Aramon, it remains one of the great classic clarets of this day and age on the Gironde. Thierry Manoncourt has been reported to have never tired during his long career at the helm at Château Figeac of advocating that his beloved estate deserved to be ranked at the very pinnacle of the commune of St. Émilion, alongside of Château Cheval Blanc and Château Ausone. Given how brilliantly the domaine's wines have been since his assuming the direction of the property in 1946, it is pretty hard not to take his point of view on this question. One must suspect that the spotty history of the estate under the previous ownership groups who whittled down this great property over the centuries- while never seizing the possibility of making a great wine from one of the greatest *terroirs* in all of Bordeaux- has played a key role in Figeac not having been promoted to the very top rank in St. Émilion.

2010 Château Figeac

I did not have time to squeeze in a visit to taste *sur place* at Château Figeac this year, which was too bad, because all three samples of the 2010 that I tasted seemed decidedly un-Figeac-like in style. However, as all three samples were consistent in their rather heavy-handed personalities, I have to assume that this is simply a year where the vagaries of the vintage dictated the style at the estate. The nose is very, very ripe in its aromatic mélange of black cherries, just a touch of kirsch, chocolate, earth, violets and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very dense for Château Figeac, with a fairly flat palate impression, very firm, but well-integrated tannins and a long, closed finish. I would guess that 2010 was a vintage where the team at Figeac simply had to let the grapes hang and try and soften up the tannins a bit, and ended up with this rather dense and ripe wine. The wine is not bad, but I am so accustomed to Château Figeac being one of the very best few wines in the commune, that the 2010 is likely to go down as one of my least favorite examples from the estate in many years. 2022-2075. **87-88+?**

2009 Château Figeac

I had not seen the 2009 Figeac since the *En Primeur* barrel tastings in April of 2010, and I was happy to see that it has found its way into bottle with its character intact. This is a very ripe, plush and powerful vintage of Figeac, and at our Washington tasting, it was served at the end of the vertical and may have not shown at its best in the context of following several mature or maturing vintages. In any case, this broad-shouldered Figeac offers up a very ripe and opulent nose of black cherries, a touch of black raspberry, chocolate, sweet nutskins, Cuban tobacco, smoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very plush on the attack, with a fine core of thick fruit, ripe, beautifully-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the powerful and succulent finish. After wines such as the '98, '95 and '86, this comes across as quite fruit-driven in style- which may simply be a function of such a young wine following on the heels of wines starting to approach maturity- but there is little doubt that the 2009 Figeac is one of the top successes of the vintage. I had initially thought that this might age along the lines of the fine 1982 Figeac, but it seems likely that this will always be a more powerful wine that will not be able to replicate the beautiful elegance of the velvety 1982. That said, the 2009 Figeac is still a beautifully made wine, but stylistically, I much prefer the classic 2008, even if the two vintages are not that dissimilar in terms of absolute quality. 2020-2060. **93.**

2008 Château Figeac

The 2008 Figeac is a beautiful bottle in the making and was clearly one of the best 2008s on display at the UGC tasting. The bouquet is deep, complex and utterly classy, as it jumps from

the glass in a stunning blend of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, tobacco smoke, coffee, complex soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very elegant out of the blocks, with excellent mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the youthful and very pure finish. Figeac is of course raised in one hundred percent new wood, so it always shows a bit more flamboyantly at this early stage than wines such as Canon, and it will be very interesting to compare these two classics a decade or two down the road. A great vintage of Figeac. 2018-2045+. **94.**

2006 Château Figeac

I had not seen a bottle of the 2006 Figeac in a few years and was very impressed with the bottle we tried at the tasting in Washington. From the first taste of this wine that I had in early 2009, I have liked the classic size and shape of the '06 and this most recent bottle was showing excellent promise. The deep and very classy nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, sweet nutty tones, a touch of chocolate, a gentle touch of menthol, lovely soil tones, cigar smoke and a nice touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and lovely focus, grip and balance on the very long and refined finish. While the structure on the 2006 Figeac is far from forbidding, I would still give this nearly another decade in the cellar to fully allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. It remains an outstanding and quite underrated vintage for this fine estate. 2021-2050+. **93+.**

2005 Château Figeac

The 205 Figeac is a very, very young bottle of wine that looks likely at this time to be one of the finest vintages at this superb estate in the last fifty years. The very pure, ripe and primary nose offers up a beautiful mélange of plums, black cherries, sweet Cuban tobacco, raw cocoa, just a touch of fresh herbs, woodsmoke, soil and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core of pure fruit, superb soil inflection, ripe, substantial tannins, tangy acids and outstanding balance and backend grip on the very long and focused finish. This will unfold very slowly, but has the depth and youthful purity that legends are made of! Quite clearly this is the greatest young vintage of Figeac I have ever tasted. 2030-2100. **96+.**

2004 Château Figeac

The 2004 Figeac is not a bad wine in the making by any stretch of the imagination, as it shows off good mid-palate depth, but it is decidedly more black fruity than most young vintages from this estate and will need some cellaring to come out from behind its youthful reticence. The nose offers up a complex spread of cassis, dried eucalyptus, cigar smoke, incipient notes of chipotle peppers and a base of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and dark in its fruit tones, with a solid core, nascent complexity, moderately firm tannins and good length and grip on the ever so slightly bitter finish. This will be a good bottle with sufficient bottle age, but in the string of exceptional Figeacs from the first decade of the twenty-first century, the 2004 is not one of the archetypical vintages in this stretch. 2017-2035. **88.**

2001 Château Figeac

2001 is certainly the most underrated vintage in the last decade in Bordeaux, if one assumes that the recent stirring in some journalistic circles regarding the superb 2008s is a sign that this vintage is about to spring forth onto the consciousness of the wine market. The 2001 Figeac was showing beautifully at our vertical in Washington, as it jumps from the glass in a very pure and classic nose of red and black cherries, fresh herb tones, a touch of exotic spice tones, cigar smoke, a beautifully complex base of soil and a deft framing of nutty new oak. On

the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the blossoming and very refined finish. While the '01 Figeac is certainly accessible at age eleven, I would be inclined to still give this lovely wine another five years in the cellar and allow its secondary layers of complexity to fully emerge. A beautiful wine. 2016-2040. **92+**.

2000 Château Figeac

Eric d'Aramon commented on the 2000 Figeac that if he had it to do all over again, he might have waited just a few days longer before starting to pick at the estate. This vintage shows a bit of youthful bell pepper and fresh herb tones of old school claret, and to my palate, I see nothing amiss with the youthful aromatic and flavor profiles of this very deep, pure and soil-driven Figeac. The complex and utterly classic nose jumps from the glass in a superb mélange of cherries, raw cocoa, fresh herb tones, just a touch of youthful bell pepper, beautifully transparent, gravelly soil tones, a bit of menthol, nutskins and new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very reserved at the present time, with a wonderfully sappy core of fruit, ripe tannins, tangy acids and stunning length and grip. This is still very young, but I have absolutely no reservations that in the fullness of time this will be a stunning vintage of Figeac. 2022-2100. **94.**

1999 Château Figeac

Given the depredations of September 1999 in St. Émilion, with a brutal hail storm on the fifteenth of the month followed by almost incessant rain, the 1999 Figeac has not turned out too badly. The nose is pretty and stylish, as it offers up scents of black cherries, plums, nuts, chocolate, woodsmoke and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and quite fruit-driven in style, with melting tannins and pretty good length and grip on the velvety finish. Given the depredations of the vintage, I have to assume that some sort of concentrator was used here, which may account for the more fruit-driven personality of the wine. 2011-2025. **87.**

1998 Château Figeac

Due to hail at the end of July on the Pomerol, St. Émilion border, the 1998 Figeac was produced from the lowest yields in recent memory at the estate: eighteen hectoliters per hectare. Our vertical tasting in Washington provided the second opportunity I have had in the last six months to taste this brilliant young vintage of Figeac, and I was delighted to find that the wine showed consistently superb. The deep and utterly beautiful nose soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, plums, a touch of dark chocolate, Cuban tobacco, sweet nutskins, fresh herbs, soil and a stylish base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly classic on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, beautiful soil inflection, ripe, suave tannins and laser-like focus on the impeccably balanced and very long finish. This has everything going for it and all that is needed now is patience. A brilliant vintage of Figeac that completely avoids some of the overripe fruit character that mars some of the other Right Bank wines in 1998. 2020-275+. **95.**

1995 Château Figeac

1995 was the fiftieth vintage for Thierry Manoncourt and the château designed a special label to mark the anniversary. Happily, Monsieur Manoncourt was blessed with a great vintage to mark his fiftieth, as the 1995 Figeac is a stunning wine. The bouquet is deep, complex and blossoming beautifully at age seventeen, jumping from the glass in classic mélange of red plums, black cherries, Cuban tobacco, bitter chocolate, cigar smoke, sweet nutty tones, complex soil nuances and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and

starting to really develop its secondary layers, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and complexity, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the perfectly poised and suavely tannic finish. A beautiful vintage of Figeac. 2015-2055+. **95.**

1990 Château Figeac

I have been having more and more examples of 1990 claret that leave me rather cold stylistically, and at this point in time, it really seems that this is a very overrated vintage. The '90 Figeac is quite marked by the torrid conditions of the vintage, offering up scents of ripe plums and black cherries, roasted herb tones, cigar ash, a bit of barnyard, leather, dusty soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and a touch roasted in personality, with moderate tannins, not particularly impressive mid-palate depth and a distinctly herbal finishing note on the long finish. Perhaps these bottles were not spot on, as Monsieur d'Aramon has said that there was a batch of the wine in 1990 that had some TCA issues. However, I have had several other '90s in the last year or two that have performed rather similarly and far below expectations based on how the wines showed in their youth. This is not a bad wine *per se*, but not up to the customarily high quality of most top vintages of Figeac. 2011-2035+? **87?**

1989 Château Figeac

The more I drink 1989 and 1990 Bordeaux these days, the more I am convinced that the '89s are far superior across the board. There is a depth and purity to the ripe fruit of the 1989s that cannot be matched by the more roasted and slightly hollow 1990s, and the '89s are almost all universally younger than their 1990 counterparts. This is certainly the case with the beautiful '89 Figeac, which offers up a deep and very pure bouquet of red and black cherries, a bit of plum, incipient notes of black truffle, gentle notes of menthol, St. Émilion nutskin, Cuban cigars and a beautifully complex base of soil that shows more than a trace of iron. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a lovely core of sweet and pure fruit, moderate tannins, lovely focus and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and still fairly young finish. This is a fairly low acid vintage for Figeac, but the wine is aging gracefully and is still on the young side for primetime drinking, though the tannins are not particularly obtrusive at this point in time. But, further patience will be rewarded with decidedly more complexity and perfume in what will ultimately be a very velvety vintage of Figeac. A beautiful wine. 2012-2050. **94+.**

1988 Château Figeac

The 1988 Château Figeac is a wine of outstanding potential, but it is still several years away from its apogee. The nose is young, deep and still marked by a bit of youthful "horsiness" that may or may not fully disappear with further bottle age. However, under this bit of barnyard is a stunning mélange of black cherries, menthol, cigar ash, a nice touch of St. Émilion nuttiness, a complex base of soil tones and a refined framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and classically structured, with a sappy core of black cherry fruit, a fine signature of soil, and still a fair bit of ripe tannin perking up the finish. The focus and balance here are exemplary, and the complexity is already most impressive for its still fairly youthful state. I would keep this wine tucked away in the cellar still for seven or eight more years to let it fully blossom, and then drink this excellent vintage of Figeac over the ensuing forty years or more. 2018-2050+. **93.**

1986 Château Figeac

While 1986 is not a top vintage on the Right Bank, it has certainly produced a superb Figeac. The wine offers up a very deep, pure and striking nose of red and black cherries, Cuban tobacco, raw cocoa, new leather, brilliantly transparent soil tones, fresh herbs and a stylish base

of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, ripe tannins and outstanding backend grip and energy on the pure and very long finish. This vintage of Figeac is really starting to drink well at age twenty-six, but I might be tempted to give it a few more years to let just a bit more of the tannin fall away and some of Figeac's customary black truffle tones to emerge on the already very complex and perfumed nose. A beautiful vintage of Figeac that is currently a bit below the radar. 2011-2050. **94+.**

1985 Château Figeac

The suave style of the 1985 vintage would seem perfectly suited to the style of Château Figeac, but if this particular bottle was pristine, then the lack of rough edges on the vintage may be just a bit too much of a good thing for Figeac. The wine is now fully into its peak of drinkability and is a perfumed beauty, but with a rather laid back, low acid structure that may leave a few folks craving just a bit more backend grip on the palate. The nose is stunning and a classic Figeac blend of cherries, red plums, nutty overtones, cigar ash, menthol, cedar and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, silky and sweet at the core, with fine focus, melting tannins and fine length and complexity on the finish. A touch more grip would move this wine from the realm of very, very good to outstanding, as the balance here is excellent and should allow this vintage to continue to drink well for several decades. Despite its rather gentle nature, this is still one of my current favorite vintages of Figeac to drink from the decade of the 1980s. 2011-2040. **91.**

1982 Château Figeac (served from magnum)

The 1982 Figeac out of magnum is an opulent and utterly exuberant wine that takes a good hour in decanter to calm down and show its underlying structure and complexity- before that it just exudes opulent and creamy fruit and chocolaty tones. Eventually the wine offers up a stunning bouquet of black cherries, menthol, woodsmoke, St. Émilien nuttiness, a lovely base of soil, chocolate and a fine framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite opulent for a nearly thirty year-old Figeac, with a plush core of fruit, moderate tannins and absolutely great length and grip on the opulent and very complex finish. This is a beautiful vintage for Figeac that is only going to get better with further bottle age. 2011-2040+. **94+.**

1978 Château Figeac

I have a sentimental attachment to the 1978 Figeac, as this was the first vintage from the château that I ever had the pleasure to taste. At age thirty-three the wine is drinking beautifully, but probably is getting to the point where the fruit will begin to gently fade and the other elements in the wine will take over as the focal points. The bouquet is outstanding, as it offers up a complex and *à point* mix of red cherries, fresh herb tones, a touch of nuttiness, tobacco leaves, soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and smoky, with lovely focus, good, but not great depth, little remaining tannin and a long, classy finish. There is lovely intensity of flavor here, but the wine shows just a touch of *herbacité* on the backend now- no doubt from the very late-arriving maturity in 1978- and this characteristic will now probably become more pronounced as the years roll by. The balance here is excellent, so the wine will continue to drink well for several decades, but for those who do not savor the more “weedy” side of cabernet-based wines, I would plan to drink the 1978 Figeac up over the coming decade or so. 2011-2035. **89.**

1975 Château Figeac

While the 1975 vintage is purported to only be great in Pomerol, I have had some absolutely wonderful examples from St. Émilien as well from this year and the '75 Figeac is

certainly a fine, fine bottle. The bouquet is deep, complex and *à point*, as it wafts from the glass in a classy mélange of roasted cassis, woodsmoke, coffee, a touch of meatiness, a lovely base of soil and a nice touch of Christmas spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and nicely resolved, with a good core of fruit, lovely, tertiary layers of complexity, fading tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is not as fleshy and red fruity as most mature vintages of Figeac, but it is a lovely, soil-driven and perfectly balanced bottle of mature claret. 2008-2020+. **91.**

1971 Château Figeac (served from magnum)

The 1971 Figeac is just a tad riper than the more classic vintages of this era at the estate, and while it is a very, very good bottle of wine (particularly in magnum), I had hoped for just a touch more precision on the palate. The nose is deep, very complex and almost exotic in its ripeness, as it offers up scents of raspberries, cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, summer truffles, iron soil tones, a touch of nutskin and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with beautiful complexity, a very velvety palate impression and a very long, pure and seamless finish. The ripeness here adds just a touch of jamminess on the attack that keeps the score down a bit, but this is a lovely bottle of Figeac for current drinking, and which is at a particularly good point in magnum. In magnum, it still has decades of life ahead of it. 2010-2050. **92+.**

1970 Château Figeac

Over the years, I have had more 1970 Figeac than any other wine in this vintage, and for this I count myself a lucky man, as the wine is magnificent. The celestial bouquet on the '70 Figeac offers up a complex perfume of red plums, red and black cherries, menthol, a nice touch of meatiness, black truffles, tobacco, superb soil tones, walnuts, roses and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, lush and voluptuous, with a lovely, creamy mid-palate, superb depth and focus, bright acids, and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. While the 1970 Figeac has been drinking beautifully for decades already, there is no rush to consume this superb wine in regular-sized or larger formats. This is an utterly brilliant Figeac that competes favorably for wine of the vintage. Great juice. 2011-2030+. **95.**

1967 Château Figeac

The 1967 Figeac is still drinking quite well, but at age forty-five is getting to the backend of its plateau of maturity and is probably best drunk up in regular-sized formats. The wine continues to offer up surprising depth and structural integrity on the palate, but the fruit components seems to be taking a back seat to the other aromatic and flavor elements in the wine—which to me is always a sign that the decline is about to settle in. The nose offers up a complex blend of fading black cherries, summer truffles, cigar ash, lovely base of autumnal soil tones, nutskin and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and really still quite vigorous, with a very good core, very little remaining tannin, but still good focus and balance and sneaky length on the very classy and silky finish. I am sure five or six years ago this wine was still superb, but even as it starts its gentle descent, it is still a good drink. 2012-2017. **86.**

1966 Château Figeac

I had only previously tasted the '66 Figeac from a cellar lot which I purchased back in the early 1990s, and I now know that though those bottles were not bad, they were not perfect examples of the wine. This particular bottle was a delight, with the firmer character of 1966 dovetailing perfectly with the opulence of Figeac at the top of its game. It is not as powerful or dramatic as the 1964 or 1962, but this is a delightful Figeac. The nose offers up scents of red

cherries, plums, milk chocolate, truffles, herb tones, minerals and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and silky, with lovely focus and delineation, little tannin, and a long, silky and intensely-flavored finish. This is a complete and polished middleweight that has not doubt been drinking beautifully for decades, but shows no signs of imminent decline. Fine juice. 2000-2015. **91.**

1964 Château Figeac

I had never tasted the 1964 Figeac prior to this example (tasted in 2004), so I do not know if this bottle was representative. Given how spectacular the 1961, 1962 and 1970 can be, I had hopes that the 1964 would perform a bit better than our bottle did on this occasion. Not that this bottle was bad per se, but that there was a lack of harmony and elegance to this bottle that is not typical of this finesseful property. The nose offered up notes of black cherry, ground pepper, tobacco, earth, black truffles, herb tones and smoke. On the palate the wine is fullish and powerful for Figeac, but also oddly sweet/sour, with good length and grip. This is still a good, solid bottle of wine, but somehow I suspect that there are much more polished and perfumed versions of the 1964 Figeac out there. 2004-2020+. **90+?**



1962 Château Figeac

The 1962 Figeac has to be one of the finest wines of the vintage on the Right Bank and is drinking splendidly well at age forty-eight. The brilliant nose soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, eucalyptus, black truffles, nutskins, a beautiful base of soil tones (with an attendant touch of Figeac's vein of iron in evidence) and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly refined, with beautiful complexity, perfect focus and balance and a very, very long, elegant and poised finish that closes with outstanding grip. This is

a great, under the radar vintage of Figeac that remains at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability. The quality is really just a tiny step below the utterly brilliant 1961 Figeac. 2010-2040. **95.**

1962 Château Figeac (served from magnum)

I do not know how the '62 Figeac is drinking today out of regular-sized format, but out of magnum it is a brilliant and stunning wine that is as good as any 1962 that I have tasted in the last several years. The bouquet is deep, pure and flamboyant, as it explodes from the glass in a brilliant blend of red and black cherries, menthol, black truffles, chocolate, lovely, discreet soil tones, nutskins and a lovely note of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and voluptuous, with great mid-palate depth, beautiful balance, melting tannins, bright acids, and a very, very long, complex and velvety finish. This is a magical vintage for Figeac, and I am sure it is utterly compelling today out of bottle, but out of magnum the wine is absolutely in full bloom and possesses decades more of life ahead of it. 2007-2030+. **95.**

1961 Château Figeac

As fortunate as I have been over the course of my wine tasting career, I have only had the good luck to cross paths with the 1961 Figeac on one magical occasion. This is clearly one of the greatest vintages of Figeac that I have ever tasted and the wine remains quite youthful and shows every likelihood of lasting another forty years or more! The utterly profound and vibrant nose delivers a hauntingly elegant mélange of black cherries, damsons, black truffles, mocha, woodsmoke, walnuts, beautiful soil tones and an exotic topnote of mint leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and silky, with a sappy core of fruit, stunning soil inflection, melting tannins and stunning intensity and refinement on the endless and gem-like finish. An utterly profound example of Figeac. 2006-2050. **97.**

1959 Château Figeac

Sadly, the only bottle of the '59 Figeac that I have crossed paths with in the last few years was badly corked. Underneath was a ripe, pure, chocolaty and quite plush vintage of Figeac that I am sure would be utterly spectacular if not marred by TCA. No one ever said I was born lucky!

1955 Château Figeac (bottled by H. Grafé-Lecocq et Fils)

This *négociant* bottling of the 1955 Figeac was not a bad version by any stretch of the imagination, but was just getting to the tail end of its plateau. The nose offers up an excellent and quite complex blend of cherries, tobacco ash, iron-infused soil tones, cigar smoke and summer truffles. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and now getting just a touch delicate structurally, with solid mid-palate depth, very little remaining tannins, fine complexity, but a gentle backend that finished with pretty good grip and length. I am sure that this bottling was very good in its day, and while it is not in immediate danger of plunging over the cliff, I would be inclined to drink it up fairly soon in regular-sized formats at this point in its evolution. I would love to see how this compares with the château bottling. 2010-2020. **87.**

1953 Château Figeac

The 1953 Figeac is the epitome of breed, polish and balance that this vintage offers in copious abundance. The bouquet is totally beguiling, offering up an intense potpourri of red cherries, red plums, a bit of tobacco, iron-like soil tones, beautiful spices, coffee, herb tones and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and oh, so elegant, with great intensity coupled to a lightness of step that many modern day St. Émilion wonder wines will never replicate. The wine is flawlessly balanced, focused and multi-faceted, with layers of pure fruit coupled with great *terroir*, and a hauntingly profound finish. A great wine that has probably been into its apogee for decades, but is so perfectly balanced that it will have no difficulty cruising along for a few more. Brilliant wine. 2001-2020. **95.**

ITALIAN WINES OFF THE BEATEN PATH LOOKING A BIT FURTHER AFIELD FOR VINOUS FIREWORKS



Autumn descends on the rolling hill vineyards of the Langhe. (Courtesy David Beckwith)

I love old school Italian wines and do not get to taste them with anywhere near the regularity that they so richly deserve, as I seem to be so overwhelmed with samples each year from the regions that I regularly cover that it is hard to squeeze in another annual feature on wines that are not currently in the yearly rotation. So my coverage of the wines of Italy is far more spotty than it deserves to be, as there are an awful lot of truly exciting wines that offer up outstanding value beyond the usual confines of Barolo, Barbaresco, Brunello di Montalcino and Chianti, that I seem to be able to cover with the most consistency. For the last couple of years I have been thinking that I have been seriously overdue with writing another feature on some of the less well-known wines of Italy- such as the beautifully black fruity and light on its feet wines of Lagrein grown in the Alps, or the deep and classically structured wines of Taurasi in the Campania region east of Naples. Even the regions that I get to cover the most often- Piemonte and Tuscany- have dozens and dozens of different wines that do not usually fall into my coverage of the two regions, as I simply have not been able to taste as many wines from grapes such as Dolcetto or Barbera in Piemonte proper, or the lovely and ethereal Nebbiolo-based wines found further up into the mountains in places such as Valtellina, or even the bottlings from Montepulciano or the like in Tuscany. Italy has, along with Spain, the most diverse pallet of

grape varieties and unique *terroirs* to work with of any wine-producing country in the world, and my coverage heretofore has not really done justice to this magically complex mosaic of wines and dedicated producers. Here at least is an effort to cover some of my recent favorites that I have tasted in the last couple of months, which I hope will be the start of much more regular coverage of these wines and regions.

While there is a plethora of great traditional wines being produced throughout the entire boot of Italy, this does not mean that the region's producers have been able to totally escape the dark wine times under which we live. I tried to be quite scrupulous in avoiding any of the modern, over-oaked and jammy "international" wines that a legion of consulting oenologists seem capable of turning out up and down the peninsula and which taste so much like each other from heavy-handed techniques in the cellar that it is very hard to believe that they have been crafted from different grape varieties and grown in different regions. Happily, for the most part I missed those types of wines in preparing this report, but one should not assume that there are not thousands of such sloppily modern wines available today on the current Italian wine landscape. And even in some of the former bastions of traditionalism in Italy, I see more and more French oak *barriques* creeping into the winemaking recipes at great estates that should really know better. I find that with most of the great indigenous grapes of Italy- Nebbiolo, Barbera, Dolcetto, Sangiovese, Aglianico and a host of others, the spicy, cedary aromas and flavors imparted in wines from new French barrels are completely at odds with the aromatic and flavor signatures of the wines, and I find nothing that French wood adds to wines made from these grapes. In fact, most often the spicy new oak of French barrels simply scars the wine- as it does in Rioja for instance- and no matter how well-made and balanced the wine is beyond its new wood component, it is always going to be less attractive to my palate from the inclusion of new French wood in the cellar recipe. There are simply aromas and flavors from the French wood that do not belong in these wines!

But, that said, as the notes below will attest, there is still an awful lot of great wine being produced in Italy these days for lovers of classic, old school styles. While my coverage is only a single toe dipped into the ocean of great Italian wines beyond the shadows of the most famous regions and grapes, I hope it will at least prove beneficial to those inclined to hunt a bit further afield these days for a bit of old world magic from Italy. In the preparation of this article, I was surprised to be sent samples of several producers who are very important in the "natural wine movement" in Italy. For the most part, I liked these wines a lot, but please keep in mind that these wines are decidedly "artisanal" in nature and are emphatically not everyone's cup of tea. Some can be a bit "unclean" on both the nose and palate, and a few were also plagued by either overt volatile acidity already or sure signs that VA will become an issue with the wines down the road. I happen to be pretty tolerant of volatile acidity (at least within reason), as a very little bit will do a lot to elevate the aromatics of the wine and give it a bit of bounce on the palate, but this can quickly spiral out of control. But, different people have decidedly different tolerance levels for volatile acidity, and I fully understand that for many tasters, even a faint whiff of acetic acid ruins their enjoyment of the wine. I have tried to be very clear if a wine has even a touch of VA in residence, so that those who are less tolerant than I am can adjust appropriately. While I am all for the concept of natural wines in principal, I do believe that they need to be good wines first and foremost, and I tend to be pretty unhappy with inherently flawed wines that are made by natural precepts.

I tried to cover mostly red wines for this article, but as some lovely bottles of white wine also crossed my path or were generously provided by importers here in the states, there are notes on a fairly good range of white wines as well. As has been remarked upon elsewhere, the last decade of white wine production in Italy has truly been exceptional and the average quality of white wines on the peninsula is dramatically higher than was the case when I started in the wine trade in the mid-1980s. One of the fun things in tasting samples in preparation for this report was to be able to visit some of my old favorites from the first fifteen years of my career, when I worked as a wine merchant and had much more experience with white wines from Italy due to the necessity of stocking a serious section of these wines. What I found is that many of these old “workhorse” bottlings that were my absolute favorites back in the day are even better today, and yet the overall quality of white winemaking in Italy has come forward so dramatically in the last decade or so that they no longer tower above their neighbors’ wines like they did back then. Italian white wines, even from my quite small sampling reported on below, has clearly never been better than it is today and in a coming issue I will try to do a report solely focused on the great breadth of superb white wine options now available from this beautiful country. In the meantime, I have included notes on the white wines that I crossed paths with in the last several months in each regional section.

The notes that followed are arranged from south to north geographically, and within each regional section, alphabetically by producer and chronologically by vintage. I should note that one of the perplexing trends that I found while tasting my way through these following wines was that there seems to be a very noticeable and inexplicable penchant on the part of many Italian producers these days to eschew vintage notations on their front labels. Many producers seem now content to simply print a generic label for the wine and leave the vintage mark to the importer’s back labels. Why they are doing this (other than, of course, saving money) is rather inexplicable, as I cannot think of anything that says “cheapness” to a potential customer than not putting the vintage on the front label or at least springing for the cost of a vintage neck label.

Sicily

I only tasted a few Sicilian wines for this article, most notably those crafted by Arianna Occhipinti of the eponymous winery located in the southeastern and cooler section of Sicily. I was served the 2009 SP 68 in France by an ex-patriot American working at Domaine Rousseau, and at the time I had no idea that Arianna Occhipinti was one of the new stars in the Italian firmament of wine producers. After having tasted two of her 2009s, I can understand why her winery has such a loyal following and I look forward to tasting more of her wines in subsequent vintages. Of all the Italian “natural wine” producers who I have tasted in recent years, I would rank Signora Occhipinti’s wines right up there at the pinnacle, which seem to show a wonderful confluence of quality and commitment to natural wine principals (not that I am really sure what those might be these days). The other Sicilian wines that I tasted were from the long-time estate of Calabretta whose vineyards lie on the slopes of Mount Etna, and which were also outstanding.

2009 Occhipinti SP 68

Arianna Occhipinti’s newest cuvée, SP 68, is lovely in 2009, but also a pretty ripe wine that shows a bit of its alcoholic clout on the backend and which keeps its score down just a touch. The deep, ripe and impressively complex nose offers up scents of roasted black cherries,

balsam boughs, bonfires, a nice touch of road tar and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, very good focus and complexity and a long, softly tannic and slightly heady finish. For folks more tolerant of a bit of backend heat on the palate, please add four points to the score, but for me, I just could not enjoy this complex wine fully with its touch of uncovered alcohol on the backend. 2011-2017. **87.**



2009 Occhipinti “Siccagno” Nero d’Avola

The 2009 Siccagno from Arianna Occhipinti is at least a full point lower in alcohol than the '09 SP 68, which works much better with my sensitive palate. The excellent nose is a deep, complex and stylish blend of bitter cherries, pomegranate, new leather, dark chocolate, a lovely base of soil, a hint of tree bark, fresh herb tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a good core of fruit, modest tannins, a lovely signature of soil, tangy acids (that may one day go a bit volatile, but right now are still very well-integrated into the body of the wine) and fine focus and complexity on the long and classy finish. I really like the bounce and interplay of soil and understated, but complex fruit on the backend of this wine, but those who are intolerant of any VA or pyrazines at all in their wines are going to like this decidedly less than I did. 2012-2020. **92.**

Arianna Occhipinti pouring her wines at a recent wine trade tasting somewhere in the western world.

2009 Moscato di Siracusa- Solacium

This is a very pretty, but simple dessert wine from Solacium, offering up a stylish, but pretty straightforward nose of pears, orange zest, delicate soil tones and acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, moderately sweet and a touch spirity on the backend, with good length and grip, but rather modest complexity. Not bad. 2012-2015. **86.**

2008 Carricante- Calabretta

The 2008 Carricante from Calabretta hails from a one hectare vineyard on the side of Mount Etna. Sixty percent of the vines are young, but the other forty percent are eighty years of age! The 2008 is a lovely white, offering up a unique and compelling nose of lemon oil, apple, a touch of balsam bough, lovely soil tones and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and lovely, with fine focus, sound acidity, a very good core of ripe fruit and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is really a lovely wine and probably the classiest white Sicilian wine I have tasted before- clearly I need to taste a bit wider of this genre! 2012-2015. **90.**

2002 Etna Rosso- Calabretta

Calabretta is clearly one of the superstars on the island of Sicily and this superb Etna Rosso is comprised of a blend of sixty to eighty year-old vines of Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio, all planted on ungrafted rootstocks. The 2002 is a stunning wine, offering up a deep, complex and still fairly youthful nose of cherries, orange peel, roasted game, coffee, fresh herb tones, a stony base of soil nuances and a nice topnote of exotic spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, modest tannins, superb focus and grip and a very long, complex and classy finish. This is a broad-shouldered and truly superb bottle of Etna Rosso. An excellent wine. 2012-2030. **93.**

Sardinia

2010 Vermentino di Sardegna “Villa Solais”- Cantina di Santadi

The Vermentino grape is not one that I normally associate with a bit of new wood raising, but the 2010 Vermentino from Cantina di Santadi does a very nice job of giving the wine just a bit of new oak and still staying fresh and light on its feet. The lovely nose offers up a deep and complex bouquet of apple, melon, a bit of green olive, lovely soil tones, gentle floral tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely carries its new wood, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and very good focus and balance on the long and intensely flavored finish. This is really a lovely wine- perhaps not better for its sojourn in new wood, but certainly not adversely affected by the oak either. I have no idea how Vermentino ages with a bit of wood, so I would be inclined to drink this on the younger side. Good juice. 2012-2015+? **90.**

2009 Montessu “Isola dei Nuraghi”- Agricola Punica

The 2009 Montessu from Agricola Punica is comprised of a blend of sixty percent Carignano, and ten percent each of young vine Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot. Sebastiano Rosa, the winemaker at Tenuta San Guido, the producer of Sassicaia, owns forty percent of this new estate, equally with Cantina di Santadi , a cooperative in Sardinia and a couple of smaller partners. The 2009 Montessu is fourteen percent alcohol and was raised in a generous percentage of new oak. Given the principal participation of Sebastiano Rosa in the new project, I was hoping for a bit more, but this is a run of the mill, spit-polished modern wine without flaws and also devoid of excitement. The generically modern nose offers up scents of blackberries, dark chocolate, a bit of balsamic vinegar and spicy new wood that probably hails primarily from the coopers at Taransaud. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and simple, with a very “worked” palate impression, moderate depth, sculpted tannins, low acids and very little rough edges on the spineless and oak spicy finish. This wine is so obviously manipulated as one wonders whether or not the tannins that are here will really carry it for a while in bottle, or if it will collapse under the weight of its pretension. It is pretty hard to imagine a more boring bottle of well-made wine. 2012-2025? **83.**

2008 Barrua “Isola dei Nuraghi”- Agricola Punica

The Barrua bottling is the flagship wine of Agricola Punica and the 2008 is a decidedly ripe affair at a full fifteen percent alcohol. The Barrua vineyard is comprised of twenty-five hectares of old vine Carignano and fifty acres of recently-planted (2002) Carignano, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Currently, the *cépage* on the Barrua bottling is eighty-five percent Carignano (primarily from the old vines?), ten percent Cabernet Sauvignon and five percent Merlot. The wine is raised in French oak *barriques*, of which sixty percent are new. The 2008 Barrua is decidedly more interesting than the 2009 Montessu, but suffers a bit from its overt *sur maturité* on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is certainly deep and complex, offering up a

jammy blend of cassis, dried black cherries, fresh oregano, lovely soil tones, coffee bean and a classy blend of pricy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rather muddled from its excessive ripeness, with a fine core of fruit, well-measured tannins and a bit of blurry heat flawing the long finish. The alcohol and wood together combine to give the wine a note of unpleasant sourness on the backend that decidedly detracts what could have been a really serious and intriguing wine at one and a half to two percent lower octane! 2012-2017. **86.**

2007 Shardana- Cantina di Santadi

The 2007 Shardana from Cantina di Santadi is actually the brain child of Neil Empson, the famed importer here in the US of high class Italian wines, including Marcarini Baroli which are reported upon later in this issue. The wine is produced primarily from carignano grapes, with a bit of syrah tossed into the mix. The region on Sardinia where the vineyards are planted are some of the hottest on the island, so it is no surprise that this wine weighs in at a full 14.5 percent alcohol. The 2007 Shardana offers up a ripe and thoroughly modern nose of jammy black cherries, a bit of black raspberry, chocolate, balsam bough, tarry soil tones and plenty of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe, with a glossy core of fruit, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the slightly dry-edged finish from less than exemplary curing of the new wood. The mid-palate texture here strongly suggest micro-oxygenation or some other sort of cellar polishing trick. Despite all of the clear manipulations here, the wine is actually quite good, with the ripeness not currently straying over the line into overripeness, no signs of backend heat, and other than the bit of backend, uncovered wood tannin, really a nice sense of overall balance. Clearly there are some very good raw materials here, but the question is can some of the overtly intrusive technique be lost to allow the wine to find its own voice in future vintages? Not bad. 2012-2025. **87+.**

Puglia

2010 Negroamaro- Perrini (Salento)

The 2010 Negroamaro from Perrini is a lovely wine that makes a whole lot more of its certified organic character on the label than its vintage of origin (which can be found in the fine print of the back label). The nose is deep, pure and impressively focused in its mélange of dark berries, a bit of tree bark, cherry skin, gentle notes of woodsmoke, complex soil tones and a lovely spread of exotic botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, well-balanced and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, modest tannins and fine length and grip on its pure, focused and slightly bitter finish (one of the characteristics of this grape). This is really a lovely, idiosyncratic wine of poise and impeccable balance. 2012-2020+. **90.**

2010 Primitivo- Perrini (Salento)

Happily, the 2010 Primitivo from Perrini is a low octane version of Primitivo, and at a thirteen percent alcohol, this was a pretty wide margin the lowest alcohol wine I tasted from this varietal. The nose on the 2010 is quite good, offering up scents of cassis, black raspberry, a touch of chocolate, spicy overtones, soil, a touch of leather and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite approachable, with low acids, modest tannins, a good core and a long, slightly peppery finish. Good hearty juice with a bit of “noble rusticity”. It would be great with a stew on a winter’s evening. 2012-2020. **88.**

2010 Primitivo “Matané”- San Marzano

The 2010 Primitivo “Matané” from San Marzano is bottled under a screwcap, but my sample showed only a tiny hint of reduction and was really a pretty good middleweight with time in decanter. The nose is ripe and quite pure, showing no signs of *sur maturité* in its blend of

cherries, a touch of road tar, resinous tones, fresh herbs and soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, forward and tasty, with a good core of fruit, modest tannins, good acids and just a touch of backend pinching from the closure that has to be waited out with time in decanter. I am not sure how long this wine will drink under screwcap, as the reductive elements are likely to get stronger, but for near-term drinking, it really does pack good depth and complexity. But, make sure you decant it, as the wine is a bit metallic if “popped and poured”. 2012-2014? **87.**

2009 Primitivo “Amphora”- Cristiano Guttarolo

These were the first wines I had ever tasted from Cristiano Guttarolo, who started his winery in 2004. The wines are all certified as “natural wines” by Ecocert. His IGT Amphora is made from one hundred percent primitivo, with the wine aged for one year in sealed clay amphorae after it has completed fermentation. The color is a pale ruby, rather than the more purple-hued young wines made from this grape. The nose on the 2009 is deep, complex and quite intriguing in its blend of dried cherries, celery seed, vinesmoke, dusty soil tones and a resinous topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, nicely transparent and complex, with only a hint of tannin, fine depth and a touch of volatile acidity perking up the long and soil-driven finish. This is a far cry from the school of squeaky clean winemaking, but there is admirable complexity and personality here, and for the intrepid, there is a lot to like. But, be forewarned, this is far off the beaten path of conventional primitivo (at only 12.5 percent alcohol I suppose this should be self-evident). Given the volatile acidity on the backend, I am not really sure how well this wine will age, but it will supply wine hipsters with a lot of pleasure over the next couple of years at the very least. 2012-2017+? **88.**

2007 Antello Delle Murge- Cristiano Guttarolo

This is another one hundred percent primitivo bottling from Cristiano Guttarolo, but it is a more traditional example of the varietal, tipping the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol. The wine is deep and complex on both the nose and palate and really shows fairly few signs of its hefty octane on the nose, as the bouquet offers up scents of ripe black raspberries, game, charred wood, chocolate, balsam boughs and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and plush on the attack, with good mid-palate depth, a fair bit of tannin and a slightly stewy finish from its heady ripeness that also shows some backend heat, despite its good length and grip. I would have found this much more interesting with less alcohol, as the nose has a lot going on. 2012-2015. **83.**

2007 Gioia del Colle- Cristiano Guttarolo

The 2007 Gioia del Colle from Christiane Guttarolo is a tad less ripe than the '07 Antello Delle Murge bottling, as this only weighs in at 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up good aromatic and flavor complexity, but is still just a touch too hot on the backend for my sensitive palate. The complex and classy nose offers up scents of jammy strawberries and raspberries, a touch of chocolate, oregano, lovely, sandy soil tones and a bit of top end smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch stewy from the ripeness, with a good core, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the complex and slightly hot finish. This is not bad wine and would really be exciting if one could ratchet down the ripeness by a full point. 2012-2016. **87.**

Campania

I had the pleasure to meet and taste with Ilaria Petitto, the lovely young woman who runs the estate of Donnachiara in the village of Montefalcione in Campania. Ilaria is the fifth generation of women to run this estate, which is named for her great grandmother, Chiara

Petitto and which has been passed down from mother to daughter since the late nineteenth century. However, while the history of the property stretches back five generations (and in the extended family all the way back to 800 AD!), the commercial winery here is a new venture that was only begun in 2005. Donnachiara seems to be a young domaine that is equally talented with both white wines and red wines, with the quality of both colors absolutely exemplary and the wines showing a lovely, old school character and impressive complexity. The range of whites I tasted included single varietal wines produced from the Fiano, Falanghina and Greco grapes- only the well-known Greco di Tufo being a wine with which I had any familiarity with prior to this tasting. The reds are all made from the Aglianico grape, which is responsible for one of the great classic reds of Italy- Taurasi. The vintage of Donnachiara Taurasi that I tasted was extremely impressive, but so too were the two other Aglianico cuvées that I tasted from the estate. I had never before had the pleasure to taste any of the wines from Donnachiara, but I was extremely impressed with both the quality and the exceptional value that the estate's wines display across the entire range, and I cannot recommend these wines highly enough, as they are amazing values! In addition to the fine and extremely well-priced wines from Donnachiara, I also tasted some outstanding current releases from some of the other top producers in Campania- further underscoring that this is one of the most exciting regions in Italy today for both reds and whites and that the once famous Taurasi has lost none of its superb potential despite the wine world's attention shifting to other locales!

Santé Brut NV- Donnachiara

This lovely, medium-bodied sparkling wine is made by the *Charmat* bulk process, rather than individually fermented in the bottle, but is still a lovely and aromatic bottle. The wine is made from one hundred percent Falanghina- one of the top white wine grapes to be found in Campania. The bouquet is bright and lovely, offering up scents of lemon, green apple, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of green olive and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and frothy, with lovely focus, good mid-palate depth and a long, bright and elegant finish. Really a lovely wine. 2012-2015. **89+**.

2010 Fiano di Avellino- Donnachiara

I had never tasted a bottle of Fiano di Avellino before, but if the 2010 Donnachiara is an example of how good the Fiano grape can be, then this is a wine that is going to grace my table with some regularity in the future! The wine offers up a deep and very classy nose of pear, green olive, stony minerality, lime peel and a nice touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with lovely, nascent complexity, a great core of fruit, excellent focus and superb length and grip on the racy and still quite youthful finish. I would be inclined to tuck this superb wine away in the cellar for at least a year or two and really let it blossom. Very impressive and a stunning value! 2013-2025. **93+**.

2010 Falanghina- Donnachiara

I was very impressed by the 2010 Falanghina from Donnachiara as well, which is fermented and aged entirely in stainless steel to protect the fresh and floral character of this lovely grape. The wine offers up a stylish and very floral bouquet of lemon, tart pear, spring flowers, a touch of pink grapefruit and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very light on its feet, with bright acids, lovely complexity and fine length and grip on the transparent and dancing finish. There is not quite the same mid-palate intensity or sense of reserve in the 2010 Falanghina in comparison to the stunning 2010 Fiano de

Avellino, but this too is a really well-made and delicious bottle of un-oaked white wine. 2012-2016. **91.**

2010 Falanghina- Villa Matilde

The 2010 Falanghina from Villa Matilde was sealed under screwcap and was a bit reduced when first poured, so into decanter it went! After a bit of very vigorous splashing around in decanter and glass (why on earth did I pack away my paint shaker?), the wine blossoms a bit, but this is one where the reduction is already getting permanent in nature and the inherent promise of the wine has already been compromised by its closure. The nose is a complex and slightly metallic blend of apple, peach, gentle acacia blossoms, a slight fishy tone (or is it matchstick?) and very discreet soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and getting slightly vegetal, with a decidedly short and pinched finish. Exhibit A of a permanently reduced wine- pity! I suppose I could have dug out some copper wire and seen what the underlying wine was like before it was bottled, but how many of you out there are going to do the same just so the winery can save a few cents with their choice of closure? I cannot rate a wine this flawed by reduction from its closure. **????**

2010 Greco di Tufo- Donnachiara

Along with the red wine of Taurasi, Greco di Tufo is the most famous wine of Campania and the excellent 2010 version from Donnachiara shows that the fame of this wine is well-deserved. The nose is deep and simply beautiful in its mélange of pear, tangerine, a touch of honeycomb, lovely, deep and complex soil tones, citrus peel and a lovely topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with a great core of fruit, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the laser-like finish. This should age long and gracefully. 2012-2020+. **93.**

2010 Greco di Tufo- Villa Matilde

The 2010 Greco di Tufo from Villa Matilde is a young and very good wine on both the nose and palate. Happily, it is sealed under natural cork. The deep and complex bouquet offers up scents of apple, white peach, lovely “*Tuffeaux*” soil tones, a touch of straw and a whisper of ocean breeze in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty youthful, with a lovely core of fruit, very good complexity and focus, and a slightly rigid backend structure that suggests that as good as this wine is today, six more months in the bottle is going to pay handsome dividends. Today this is a bit forceful in personality, and I would certainly suggest that a bit of bottle age is called for, as the underlying material is very good and this wine has the stuffing and cut to age very well. 2012-2020. **90+.**

2010 Costa d’Amalfi Rosato “Getis”- Andrea Reale

The 2010 Getis Rosato from Andrea Reale is a lovely dry rosé made from two of the native grapes of Campania, Per’e Palummo and Tintore. The bouquet of the 2010 version offers up a lovely mélange of cherries, pomegranate, volcanic soil tones, orange peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core and very good length and grip on the crisp and focused finish. Just a lovely bottle of rosé. 2012-2016. **90.**

2008 Aglianico IGT- Donnachiara

The Aglianico IGT bottling from Donnachiara is made from a selection of the vines in their vineyard in Torre le Nocelle, which is also home to their Taurasi bottling. The IGT cuvée is made from a combination of the newly planted vines- now eight years of age, and some of the older vines that are used primarily for the other two bottlings of red wine from the estate. This very lovely wine is aged entirely in stainless steel tanks and offers up in 2008 a deep and vibrant

nose of roasted cherries, gentle tarry tones, woodsmoke, a beautiful base of soil and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fresh and impressively complex, with good acidity, fine focus, just a touch of tannin and very fine length and grip on the finish. This is a lovely bottle and a superb value. 2012-2020. **88.**

2008 Aglianico “Irpinia” DOC- Donnachiara

The 2008 Aglianico from Irpinia (the region where the estate is located) is raised in oak barrels, rather than stainless steel, with one-third of the barrels new and the other two-thirds utilizing one wine and two wine wood. However, the wine only spends four to six months in these barrels and shows no signs of over-oaking. All of the vines are at least thirty years of age that are used for this cuvée. The 2008 is a deep and very impressive wine, with a youthful nose of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, a beautifully complex base of soil, a touch of tariness, spicy wood and a bit of cherry skin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully structured, with moderate tannins, fine focus and impressive length and grip. This is not as powerful as young Taurasi, but also will not require any extended cellaring time before drinking. A really impressive bottle and another absolute steal at its price. 2012-2025. **90+.**

2007 Taurasi- Donnachiara

The 2007 Taurasi from Donnachiara is an absolute classic in the making. The wine is made from only thirty year-old vines and is aged for twelve months in new wood, followed up by two years of bottle aging in the Donnachiara cellars prior to release. The deep, youthfully complex and brilliant bouquet soars from the glass in a blend of plums, black cherries, dark chocolate, a superbly complex base of soil, a touch of bitter herb tones, woodsmoke and a deft framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a still quite primary personality, ripe, well-measured tannins and absolutely stunning grip and focus on the very, very long, youthful finish. All this great wine will need is time in the cellar to fully blossom. A stunning young Taurasi and absolutely insanely inexpensive for its quality and potential! 2017-2040. **94.**

2007 Taurasi- Contrade di Taurasi (Cantine Lonardo)

I had not crossed paths with a bottle of Taurasi from Cantine Lonardo since their 2000s and 2001s and I was very happy to have a chance to taste their 2007 *Normale*. This is a terrific wine in the making, as it offers up a very deep, nascently complex and serious bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, bitter chocolate, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a bit of road tar and a gentle framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm structure and outstanding length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This will be an absolutely classic bottle of Taurasi with five or six more years of bottle age. Superb juice. 2017-2040. **93+.**

Umbria

2010 Petricaia (Trebbiano)

The 2010 Petricaia is a very pretty middleweight white that offers up good vibrancy on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine blend of backed apples, tangerine, musky floral tones, orange peel and a nice base of sandy soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and bouncy, with a very fine core of fruit, bright acids and really quite impressive length and grip on the focused finish. This is a great, great value. 2012-2018. **89.**

Marches

2009 Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi- Bucci

Bucci has always been my reference point producer for outstanding Verdicchio, but I had not seen a bottle of the estate's wines in more than a decade, as my personal journey has taken me in other directions. Consequently, I was very happy to receive samples of their 2009 *Normale* and their 2006 *Riserva*. The 2009 *Normale* is a deep and complex wine on both the nose and palate, offering up a fine bouquet of apple, honeydew melon, salty soil tones, straw, spring flowers and a touch of green olive. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and very long, with excellent mid-palate depth, lovely intensity of flavor, sound acids and very good length and grip on the focused and impressively complex finish. A superb bottle of Verdicchio. 2012-2016+. **91.**



2006 Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi “Villa Bucci” Riserva – Bucci

The Villa Bucci Riserva comes from the oldest vines on the estate, which average forty years of age, and which is then raised for two years in old oak barrels prior to bottling and release. The 2006 Villa Bucci is the current release of this lovely Riserva. The deep and complex bouquet offers up scents of pear, acacia blossoms, salty soil tones, fresh almonds, lemon oil and just a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully fresh for its age, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and balance and impressive length and grip on the à

point and complex finish. To my palate, the two years spent in older wood here has dried out the finish just a hair, and though this has a decidedly different personality than the *Normale*, I cannot see that the wine is any better for its having been raised in older wood barrels. It is still an excellent bottle of Verdicchio, but I have a slight preference for the fresher snap of the *Normale* bottling, even there is more mid-palate depth from the older vines in the *Riserva*. 2012-2016. **90.**

Carmignano

2010 Monna Nera- Tenuto di Capezzana

The Monna Nera bottling from Tenuto di Capezzana is a complex blend of fifty percent sangiovese, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and ten percent each of canaiolo, merlot and syrah. It is made to be drunk young and is never over the top in ripeness, with the 2010 coming in at a very relaxing 12.5 percent alcohol. The nose is a juicy and inviting blend of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of road tar, a nice base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, ripe and nicely balanced, with a bit of tannin, good focus and very respectable length and grip on the fairly straightforward finish. Good juice for its price. 2012-2017. **87.**

2008 Barco Reale di Carmignano- Tenuto di Capezzana

The Barco Reale bottling from Tenuto di Capezzana is a younger vine blend of Carmignano comprised of seventy percent sangiovese, fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon, ten percent canaiolo and five percent cabernet franc. The wine is aged in traditionally large *botti*, but in the last few years, Capezzana has been switching the origin of the oak for their *botti* to French oak from Slavonian, and consequently, the large casks here are still a bit on the young side and imparting a bit of wood tannin to the wine. At 13.5 percent alcohol, the '08 Barco Reale is a full point higher than the tasty 2010 Monna Nera bottling, but shows no signs of heat or overripeness on either the nose or palate. The nose offers up a ripe and complex blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, a lovely base of soil and a bit of cedary wood from the relatively new *botti*. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with lovely purity on the attack, a good core, but with just a bit of uncovered wood tannin poking out on the finish. Hopefully, the *botti* will continue to season (rather than being replaced often) and this bit of obtrusive wood tannin will not be found in future vintages. 2013-2025. **87.**

2006 Villa di Capezzana Carmignano- Tenuto di Capezzana

The Villa di Capezzana from Tenuto di Capezzana is comprised of a blend of eighty percent sangiovese and twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and sees its malolactic fermentation take place in 350 liter *barriques* and is raised for one year in these same French barrels. The raw materials here are very good, but the 2006 Villa di Capezzana seemed just a bit overoaked to my palate. At a full fourteen percent alcohol, the wine is very ripe on both the nose and palate, but never strays over the line into overripeness. The bouquet offers up a mix of black cherries, chocolate, tarry tones, herbs and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with very good length and grip, but sadly, a bit of uncovered wood tannin on the backend that will need to be absorbed before the wine will provide much drinking pleasure. There seems to be adequate stuffing here to eventually integrate the wood, but this wine would be so much more interesting with less new oak or the entire cuvée raised in one or two or three year-old barrels. It is not bad and should be a pretty good drink with a few years bottle age, but the new oak here is adding nothing to the equation but disequilibrium in the wine's youth. 2014-235. **88.**

Montepulciano

2009 Rosso di Montepulciano- Avignonesi

The 2009 Rosso di Montepulciano from Avignonesi offers up a very pretty, red fruity nose of cherries, strawberries, woodsmoke, soil and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish and quite ripe, with a bit more alcohol than the nose suggests. The wine has decent mid-palate depth, but the backend heat here is obtrusive and really mars what would otherwise be a much more interesting wine. 2012-2017. **85.**

2009 Rosso di Montepulciano- Carpineto

The 2009 Rosso di Montepulciano from Carpineto is a lovely wine. The deep and very classy nose offers up a complex mélange of red and black cherries, nutskins, a touch of gamebird, woodsmoke and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and impressively complex, with tangy acids, modest tannins and impressive length and grip on the focused and classy finish. At thirteen percent alcohol, this is more satisfying and infinitely better balanced than most examples of Brunello di Montalcino I have tasted in the last few years. A lovely wine and a terrific value. 2012-2020. **89+.**

2009 Rosso di Montepulciano- Poderi Sanguineto I & II

The 2009 Rosso di Montepulciano from Poderi Sanguineto is a pretty ripe wine at 14.5 percent alcohol, but remains pretty fresh on both the nose and on its flavor profiles, though just a touch of backend heat does peak out on the finish. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite classic in its blend of cherries, quince, coffee, Tuscan herb tones, gentle smoky tones and a wonderfully complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the slightly heady finish. Others may find the backend alcohol here a tad less distracting than I do, but to my plate it really soils what would otherwise be an exquisite example of Rosso di Montepulciano. 2012-2017+? **84.**

2009 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano- Boscarelli

I used to drink a lot of the Boscarelli wines in my old merchant days and was very pleased to taste their 2009 Vino Nobile and see that their quality here is as fine as it ever has been. The 2009 comes in at a ripe 13.8 percent, but still well within the range of balance and purity. The fine bouquet is a deep and complex blend of cherries, coffee, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and quite generous with ripe fruit on the attack, but with very good transparency, very respectable mid-palate depth, a bit of tannin and very good length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice. 2012-2020. **89.**

2008 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano- Avignonesi

The 2008 Vino Nobile from Avignonesi is a really a lovely wine. It is aged these days for six months in used *barriques* and six months in traditional *botti* made from Slavonian oak. The 2008 offers up a lovely and complex nose of black cherries, plums, coffee, fresh oregano and a bit of cedary wood from the *barriques*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely focused, with a good core of fruit, lovely focus and a long finish that shows just a bit of wood tannin from the same *barriques*. This is a very good wine that would rate outstanding if the French wood did not get in the way a bit on the backend. 2012-2025. **88.**

2008 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano- Boscarelli

The 2008 Vino Nobile from Boscarelli is a tad less ripe than the very good 2009, and hence offers up even a touch more precision on both the nose and palate. The 2008 offers up a

superb bouquet of ripe black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, Tuscan herb tones, a touch of game and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open, with lovely focus, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the tangy and complex finish. At 13.5 percent alcohol, the 2008 is probably a full percentage point higher in alcohol than the wines I drank with such regularity from the vintages of the late '80s and early '90s, but the wine has retained its lovely purity and soil-driven personality. Just a lovely wine. 2012-2025. **90+.**

2008 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano- Poderi Sanguineto I & II

The 2008 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano- Poderi Sanguineto is cooler than the estate's 2009 Rosso di Montepulciano, weighing in at an even fourteen percent alcohol, which gives the wine a bit more precision on the backend. The nose is deep, complex and still youthfully reticent, offering up classy mix of red and black cherries, fresh oregano, raw cocoa, lovely soil tones, acorns and a touch of balsam bough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, a bit of firm tannin and very good length and grip on the still youthful and slightly rustic finish. This is a natural wine and shows it just a bit on the backend with a bit of uncleanness, but that touch may fade away with bottle age. The wine definitely benefited from some aeration and I would strongly recommend decanting if one is thinking of drinking this wine in the next couple of years. 2013-2020+. **88.**

2007 Desiderio- Avignonesi

The Desiderio bottling from Avignonesi is a blend of eighty-five percent merlot and fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon that is aged in one hundred percent new *barriques* for eighteen months. The 2007 offers up a really lovely nose, with scents of black cherries, tobacco smoke, chocolate, a touch of road tar and spicy new oak wafting from the glass. On the palate, it is the same old story of whether or not the wine can eventually tame its oak tannins, which at the present time are sticking out uncovered on the wine's backend. This is a full-bodied, deep and classy wine on the attack, with a good core of fruit and just a whisper of possible overripeness poking out on the long finish, but the real issue here will not be the borderline *sur maturité*, but whether the new wood can eventually be integrated into the body of the wine. 2016-2035+? **82-89+?**

2007 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano- Bindello

The 2007 Bindello Vino Nobile is a much riper wine than the last couple of examples listed above, and at 14.5 percent alcohol, it is over its head and a blurry mess. The deep and overripe nose offers up scents of baked plums, black cherries, damp earth, chocolate and prunes. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and overripe, with a blurry palate impression and a fair bit of heat on the soupy finish. Lacking in freshness, this is a wine I would not really enjoy drinking, despite it being fairly well made in its over the top style. 2012-2015. **82.**

2007 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano "Black Label" Riserva- Boscarelli

While the *Normale* bottlings of Vino Nobile from Boscarelli are still quite old school and excellent, the Black Label Riserva is the cuvée that the De Ferrari Corradi family chooses to experiment a bit with in the more modern style. Consequently, the wine includes seven percent merlot in the blend and sees a sizable percentage of its *elevage* done in new French *barriques* of Allier origin. The wine is a bit riper than either the 2009 or 2008 *Normales*, tipping the scales at 14.2 percent and offering up a very new oaky nose of red and black cherries, a bit of tariness, herb tones and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and carries its alcohol very well, with a good core of ripe fruit, but some uncovered, raw wood tannins poking out on the long finish that will need to be absorbed before the wine provides much pleasure in the glass. There seems to perhaps be enough stuffing here to eventually carry the

wood, but the balance is pretty precarious, and in the end it may always be a bit dry from its oak. I cannot really see what all the new wood and the merlot brings to the table here! 2017-2025+? 84+?

2007 Montepulciano d'Abruzzo "Castello di Semivicoli"- Masciarelli

I used to really enjoy the unadulterated Montepulcianos from Masciarelli, which were inexpensive and outstanding for the price. However, the Castello di Semivicoli bottling from them is a heavily spoofulated wine and really quite undrinkable in 2007, as it offers up a ripe, modern, simple and thoroughly boring nose of black cherries, chocolate and resinous new oak. On the palate the wine deep, full-bodied, overripe and tarry, with a hot and oaky finish that closes with notes of uncovered wood tannins. Ugh. ??? 72.

2006 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Riserva "Grandi Annate"- Avignonesi

The Grandi Annate Riserva bottling from Avignonesi includes fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon, with thirty percent of the wine aged in one hundred percent new *barriques* and the remainder in older barrels. The wine shows lovely raw materials, but that third that was raised entirely in new oak has certainly imparted some wood tannins to the finished blend that will need to be waited out before this wine will deliver any pleasurable drinking on the palate. The bouquet is deep and really quite attractive, offering up a ripe blend of black cherries, plums, cigar smoke, a nice base of soil and a fair bit of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, but a fairly astringent finish from uncovered oak tannins on the backend. The finish is long, and there may well be sufficient stuffing here to eventually absorb its new wood, but this wine will need four or five years in the cellar to accomplish this feat and will not be particularly tasty until it has done so. At this point in time, there is no guarantee that the wine can handle its new wood, as the balance here is hanging by a thread. Like so many Italian wines that I taste today that are raised in French oak barrels, I can see nothing positive that is gained by their inclusion in the cellar calculus. 2016-2030+? 84-88+?

2006 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano "Bossona" Riserva- Dei

Dei used to be one of my favorite producers in the region, which I knew again back in my wine merchant days, but this 2006 is overripe and too hot for its own good. The label only claims fourteen percent alcohol, but it seems a bit higher, as it offers up a very ripe nose of blackberries, black cherries, chocolate, damp earth and wet herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit hot on the backend, with a distinct lack of focus from its alcohol, and a long, complex finish. This used to be one of my very favorite sources for Vino Nobile, but this 2006 needs to be at least a full percent lower in alcohol to generate a bit of delineation to its aromatic and flavor elements. 2012-2014. 82.

2005 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Riserva- Carpineto

Given how lovely the 2009 *normale* Vino Nobile from Carpineto showed at this tasting, I was very sorry to see this overworked 2005 Riserva bottling. The nose is deep and dense from over-extracted, offering up scents of cassis, tar, resin, chocolate, venison, some soil tones and an overly generous blast of raw new wood. There is also a bit of brett on the nose, just to add to the festivities. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and completely dense, with an extracted core and pretty good length on the tannic, dull and utterly ponderous finish. There may well have been some good raw materials here, but they have been buried under an avalanche of heavy-handed and unskilled winemaking techniques. What were they thinking? 2012-2016+? 78.

2005 Montepulciano d'Abruzzo "Vial Gemma"- Masciarelli

The 2005 Vial Gemma bottling from Masciarelli is also a very modern and spoofulated wine, but it at least is a bit better balanced than the highly questionable 2007 Castello di

Semivicoli. The modern and simply nose is a blend of black cherries, black raspberries, chocolate and resinous new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and completely international in style, with decent mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and a long, anonymous finish. This wine is so devoid of Montepulciano character that it could have been made in a warehouse in New Jersey! 2012-2017. **78.**

2001 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano “Vigneto Poggio Sant’ Enrico”- Carpineto

The 2001 single vineyard Vigneto Poggio Sant’ Enrico from Carpineto shows off much better winemaking decisions than the 2005 Riserva, with the exception of the use of poorly-cured and raw new oak, which has probably marred this wine for life with uncovered oak tannins. The really classy nose offers up scents of black cherries, plums, chocolate, nutskins, Tuscan herbs, woodsmoke and a fair bit of new wood. It is on the palate that the wood really gets in the way, as this full-bodied and plush wine really withers from the mid-palate back in the face of the concerted assault of uncovered, astringent wood tannins. Why not just make this wine exactly like the regular Vino Nobile bottling- with perhaps a bit lower yields- and let the *terroir* of the Vigneto Poggio Sant’ Enrico take center stage, rather than a lumberyard in France? Hard to imagine this wine every softening and becoming enjoyable to drink. ??? **70.**



1983 Montepulciano d'Abruzzo- Emidio Pepe

I have had some absolutely beautiful bottles of the Emidio Pepe Montepulciano over the years, and other vintages that have been amazingly marred by volatile acidity. Most vintages that I have tasted have always had at least a touch of VA and it seems to me that one has to handicap each vintage (or is it each bottle?) based on how well the volatile acidity is managed in the wine. Happily, the 1983 Pepe Montepulciano is a lovely vintage for this bottling, offering up all of the depth and complexity that this wine is so famous for and just a whisper of VA. The deep, complex and very classy nose offers up scents of black cherries, gamebirds, coffee bean, a note of spice meats that recalls salami and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and now *à point*, with excellent focus and balance, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the very suave finish. One has to have at least a little tolerance for volatile acidity to enjoy these wines, but I strongly suspect that a vintage such as the 1983 will fine nearly all wine lovers impressed with its complexity and style. 2011-2030. **92.**

Greater Tuscany

This was my first encounter with the wines of Il Carnasciale, which is owned by the Rogosky family, who have been producing tiny quantities of their utterly unique Il Caberlot from their one acre vineyard since the 1988 vintage. The vineyard was planted in the early 1980s in Mercatale Valdarno, about thirty miles due north of Montepulciano. Their Il Caberlot is a single varietal bottling made from the very rare cabernet sauvignon mutation called Caberlot- so named as it is a grape that displays characteristics of both cabernet and merlot- and the Il Carnasciale vineyard is the only one in the world to be planted with this grape variety. The Rogoskys only bottle the wine in magnum (and a few double mags) and dole out the precious magnums in small quantities to their preferred clients. The estate began producing a second label, called Carnasciale in 2000 to handle production from the younger vines in the vineyard.

Il Caberlot is aged in nearly one hundred percent French oak barriques for approximately twenty-two months prior to bottling, but in three of the four vintages which I tasted, it showed no difficulties handling its high percentage of new wood. The wine is very pure, elegant and black fruity in profile, with a lovely base of Tuscan soil tones and lovely complexity and balance for aging. Apparently it has been a cult wine in Europe since soon after the first vintage was released, but this was my first encounter with the wines. I was quite impressed with the quality-though of course would love to see the wine in less new wood one day!

2008 Il Caberlot- Il Carnasciale (served from magnum)

The 2008 vintage Il Caberlot is the most recent release from Il Carnasciale and the wine shows excellent potential. The deep, complex and quite refined nose offers up a still quite primary mélange of black cherries, dark chocolate, fresh Tuscan herbs, a touch of road tar and cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite suave on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, fine focus and balance and very good grip on the long and ripely tannic finish. A few of the tannins on the backend today are from the new wood here, so tucking this away in the cellar for at least five or six years is highly advisable. Good juice and a new world to me. 2018-2040. **92+**.

2007 Il Caberlot- Il Carnasciale (served from magnum)

I like the slightly leaner and “cooler” style of the 2008 Il Caberlot to the riper 2007, which tips the scales at 13.6 percent alcohol- though the 2007 shows no signs of either overripeness nor heat on the backend. There is just a nice sense of reserve on the nose and palate of the 2008 that seems very promising for down the road. But the 2007 Il Caberlot is also an outstanding bottle in the making, offering up a deep, complex and sappy nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, a touch of balsam bough, dark soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely focus, moderate tannins and superb length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. Another very impressive wine. 2016-2035+. **92**.

1999 Il Caberlot- Il Carnasciale (served from magnum)

The 1999 Il Caberlot was the only one of these four vintages that still showed a whisper of wood tannin on the backend, and at age twelve, I have to imagine that this character will now always be part of the wine. But, that said, this is still a very tasty wine, and perhaps if the wine was decanted for an hour or two before serving the touch of backend wood tannin would be absorbed. The nose is deep, maturing and very classy in its blend of black cherries, espresso, tarry tones, game, dark soil and a touch of cedary oak spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with lovely focus and complexity, good mid-palate depth and a long, refined finish that still shows just a bit of oak tannin. A very lovely wine that could have been flat out stunning with a tad less new wood. 2012-2025. **90**.

1994 Il Caberlot- Il Carnasciale (served from magnum)

The 1994 Il Caberlot is really a lovely example of this wine and has now begun to offer up tertiary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate. The complex, pure and impressively complex nose offers up scents of dark berries, bitter chocolate, spit-roasted gamebirds, gently autumnal damp earth tones (it smells like this would be a really good place to have the dogs hunt for truffles!) and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully resolved, with a lovely core of pure fruit, excellent soil inflection, very modest remaining tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. A lovely wine at its apogee. 2012-2025. **93**.

Veneto

2010 Pinot Grigio- Bortoluzzi

This was the first time I had ever tasted the Pinot Grigio from Bortoluzzi and I was quite impressed with the wine. The nose is bright and nicely nutty, offering up scents of apple, gentle nutskin tones, wheat chaff, stony soil tones a bit of orange peel and a gentle touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and a touch spritzzy, with good mid-palate depth, bright acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is still a very young wine, with a bit of backend bitterness to resolve, and a year of bottle age is really going to see it blossom a bit on the backend. Good juice, with impressive intensity of flavor. 2012-2018. **90.**

2010 Soave- Pieropan

I have long been a fan of the Soave bottlings from Pieropan, so I was saddened a bit to see the inevitable march of “progress” having taken another wine and leashed it under screwcap. I am not sure if all the importers and estates the world over have heard that the new agglomerated corks are lower in price than screwcaps (the real reason most estates have switched from corks to SC, in my opinion) and offer zero possibility of TCA taint. In any case, the lovely 2010 Soave from Pieropan is sealed up with this industrial closure and my sample was showing a bit of metallic pinching on the backend from the early onset of reduction. Splashed around in decanter for half an hour revealed a completely different and totally dynamic wine, as the reduction blew off and notes of lemon zest, casaba melon, beautiful, sandy soil tones, spring flowers and straw form a lively bouquet. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and intensely flavored, with fine mid-palate depth, bright acids and very good length and grip on the complex and classy finish. It is amazing how the heavy metal minerality and clipped finish disappeared with a half an hour in decanter, leaving a wine of depth, complexity and impressive length and grip! I would drink this wine on the early side (though Pieropan Soaves have aged very well in the past under cork), before the reduction becomes a permanent and irreversible problem. The underlying wine here is stellar- one just has to work around the Stelvin! 2012-2013. **91.**

2007 Amarone della Valpolicella- Speri

I used to quite enjoy Amarone, but the wines I have tasted in the last half dozen years have just been too overripe and heady for my tastes and this is the case with the 2007 version from Speri. The deep, syrupy nose offers up scents of marinated black raspberries, prunes, chocolate, coffee grounds and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and stewy, with zero structure, a jammy personality, firm tannins and a long, heady and muddled finish. I am not sure if Amarone has been one of the great losers in the climate change sweepstakes or this is just the winemaking fashion here these days, but this is pretty disagreeable juice to my palate. 2012-2018. **81.**

Lombardy

Bellavista “Gran Cuvée Saten” Franciacorta Brut NV

The Gran Cuvée Saten from Bellavista is comprised of one hundred percent chardonnay, which is raised in small barrels. The current release shows just a touch of oak influence on its deep and complex nose of pears, citrus zest, complex soil tones, bread dough, a whisper of vanilla and a lovely topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, sound bubbles, bright acids and very good length and grip on the complex and classy finish. This is a lovely Italian sparkler. 2012-2018+. **89+.**

2005 Bellavista “Gran Cuvée” Franciacorta Brut NV

The 2005 Bellavista Gran Cuvée is a blend of seventy-two percent chardonnay and twenty-eight percent pinot noir, with a bit of the blend aged in small oak casks during the *elevage*. The 2005 offers up a really classy nose of green apple, a touch of grapefruit, stony minerality, bread dough, citrus peel and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely signature of minerality, sound *mousse* and very good length and grip on the youthfully complex and zesty finish. This is really a superb bottle of Italian sparkling wine, which will be even better with a few years of bottle age. Impressive. 2012-2020+. **91+**.

2010 Marzemino “Mazane”- Costaripa

Marzemino is a grape variety that I am not familiar with, but the rather florid back label tells that this wine was one of Mozart’s favorites back in the day- for what that is worth. The 2010 Marzemino from Costaripa is really quite pleasant on both the nose and palate, offering up a complex bouquet of bitter cherry, a touch of tariness, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, soil and marinated orange peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and nicely transparent, with a good core, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the slightly bitter finish. The touch of backend bitterness here is quite botanical in nature- reminding me of an *aperitivo*- and is nicely ameliorated with food. Good juice. 2012-2018. **88**.



The snow-covered vineyards of the important Barbaresco village of Treiso, with the Alps in the background.

Piemonte

The Piedmontese wines tasted below are broken up into three sections: Dolcetto, Barbera and Nebbiolo-based wines from outside of the usual suspects of Barolo and Barbaresco. Within each subset, I have listed the wines chronologically by vintage and then alphabetically by producer. As you will see, I tasted a goodly crop of Barberas in preparation for this report, as this is a grape that I love and which I feel does not get anywhere near the respect that it deserves. Witness for example the great traditionalist estate of Marcarini, which slaps around their own Barbera in a fair bit of French barrique- how's that for a lack of respect from a proud Barolo traditionalist? The Marcarini Dolcetto and Barbera bottlings are reported on in the historical feature on the estate found at the end of this issue, rather than included here. I should note that I tasted a few really high alcohol examples of Barbera from some great estates while working my way through my samples for this report, with wines from both the 2009 and 2007 vintages often tipping the scales between 14.5 and 15 percent alcohol! I hope this is simply a reflection of the torrid nature of those two vintages and not a sign of things to come, as I could not think of anything more depressing for this grape than a future that follows the sordid path of Zinfandel. One of the beauties for me found in great examples of Barbera is the varietal's wonderful acidity, which makes it such a superb partner at the table with a wide, wide array of cuisine. But, several of these high octane Barbera bottlings- from some big names like Giacomo Conterno, Giuseppe Mascarello and Giacomo Bologna, were remarkable for their undeniably low acids and their rather blurry palate impressions from excess alcohol. Is not the world already awash enough with Monster Truck reds without losing Barbera also to the excesses of the modern wine world? As I said, I hope these wines were simply a reflection of the singularly torrid conditions of the 2007 and 2009 vintages and not the start of a trend to destroy this lovely varietal with modernization.

Dolcetto

2010 Dolcetto d'Alba- Bongiovanni

According to the importer's literature on this wine, the Dolcetto from Bongiovanni sees a bit of micro-oxygenation during its *elevage*- though why one would feel any need to do this with Dolcetto (to soften the tannins?) is quite beyond me. In any event, the nose on the 2010 is quite lovely, offering up scents of black cherries, chocolate, peanuts, soil and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, forward and juicy, with a modest core of fruit, no visible tannins and good bounce and length on the finish. I would love to see a touch more mid-palate stuffing here, but otherwise, this is a tasty bottle of Dolcetto. 2012-2014. **87.**

2010 Dolcetto d'Alba "Roussot"- Francesco Rinaldi y Figli

I really enjoy the Dolcetto from Francesco Rinaldi and the 2010 is superb. For those who are not aware, the Roussot plot is a sub-parcel of the Cannubi Boschis vineyard, so this is pretty good real estate for a Dolcetto! The 2010 offers up a deep, complex and classic nose of black cherries, cassis, a touch of road tar, espresso and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and sappy finish. Good, old school, crunchy Dolcetto. 2012-2018. **91.**

2010 Dolcetto d'Alba- Roagna

Roagna makes fine, old school and chewy Baroli, so it is not surprising that they also get a bit of backbone into their fine Dolcetto. Their parcel of Dolcetto is actually planted in the fine Barbaresco vineyard of Pajè, so this is another Dolcetto that really comes from some excellent *terroir*. The 2010 offers up a deep and complex nose of cassis, coffee bean, road tar, woodsmoke

and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chewy, with a fine core of fruit, nascent complexity and very good length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. I would give this a year in the cellar to round off a bit on the backend- it is a serious bottle of Dolcetto. 2013-2020+. **89+**.

2010 Dolcetto d'Alba "A. Elizabeth"- Cascina Delle Rose

Continuing the theme of Dolcetto from high-brow crus, Cascina Delle Rose's parcel is planted in the lower section of the fine Rio Sordo cru in Barbaresco. The 2010 is a very classy bottle, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of game, a touch of fresh oregano and a nice base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with very good focus and length, just a whisper of tannin and fine grip on the long and tangy finish. Good juice. 2012-2018. **88**.

Barbera

2010 Barbera d'Alba "Vignota"- Conterno-Fantino

The 2010 Barbera "Vignota" is raised in French *barriques* and is a pretty new oaky and modern style of Barbera, but the wine is nicely balanced, and for those who do not find a lot of vanillin from oak a distraction in their Barbera, this wine has a lot to recommend it. The nose is very ripe at fourteen percent alcohol, but also classy in its blend of sappy black cherries, herb tones, smoke, dark chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, round and very suave on the attack, with a good core of fruit, low acids and good length and grip on the thoroughly modern and slutty finish. This is really well-made in its modern style, but I would be a lot more excited to see what this wine would look like done in a classical guise. 2012-2016. **88**.

2009 Barbera d'Alba- Bongiovanni

The 2009 Barbera from Bongiovanni is aged for twelve months in *barriques*, but I assume that these are not new, as the wine showed no signs of new oak on either the nose or the palate. The bouquet on the '09 offers up a quite classic mélange of red and black cherries, peanuts, lovely soil tones, a touch of gamebird and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with a good core of fruit, fairly low acids for this tangy grape (perhaps the influence of the *barriques* is felt here?), but good length and grip. Good juice. 2012-2017+. **89**.

2009 Barbera d'Alba "Cascina Francia"- Giacomo Conterno

I was pretty astonished to see Roberto Conterno's 2009 Barbera tipping the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol, but this is a ripe vintage and that is what this wine has attained in this year! The nose is deep, complex and very, very ripe in its aromatic mélange of sappy black cherries, peanuts, woodsmoke, road tar and soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plush and pretty blurry from its octane level, with virtually no tannin, soft acids (particularly for Barbera) and very good length and grip on the finish. This is well-made for such a level of ripeness, but I hope that this very heady Barbera is simply a reflection that something had to be sacrificed to have entire the picking team bringing in the nebbiolo in 2009 before it became equally ripe! I tasted this wine on two separate occasions three weeks apart and the wine really is that ripe, plush and soft! 2012-2016+? **87**.

2009 Barbera d'Asti "Ronco Malo"- Bera Vittorio e Figli

Alessandra Bera has been in charge of the family winery in Asti now for several years, working as her father did before in a completely organic method with no chemical use in the vineyards. Her 2009 Barbera d'Asti is a good wine, but it does show just a touch of natural wine funkiness on both the nose and palate. The deep and impressively complex bouquet offers up

scents of black cherries, a touch of barnyard, roasted game, gentle notes of road tar, bonfires fresh herbs and a bit of anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, sound acids and good focus on the slightly rustic finish. This is an old-fashioned style of Barbera that has a lot to recommend it, but is a bit chunky on the backend. 2012-2020. **86.**

2008 Barbera d'Alba "Conca Tre Pile"- Aldo Conterno

While I was less than smitten with the overtly oaky 2007 Baroli that I tasted from Aldo Conterno, the 2008 Barbera "Conca Tre Pile" was really a very good bottle in the making. The nose is deep, complex and quite vibrant, jumping from the glass in a blend of black cherries, nutskins, fresh oregano, a lovely base of soil and a delicate touch of road tar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins and excellent complexity and length on the focused and tangy finish. Just a lovely bottle of Barbera. 2012-2025. **88+.**

2008 Bricco dell'Uccellone Barbera d'Asti- Braida Giacomo Bologna

I used to really love the Bricco dell'Uccellone bottlings from Braida Giacomo Bologna, and actually poured several vintages by the glass in my sommelier days at Gotham Bar and Grill. So, I was utterly shocked to taste the new releases of this wine and find that the alcohol levels across the board here have now climbed to 15.5 percent- a ridiculous and utterly incomprehensible level for Barbera! Remarkably, despite this scorching level of alcohol, the 2008 Bricco dell'Uccellone is actually not too bad of a drink at the present time, as it offers up a borderline overripe nose of baked red and black cherries, peanut butter, oregano and a lovely and still impressively complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very ripe and still crunchy from the varietal's fine acidity, with a plush core of fruit, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the heady finish. While this wine is holding itself together at the present time, it is hard to imagine that at 15.5 percent it can maintain its high wire act for more than a few years in the bottle. What on earth can be the reason to let the grapes here hang out on the vine until 15.5 percent is achieved in the finished wine? Bricco dell'Uccellone used to be a very ageworthy and utterly classy wine. The new version is palatable in its youth, but seems to me to be bound to collapse under the weight of its excessive ripeness in the near-term. Very sad. 2012-2016+? **87.**

2008 Ai Summa Barbera d'Asti- Braida Giacomo Bologna

The 2008 Ai Summa bottling- the domaine's top of the line cuvée- is also a heady 15.5 percent and seems to already be showing a bit more of an overripe personality than the '08 Bricco dell'Uccellone. The overripe bouquet is a blend of black cherries, prunes, chocolate, damp herb tones and venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very powerful for Barbera, with a fat core of fruit, little resident tannin and still pretty good balance from Barbera's acidity on the long, chunky and blurry finish. The high alcohol here is really marring the wine on the backend- even at this very early stage- and I have a hard time imagining that this wine will age for more than a couple of years. 2012-2015. **84.**

2007 Barbera d'Alba "Scudetto"- Giuseppe Mascarello y Figli

While I have not tasted deeply in the 2007 vintage in Piemonte, of the wines I have tasted, there have certainly been a fair number of wines with rather heady alcohol levels. The 2007 Scudetto from Giuseppe Mascarello y Figli tips that scales at fourteen percent, which seems a tad on the ripe side for Barbera. The bouquet shows this ripeness in its mélange of

backed black cherries, chocolate, peanut butter, soil and a touch of spit-roasted gamebird in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite fruit-driven from the heat of the vintage, with a good core and very good length and grip on the slightly tannic finish. This is not bad for a 2007, but I do really prefer my Barbera with greater cut and transparency than what I have found generally from the 2007s that I sampled. 2012-2020. **87.**

2007 Barbera d'Alba "Santa Stefano di Perno"- Giuseppe Mascarello y Figli

The 2007 Mascarello Barbera from the Santa Stefano di Perno vineyard is even a bit riper, tipping the scales at a full 14.5 percent, but it does not show any signs of overt heat on the backend. What this ripeness does do however, is contribute a bit of blurriness to both the nose and palate that is far from typical in most Mascarello wines. The nose is deep, ripe and complex, offering up scents of backed black cherries and plums, venison, chocolate, herbs and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and plenty ripe, with a sense of blurriness that keeps the wine slightly off kilter and out of focus. The finish is long, shows a bit of suave tannin and has fine grip, but I really miss the customary precision of Mauro Mascarello's wines in less heady vintages. It is a success for a 2007 Barbera, but it is not up the quality of the superb 2006 version. 2012-2018. **87+.**

2007 Barbera d'Alba "Donna Elena"- Cascina Delle Rose

Given how good the Dolcetto 2010 was from Cascina Delle Rose, I was hoping for just a bit more from their 2007 Barbera "Donna Elena" bottling, but there was just a touch of volatile acidity in my sample that kept the score down a bit. The nose offers up a good mix of cherries, bonfires, coffee, *sous bois*, peanuts and a bit of acetic acid. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and a bit volatile, with a good core, lovely focus and very good length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. Perhaps I was just unlucky with my sample bottle, but even with my pretty high tolerance for VA, I had to mark this down just a bit for its wildness on both the nose and palate. 2012-2020. **87+?**

2007 Bricco dell'Uccellone Barbera d'Asti- Braida Giacomo Bologna

The 2007 Bricco dell'Uccellone is also 15.5 percent in alcohol, and here, the additional year of bottle age seems to already be making itself felt in less precision and focus on the both the nose and palate. The now decidedly less pure nose offers up scents of black cherries, peanut butter, chocolate, some soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in style, with the acidity here acting as a girdle to keep these other blowsy elements from complete sloppiness, but without any real focus or delineation, due to the combination of excessive ripeness and an additional year of bottle age. It is clear that the raw materials here are still capable of making world class Barbera, but a wake-up call is needed in the front offices here! Already the sun is starting to set on the 2007 Bricco dell'Uccellone. 2012-2015. **85.**

2006 Barbera d'Alba "Santa Stefano di Perno"- Giuseppe Mascarello y Figli

The 2006 Santa Stefano di Perno Barbera from Giuseppe Mascarello y Figli is decidedly "cooler" in fruit tones and shows off a lot more soil nuance as result. The deep, complex and quite classic bouquet offers up a fine mélange of black cherries, peanuts, a touch of road tar, woodsmoke, superb soil complexity and a bit of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with the tangy acids I customary in fine Barbera (and which was missing in both of the estate's 2007 versions), lovely focus and just a bit of tannin perking up the long and soil-driven finish. This is a classic bottle of Barbera that will repay cellaring handsomely. 2012-2020+. **89+.**

Rosso del Noce NV- Trincherio

Trincherio is one of my favorite Barbera specialists, as they continue to exploit the wonderful vineyard of Vigna del Noce, which was planted to Barbera in 1929! The current release of their non-vintage, Rosso del Noce cuvée is comprised of a blend of this old vine Barbera from the 2001, 1999, 1998 and 1997 vintages and it is outstanding. The deep, very complex and mature nose offers up scents of baked black cherries, chestnuts, roasted meats, new leather, *sous bois* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and *à point*, with beautiful, autumnal complexity, good mid-palate depth and superb length and grip on the focused and fully mature finish. This is a lovely wine and a terrific value for a wine at its peak of drinkability. 2012-2020. **90.**

2004 Barbera d'Asti "Vigne del Noce"- Trincherio

The Trincherio estate makes Barbera as if it were Barolo, and their 2004 is still a few years away from fully blossoming! The deep, classy and youthful nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of dark berries, cherries, road tar, new leather, dark soil tones and woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit chewy, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine focus and superb length and grip on the still slightly primary finish. I would wait until this wine sees its tenth birthday before really entertaining thoughts of pulling corks in earnest. This is dynamite, old school Barbera! 2014-2030+. **91+.**

1999 Barbera d'Asti Vigne del Noce "Speciale 7 Anni in Castagno"- Trincherio

The 1999 Speciale 7 Anni in Castagno bottling from Trincherio is a bottling of their Barbera that rests in old chestnut *Botti* for seven years before it is bottled up and made available for sale. Stylistically, this is a glimpse of how Barbera and Barolo were sold a hundred years ago. The 1999 Speciale delivers a very tertiary nose of desiccated black cherries, grilled venison, nutskins, woodsmoke, coffee grounds and dried herbs and spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and autumnal, with a good core of fruit still in residence, a bit of old school tannin and good length and grip on the tertiary finish. This is a very interesting drink, and though it has traded a bit of punch from its fruit component for added autumnal notes of complexity from its seven years in chestnut, it has retained plenty of vitality. Good juice. 2012-2020. **88.**

Nebbiolo and Primarily Nebbiolo

2007 Rosso di Valtellina- Arturo Pellizzatti Perego (Valtellina)

The 2007 Rosso di Valtellina from Ar. Pe. Pe. is a lovely middleweight, with fine purity on both the nose and palate. The bright and red fruity bouquet offers up scents of cherries, a touch of blood orange, lovely soil tones, fresh oregano, coffee and orange peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and intensely flavored, with moderate tannins, good acids and very fine length and grip on the young and slightly herbal finish. This is a lovely wine, but I would be inclined to give it a year or two of bottle age to allow the tannins to more fully fall away. Really a classy bottle. 2014-2030. **89+.**

2007 Bramaterra- Tenute Sella

The 2007 Bramaterra from Tenute Sella is comprised of seventy percent Nebbiolo, twenty percent Croatina and ten percent Vespolina, and the wine is aged in large Slavonian oak *Botti*. The 2007 is a deep and complex wine that is already showing some lovely signs of maturity in its aromatic blend of dried cherries, espresso, gamebirds, woodsmoke and soil. On the palate the wine is fullish and deep, with a slightly four-square personality, with a good core

of fruit, little tannin and very good length and grip on the mature finish. This is a very tasty bottle for drinking over the near term. 2012-2017. **88.**

2007 Grumello- Rainoldi

Grumello is another one of those lovely, nebbiolo-based middleweights that are produced in the mountains further up into the Alps from the main Barolo and Barbaresco regions. The 2007 from Rainoldi is a lovely wine in this lighter and more aromatic style, offering up a high-toned mix of cherries, leather, a touch of tariness, coffee, bonfires and a touch of Brett. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and intensely flavored, with modest tannins, a lovely signature of soil and very good length and grip. This is good juice that would rate a few points higher if it was entirely clean. Still, there is a lot here to like. 2012-2020. **87.**

2006 Ghemme- Antichi Vigneti di Cantalupo

Ghemme is the nebbiolo wine that hails from the hills to the west of Gattinara, and I have quite liked the selections from Cantalupo that I have tasted in the past. The 2007 Ghemme from Cantalupo is another fine wine in the making, but it is a bit structured and will need a few years to fully blossom. The deep and complex nose offers up a fine mélange of red and black cherries, coffee, gamebirds, fresh herbs and a very good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tightly-knit, with a very good core of fruit, firm tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This will be a lovely bottle, but it needs a bit of time to soften. 2016-2035. **90+.**

2004 Sassella “Stella Retica” Riserva- Arturo Pellizzatti Perego (Valtellina)

The 2004 Sassella “Stella Retica” Riserva from Ar. Pe. Pe. is another absolutely lovely wine from this consistently excellent estate. The nose offers up a blossoming and red fruity blend of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of gamebird, coffee, complex soil tones, fresh herbs and a nice touch of rose petal in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and blossoming beautifully, with lovely soil inflection, a sweet core of fruit, moderate, well-integrated tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This is drinking well already with a bit of air, but should continue to age very gracefully for many years to come. A very stylish and classy wine. 2012-2030+. **92.**

2004 Ghemme “Collis Breclamae”- Antichi Vigneti di Cantalupo

The single vineyard Collis Breclamae from Cantalupo is another fine bottle of Ghemme. The wine delivers a stylish bouquet of cherries, blood orange, coffee, game, lovely soil tones and a nice touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still fairly youthful in its structure, with a bit of ripe tannin perking up the backend. The wine shows off lovely mid-palate depth, very good focus and excellent length and grip and will be a lovely wine with a couple more years of bottle age. 2014-2030+. **91.**

2004 Bramaterra “I Porfido”- Tenute Sella

The I Porfido bottling hails from the highest elevation section of the estate, where the vines are planted on a solid base of volcanic stone. The wine is aged for two years in medium-sized *Botti*, followed by another year in older French *barriques*. The 2004 is a lovely bottle, offering up a complex and stylish nose of cherries, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of stony soil and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, suave and classy, with a very good core of fruit, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is a lovely wine. 2012-2030. **90.**

2004 Lessona “Ommagio a Quintino Sella”- Tenute Sella

The Ommagio a Quintino Sella is only produced in top vintages, with the tame at Tenute Sella selecting the finest *Botte* in the cellar and bottling it on its own as this special cuvée. The

wine is a blend of eighty-five percent Nebbiolo and fifteen percent Vespolina. The 2004 Ommagio a Quintino Sella offers up a deep and complex nose of cherries, chestnuts, *sous bois*, woodsmoke, autumnal soil tones, coffee and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and a bit of old-fashioned, chewy tannin still in need of resolution on the long finish. Good juice, but give it a year or two more in the cellar to let the tannins on the backend fall away a bit more. 2014-2025+. **89+**.

2004 Gattinara- Vallana

I have had so many great old Spanna and Gattinara bottlings from Vallana that I was extremely happy when the US importer sent me the new vintage of their Gattinara to sample. The 2004 Vallana Gattinara is a lovely wine, offering up a deep and classy nose that is blossoming with layers of secondary complexity in its mélange of dried cherries, coffee, a bit of bonfire, lovely soil tones, incipient nuttiness and a fine topnote of dried herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, albeit still a bit on the young side, with a good core of fruit, well-measured tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and impressive finish. A lovely wine in the making. 2012-2035. **90+**.

2001 Sassella “Vigna Regina” Riserva- Arturo Pellizzatti Perego (Valtellina)

While I do not have a lot of experience with either the lovely, medium-full nebbiolo of the Valtellina nor the fine wines from Arturo Pellizzatti Perego, (or Ar. Pe. Pe. as the estate is better known these days) I have been seriously impressed with the ones that I have tasted up until this point to now search out these wines with great frequency. The 2001 Vigna Regina is really a deep and beautiful bottle of nebbiolo, jumping from the glass in a complex and classy blend of cherries, roses, very gentle notes of road tar, stony soil tones, fresh herbs and camphor. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and very intensely flavored, with superb elegance, moderate tannins, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the transparent and well-balanced finish with a lovely closing note of bitter cherry. Impressive juice. 2012-2035+. **93**.

2000 Gattinara- Petterino

I also tasted a 2002 and a 2001 version of Gattinara from Petterino, but they came at the end of a sixty-plus bottle lineup of wines at a tasting and my palate was just shot by that time and I do not trust my notes to be accurate for the wines. Graciously, the importer kindly sent me another bottle of the 2000, which showed beautifully and emphatically demonstrated that my palate was fried by the end of that long tasting (I have not used any of the notes from the point where my palate had obviously called it a day). The 2000 Gattinara from Petterino is a beautifully suave and fully mature middleweight, offering up a deep, complex and very wide open nose of sweet cherries, a touch of blood orange, a note of bonfires, coffee, a beautiful base of forest floor and spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and velvety, with lovely focus and balance, solid mid-palate depth and a long, tangy and fully mature finish. Just a lovely bottle of Gattinara. 2012-2020. **91+**.

1999 Grumello “Buon Consiglio” Riserva- Arturo Pellizzatti Perego (Valtellina)

I love the wines from Ar. Pe. Pe. and the 1999 Grumello “Buon Consiglio” Riserva is a beautifully complex and mature middleweight that offers up superb complexity on both the nose and palate in a medium-bodied and quite transparent format. The nose offers up a suave and tertiary nose of dried cherries, a touch of blood orange, woodsmoke, oregano, a touch of gamebird, wonderfully complex soil tones that are just beginning to turn the corner to autumnal nuances and a nice topnote of dried roses. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and intensely

flavored, with bright acids, still a bit of tannin, lovely transparency and superb length and grip on the complex and classy finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Grumello. 2012-2025+. **93.**

1997 Sassella “Rocce Rosse” Riserva- Arturo Pellizzatti Perego (Valtellina)

The 1997 Sassella Rocce Rosse Riserva from Ar. Pe. Pe is a lovely and mature wine that shows off lovely complexity on the both the nose and palate. The classy bouquet offers up scents of cherries, a touch of orange zest, chestnuts, forest floor, fresh herb tones and a nice touch of gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, suave and drinking at its apogee, with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and meltingly tannic finish. The '97 Rocce Rosse does not quite possess the same inner tension and superb transparency as the Vigna Regina 2001, but it is a lovely bottle of fully mature nebbiolo. 2012-2020+. **91.**

1985 Sassella “Vigna Regina” Riserva- Arturo Pellizzatti Perego (Valtellina)

The 1985 Vigna Regina was the first wine that I ever tasted from this fine estate, as a good friend brought it to Burgundy from his cellar in Germany when I was there last year. The nose is deep, complex and wonderfully mature, as it offers up scents of cherries, orange peel, road tar, a beautiful base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and resolved, with lovely balance, fine focus and a very long, intensely flavored and beautifully poised finish. This is the quintessential nebbiolo middleweight that is drinking beautifully and should continue to cruise along with great style for many years to come. 2010-2025. **92.**

1971 Bricco del Drago

Bricco del Drago is a very compelling blend of eighty-five percent dolcetto and fifteen percent nebbiolo, which is considered quite famous in many circles, but I had never had the pleasure to come across a bottle until tasting this really lovely 1971. The nose is deep, mature and impressively complex, as it offers up a mix of cherries, orange zest, roses, camphor and a lovely base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and very transparent, with tangy acids, still a touch of backend tannin and great length and grip on the perfectly balanced and classy finish. A lovely, lovely wine. 2010-2020+. **90.**

Moscato di Asti

2011 Moscato di Asti- Marcarini

This was the first time I had ever tasted a bottle of Moscato from one of my favorite Barolo producers- Marcarini- and I was quite impressed with the quality of this bottling. The nose is bright, succulent and floral, offering up scents of fresh-picked pears, tangerine, acacia blossoms, lovely, stony minerality and a nice touch of coriander seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and lively, with lovely, gentle *mousse*, fine focus and a long, juicy and zesty finish. A very nice bottle of Moscato di Asti. 2012-2013. **88.**

2010 Moscato d’Asti- Vittorio Berra e Figli

The 2010 Moscato d’Asti from Vittorio Berra e Figli is superb, as it soars from the glass in a deep and vibrant nose of pears, casaba melon, musky floral tones, beautifully complex minerality, coriander and orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and dancing on the palate, with beautiful complexity, fine mid-palate depth, bright acids and a lovely touch of frothy *mousse* on the long, bouncy and very classy finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Moscato d’Asti, which shows just beautiful texture on the palate. 2012-2014. **93.**



Trentino- Alto Adige

2010 Veltliner- Abbazia di Novacella

The 2010 Veltliner from Abbazia di Novacella is a lovely wine that steers clear of some of the issues I have with this varietal in Austria- namely its propensity to harness ripeness to rather heady levels. The Abbazia di Novacella version is only 13.5 percent alcohol and very nicely balanced, as it offers up a deep and vibrant nose of apple, pear, rosemary, a bit of petrol, a lovely base of stony soil tones and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and beautifully focused, with excellent mid-palate depth, sound framing acids and very good length and grip on the complex and intensely flavored finish. Good juice. 2012-2015. **90.**

2010 Manzoni Bianco “Fontanasanta”- Foradori

Manzoni Bianco is a cross between pinot blanc and riesling and the 2010 version from Foradori is a beautiful wine. The deep and complex nose offers up a lovely mélange of lemon, pears, a gentle touch of leanness, dried flowers, soil and just a whiff of butter (the wine is aged in several year-old acacia and oak casks). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite pure on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. Good juice. 2012-2016+. **91.**

2010 Nosiola “Fontanasanta”- Foradori

Nosiola is an ancient indigenous grape of the northeastern region of Italy, but it is now very rare and little of it is planted in Trentino, having been displaced by other grapes that are easier to sell, such as Pinot Grigio. I had never crossed paths with a single varietal bottling of

Nosiola until this superb 2010 from Foradori, which showed off impressive depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The wine is fermented and raised for eight months in amphora. The classy bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant mélange of apple, lemon peel, lovely soil tones, a bit of beeswax, dried flowers and just a whisper of volatile acidity that seems to enliven all the other components. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very complex, with a great core of fruit, sound acids and superb length and grip on the focused and impressive finish. Stylistically, this way off the beaten path, but the wine is superb. 2012-2018. **93.**

2009 Teroldego- Foradori

It has been a few years since I last tasted a bottle of Teroldego, so I was very happy to taste these two classy versions from Foradori. The Foradori Teroldego *Normale* is fermented in stainless steel and then aged all in old, neutral oak casks for twenty months prior to bottling. The 2009 offers up a deep, young and extracted nose of cassis, dark berries, bitter chocolate, herb tones and a fine base of stony soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and quite sappy at the core, with a bit of chewy tannin still to resolve, fine focus and balance and very good length and grip on the finish. This is good juice, but I would tuck it away in the cellar for at least a couple of years to allow its tannins to soften up a bit and to let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. Fine value. 2014-2020+. **89+.**

2008 Teroldego “Granota”- Foradori

The Granota bottling from Foradori is their *Riserva* bottling of Teroldego, with the wine fermented in open top old wood vats, rather than stainless steel, and then aged for twenty-four months in older oak casks prior to bottling and release. The 2008 is unequivocally the finest example of Teroldego that I have ever had the pleasure to taste, as it offers up a very deep and complex nose of cassis, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and just a very discreet touch of vanillin oak (from the older barrels). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite refined, with excellent, nascent complexity, exceptional mid-palate depth, moderate tannins and excellent grip on the focused and very long finish. High class juice. 2014-2030. **93.**

Südtirol

2010 Müller-Thurgau- Manni Nössing

The 2010 Müller-Thurgau from Manni Nössing is all stainless steel fermented and is quite lovely in this vintage. The deep and complex nose offers up scents of apple, grapefruit, a touch of petrol, lemon peel and white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and rock solid at the core, with good cut and focus, bright acids and very good length and grip. A lovely bottle. 2012-2020. **91.**

2010 Kerner- Manni Nössing

The 2010 Kerner from Manni Nössing is equally fine, wafting from the glass in a classy bouquet of lemon, tart pear, stony soil tones, a touch of coriander and a potpourri of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and complex, with lovely mineral drive, fine focus and excellent grip on the very long and snappy finish. A lovely and quite serious bottle of Alpine white. 2012-2020+. **91+.**

2009 Blatterle Vino Bianco- Nusserhof (Heinrich Mayr)

The Vino Bianco from Heinrich Mayr is made from the old indigenous grape of the region, Blatterle (the winery’s importer insists that the grape variety is spelled with two “t’s”, though the label of the wine spells it with only one!), which is no longer widely planted in the

Südtirol. The 2009 is a superb wine, offering up a unique and compelling nose of honeyed lemon peel, fresh rosemary, perfumed floral scents, a touch of green olive and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with a fine core of fruit, fairly low acids, good focus and impressive length and grip on the classy finish. I would opt for drinking this over the next couple of years, as it really is on the low side for acidity, but it is so well-balanced that it would not surprise me if it ended up aging fairly well. 2012-2014. **88.**

2006 Lagrein Reserva- Nusserhof (Heinrich Mayr)

The 2006 Lagrein Reserva from Heinrich Mayr Nusserhof is a lovely version of this little understood and highly entertaining varietal. The nose is deep, complex and classically black fruity, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, tree bark, bitter chocolate, lovely soil tones and just a touch of fresh rosemary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet (as is so often the case with Lagrein), with a good core of fruit, fine soil inflection and a very long, complex, perfectly balanced and softly tannic finish. The wine closes with a lovely endnote of slightly bitter botanicals that remind me quite a bit of several Italian *aperitivos*. Picture a theoretical cross of Bandol and Burgundy and you get an idea of the textural and aromatic profile of this lovely wine. This is really an impressively complex bottle. 2012-2025+? **92.**

Valle d'Aoste

I had the good fortune to taste some lovely examples from the Alpine region of the Valle d'Aoste that lies nestled against the French border in northwest Italy. Perhaps it was just the good luck of tasting from some top producers here, but my gut feeling is that this region has probably been one of the winners in the global warming sweepstakes and the wines here today may well be a bit more interesting than was the case a generation ago. In any case, up here in the mountains the grapes retain a lovely acidity, as temperatures still plunge pretty dramatically in the cool evenings of the Alpine summer, and with alcohol levels quite moderate by contemporary standards, there seems to be an awful lot of really good wines being produced up here that will delight at the table and complement a wide variety of cuisines. The red wine grapes grown here are Petite Rouge, Mayolet, Cornalin, Fumin and Pinot Noir, with pinot the only variety I was familiar with prior to preparing this article.

2010 Blanc de Morgex et de la Salle- Caves du Vin Blanc de Morgex

This is a really lovely, snappy middleweight produced from ungrafted, fifty to one hundred year-old vines of the Prié Blanc variety. I had never previously tasted any wine produced from this grape or from this Alpine cooperative, but I was very impressed with this white wine. The nose is pure and quite lovely in its mélange of wild flowers, tart pears, lemon zest and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and transparent, with good depth, lovely focus and grip on the long and zesty finish. Really a lovely bottle. 2012-2016. **89.**

2010 Pinot Nero- La Crotta di Vegneron

The Pinot Noir bottling from the small co-operative of La Crotta di Vegneron is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks for eight months prior to bottling and sees a twenty-four hour pre-fermentation maceration at low temperatures to help set color. The 2010 is a lovely wine, offering up a pure and sappy nose of black cherries, chocolate, woodsmoke, herb tones and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and chocolaty, with a good core of fruit, soft

tannins and very good length and grip on the classy finish. This wine is quite light on its feet and a tasty middleweight for relatively near-term consumption. A fine value! 2012-2018. **89.**

2010 Chambave- La Crotta di Vegneron

Chambave is one of the best geographical sections for grape growing in the Valle d'Aoste, and this small, ten grower cooperative has produced a lovely bottling from here in 2010. This superb wine from the La Crotta di Vegneron is a blend of seventy percent Petite Rouge and thirty percent comprised of a field blend of Mayolet, Cornalin, Fumin and Pinot Noir. Most of these grapes I was completely unfamiliar with prior to tasting this wine, but they have really produced a fine and stylish bottle in this vintage. Their 2010 Chambave offers up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, black cherries, espresso, white pepper and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite primary, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. A lovely wine. 2012-2025. **90.**



fine focus, tangy acids, very good mid-palate depth and impressive grip on the long and classy finish. I may not have heard of Mayolet before tasting through these selections from the Val d'Aoste, but if they are all like this lovely wine, count me a convert to the grape! 2012-2020+. **90.**

2010 Fumin- Di Barrò

The 2010 Fumin from Di Barrò is even better than the Mayolet, offering up a deep, ripe and very classy bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, a touch of new leather, fresh herb tones, pepper and lovely soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and

2010 Petite Rouge- Di Barrò

The 2010 Petite Rouge from Di Barrò is a lovely wine that exudes freshness and brightness on both the nose and palate. The deep and complex bouquet offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, dark chocolate, a touch of orange zest, coffee and a delicate floral topnote redolent of roses. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and vibrant finish. Just a lovely, black fruity middleweight and a superb value. 2012-2020. **90.**

2010 Mayolet "Vigne de Toule"- Di Barrò

The Di Barrò vineyards are in an extremely steep section of the Aoste Valley, in the village of Saint Pierre, where everything must be done very carefully by hand, with grapes collected in baskets that the pickers wear on their backs, as they need both hands to hang on! In many ways, this region must be quite similar to the Ribera Sacra area of Spain. The 2010 Mayolet Di Barrò is another excellent wine from this small estate, jumping from the glass in a bright and complex blend of cherries, a touch of balsam bough, woodsmoke, a beautiful base of complex soil tones, a bit of pepperiness and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with

quite sappy at its black fruity core, with moderate tannins, fine focus and balance and superb length and grip on the classy finish. This is really a superb bottle of wine! 2012-2020+. **91+**.

2010 Pinot Noir- Franco Noussan

Franco Noussan is a very small producer who began making wine from a cellar extension he added onto his garage in 1999, after he and his wife inherited a few small parcels of old vines. He continues to do his “day job” as a professor at a university in Aosta. His wines are made with indigenous yeasts and fermented in stainless steel. Some of the bottlings will spend a bit of time in barrel as well. The first commercial release here was from the 2005 vintage, as previously everything was consumed by friends and family. The 2010 Pinot Noir from Noussan is a lovely red fruity middleweight that reminds me a bit of the wines from Monthelie. The nose is deep, bright and complex, delivering a lovely blend of cherries, pomegranate, vinesmoke, stony soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and intensely flavored, with good acids, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the slightly herbal finish. There is a touch of pyrazine here that folks who were put off by the style of the 2004 red Burgundies are not going to like, but for those less sensitive, this is a lovely bottle of Pinot Noir that offers up good value and seems likely to age well for the next decade. 2012-2022. **88.**

2010 Cuvée de la Côte- Franco Noussan

The Cuvée de la Côte bottling from Franco Noussan is made up of a field blend of very old vines and indigenous grapes in the region. The 2010 is dynamite, jumping from the glass in a complex mélange of black cherries, dark soil tones, a bit of espresso, woodsmoke, herb tones and tree bark. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully transparent, with its fien core of black fruit beautifully carried by stony soil tones. The finish is long, modestly tannic and tangy, with fine focus and grip and which closes with a nice touch of bitter botanicals that recalls a great *aperitivo* from Italy. A very high class and very food friendly wine! 2012-2022. **91.**

2007 Donnas- Caves Coopératives de Donnas

This lovely red wine is comprised of eighty-five percent Nebbiolo, with the balance a split between Freisa and Neyret. I had very much liked the 2004 vintage of this wine, but missed tasting the 2005 and 2006 versions. The 2007 is another excellent value, as the wine offers up a complex and lovely blend of cherries, forest floor, a fine base of soil, a touch of acorn, coffee, fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the balanced and nicely focused finish. One has to love Alpine nebbiolo! 2012-2020. **89.**

**BACK TO BEAUJOLAIS- THE FINE 2010 VINTAGE
AND OTHER RECENTLY-TASTED GEMS FROM THIS BUCOLIC REGION**



I have only made two very quick trips to the Beaujolais region in the last year, with each trip only a day in duration, so my depth of tasting notes gleaned *sur place* is not what it really should be for this article. However, I did manage to visit five of my very favorite producers during the two trips- Domaine des Billards in St. Amour, Clos de la Roilette in Fleurie, Louis-Claude Desvignes in Morgon, and Nicole Chanrion and Château Thivin (both in Côte de Brouilly). Happily, I have been able to augment these two quick visits to the region with copious samples of the 2010 vintage tasted here in New York during my (seemingly brief) moments back in the office between flights in the last six months. I am very much impressed by the 2010s from Beaujolais, which offer up very classic balance and silhouettes- with many of them providing a welcome return from the larger than life style of some of the very, very ripe 2009s. While the 2009s are certainly still an impressive crop of wines, I find myself a bit less enamored to the style of the vintage than I initially thought I would, after having had a chance to taste through a wider selection of the best growers wines. It is not quite as inconsistent of a vintage as 2009 in Burgundy, but there are certainly a fairly good number of '09 Beaujolais that also suffer from the vintage's Achilles' heel of overripeness that plagues a significant percentage of the 2009s further north. It is not that most of these riper-styled 2009s in Beaujolais are flawed wines per se, but

they certainly seem to come across as a bit heavy-handed in comparison to the more classically balanced 2010s. This is not to say that there are not some absolute legends in the making that have emerged from the 2009 vintage, but at this point in time, it seems to me that the 2005 vintage in Beaujolais has provided a higher percentage of great wines for the cellar than the 2009 vintage. However, I should note that a few of the very top producers, such as Claude Geoffroy of Château Thivin, do not share this sentiment and rank the 2009s a solid step above the very fine 2005s.

But the 2010s are another story. This is a vintage that does not share the hype surrounding the more flashy young vintages such as 2009 or 2005, but much like the 2006 vintage in Beaujolais, there are an awful lot of really strong and classic wines that are going to offer up superb drinking out of the blocks and will repay cellaring quite handsomely. In fact, at a couple of the domaines I visited during my short trips to the region, I actually had quite a strong preference for the estate's 2010s over their more powerful 2009s, as the purity and soil-driven personalities of the 2010s was much more to my liking than more powerfully fruit-driven styles of the respective domaines 2009s. At two of these domaines, I had been hunting around to find some of their 2009s for my cellar, but after having tasted them in the wake of the 2010s at each property, I immediately shifted my attention to the 2010s and will not regret trading in the younger vintage for the more highly sought-after one. For there is an inner tension to many of these top 2010s that is very special and to my palate, promises great evolution in the cellar. Much like the vintage further north in the Côte d'Or, cool weather at flowering delayed the *floraison* in Beaujolais in 2010 and produced a smaller crop that was harvested a bit on the later side than has been the custom here for several years, with most domaines finishing up towards the end of the third week in September and a few late harvesting stalwarts not completing their picking until early October. However, there was a bit of rain at the end of September in Beaujolais in 2010, so the latest harvesters may not have been rewarded for their approach.

2010 in Beaujolais is a very red fruity and classic vintage in most of the Crus, with notes of cherry, raspberry, sweet cranberry the most dominant fruit tones in most of the wines, with a bit more dark berry mixed into some of the cuvées from the more traditionally black fruity communes such as Morgon, Moulin-à-Vent and Côte de Brouilly. The transparency to the soil in most of the Crus is really quite stunning in 2010, and for those that love the combination of the tangy and revved-up fruit coupled to beautiful granite-based soil flavors of top Beaujolais, there is an awful lot to look forward to with the *crème de la crème* of the vintage. There is not the same fleshiness as was found in the 2009s at a similar stage, nor anywhere near the same levels of tannin, and the 2010s will keep more on their fine acids than on tannic backbones. But there is a poise, focus and structural integrity to these classic middleweights that makes 2010 also a fine vintage for cellaring, and I would be very surprised not to see the vast majority of the top Cru Beaujolais from this vintage infinitely more interesting to drink with five or six years of cellaring than they are today, as there is a lot of promise wound up in these lovely wines.

One of the things that really struck me in tasting through this crop of superb young Beaujolais is how much further afield the stylistic net in the region has been set in the last several vintages, as I tasted Cru bottlings from several growers that were unabashedly crafted for the cellar with significant structure and no signs of bowing to market pressures to provide an early drinking. To my mind, this is a very positive sign that the region is really starting to come out

from under the long shadow of instant gratification in the wake of the Nouveau phenomenon, and many growers now are simply making wines that are designed for a few years of cellaring prior to their really blossoming and starting to drink well. Perhaps this is simply a function of more US importers seeking out more structured styles of wines from the Crus in particular, but I have a sense that it is both a greater awareness on the part of importers (and the market in general) to the fine potential for top Crus to evolve long and gracefully in the cellar and a willingness on the part of *vignerons* here now refusing to compromise any potential for longer-term cellaring to try and craft their wines for early accessibility. The results were some surprisingly structured and reserved 2010 Crus that will demand a bit of early cellaring before they really start to offer up drinking at their proper level of potential.

I have arranged the following notes with the Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages bottlings that I have sampled listed first, and then the remainder of the different Cru Beaujolais bottlings listed by village from north to south. Within each commune of the Crus, I have embedded any estate features from the small handful of properties that I have visited this year at the start of that village's section of notes, followed by individual notes of the other Crus from those respective villages following the domaines' short features. For the individual tasting notes listed in each section, they are arranged by vintage from youngest to oldest, and then alphabetically by the name of the *vigneron* or estate within the subset of each respective vintage. As readers will notice, a few of my favorite producers whose wines formerly graced these pages are not included in this year's feature on the region, as a few importers now tell me that "Beaujolais is too hot right now" and that they cannot afford any more positive press reports on the wines and therefore can no longer send samples. I did offer to slam the wines for them if it would make it easier for their distribution nightmares, but no one took me up on my offer ☺

Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages

2010 Beaujolais-Villages "les Vignes de Thulon"- Domaine Jean-Marc Burgaud

Jean-Marc Burgaud makes quite deep and structured wines, and this extends down all the way to his very fine Beaujolais-Villages. The nose on the 2010 "les Vignes de Thulon" offers up a deep and serious nose of cassis, dark berries, a touch of white pepper, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very soil-driven (particularly for this appellation), with fine mid-palate depth, a bit of tannin and very good length and grip on the black fruity and still firm finish. This lovely wine could use a year in the cellar to unwind, but a bit of time in decanter will serve in a pinch. 2013-2020+. **88.**

2010 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine Coquelet

The 2010 Beaujolais-Villages from Domaine Coquelet is a lovely example of the vintage, with a fine core of fruit and superb soil signature on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a bright mélange of cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of autumn leaf, lovely soil tones, citrus peel and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and complex, with very good mid-palate depth, just a touch of tannin and very good length and grip on the tangy and soil-driven finish. This is a superb bottle of Beaujolais-Villages that is drinking well out of the blocks, but will improve with further bottle age. Impressive juice. 2012-2020+. **90+.**

2010 Beaujolais- Domaine Depeuble Père et Fils

The 2010 Beaujolais from Depeuble Père et Fils is a fine follow-up to their excellent and sappy 2009. The new vintage does not possess quite the same depth as the '09, but it is a very

pure and classy middleweight, delivering scents of sweet cranberries, cherries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, fresh herbs and a nice touch of dried violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and beautifully transparent, with modest tannins, respectable depth and a long, tangy finish. Good juice. 2012-2018. **88.**

2010 Beaujolais “les Grandes Coasses”- Domaine Paul Durdilly

The 2010 les Grandes Coasses from Paul Durdilly is a lovely and quite classic bottle of Beaujolais. The fine bouquet delivers a mix of sweet cranberries, cherries, vinesmoke, lovely soil tones and a nice touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and intensely flavored, with tangy acids, a fine core of fruit and lovely grip on the long and complex finish. This should age quite well for its level. 2012-2018+. **89.**

2010 Beaujolais- Domaine Michel Guignier

Michel Guignier is a young grower in Morgon and his Beaujolais hails from vineyards just outside of the that village. It is all produced from forty year-old vines and Monsieur Guignier is in the process of converting these vineyards to organic viticultural principals. The 2010 is a lovely middleweight, offering up scents of black cherries, white pepper, woodsmoke and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and classy, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and fine length and grip on the suave and succulent finish. Good juice. 2012-2016+. **88.**

2010 Beaujolais “Cuvée l’Ancien” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Terres Dorées (J-P Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun is one of my favorite winemakers in all of France and I have a very healthy respect for how he has managed to go his own, traditional way and make a name for himself (with the help of his importers, of course) here in the states in an epoch where spoofulated wines were the darlings of so much of the wine press. Monsieur Brun’s Cuvée l’Ancien has been a barometer of old school Beaujolais for many years now, with its only hiccup coming when some of the production from a few vintages was bottled under artificial corks and quickly oxidized. But, other than this single episode, one cannot ask for a better every day Beaujolais and the 2010 is exemplary, offering up a deep and classic nose of cherries, cranberries, vinesmoke, a lovely and stylish base of soil and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and intensely flavored, with fine focus and balance, tangy acids and fine grip on the long and pure finish. A lovely bottle in the making. 2012-2020. **89.**

2010 Beaujolais “Cuvée Traditionelle- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2010 Cuvée Traditionelle from Pierre-Marie Chermette is a stunning young bottle of Beaujolais, jumping from the glass in a very complex and classy aromatic mélange of cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, beautiful soil tones, a touch of blood orange, soil and rose petals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and sappy at the core, with beautiful balance, modest tannins and a very long, complex and flawlessly focused finish. Just a beautiful vintage for this consistently excellent wine. 2012-2025+. **91+.**

2010 Beaujolais “Coeur de Vendanges”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

Apparently Pierre-Marie Chermette has been making this bottling for many, many years, but the 2010 was the first time that I can recall having crossed paths with the wine. It is a deep, pure and absolutely superb young bottle of Beaujolais, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet cranberries, charred wood, a touch of gamebird, autumnal overtones and a lovely base of granite. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very intensely flavored, with a sappy core of fruit, fine focus, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the still fairly reserved, tangy and soil-driven finish. Just a beautiful bottle in the making. 2013-2030. **92+.**

2010 Beaujolais “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Cédric Vincent

The 2010 Beaujolais Vieilles Vignes from Cédric Vincent is stellar, as it soars from the glass in a very pure and sappy blend of black cherries, sweet cranberry, woodsmoke, a touch of pepper, lovely soil tones and a fine topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and serious, with a superb core of fruit, a bit of tannin (in need of waiting out!), bright acids and superb length and grip on the soil-driven and impressively complex finish. This is a bottle of 2010 Beaujolais that really is going to demand a year or two in the cellar to blossom, but it will be a stunning middleweight once it comes into its own. A superb wine. 2014-2030. **91.**

1976 Beaujolais-Villages- Maison Louis Jadot

I tasted this surprisingly tasty bottle two years ago, but had misplaced the tasting note and did not come across it until just this past January. This bottle was brought to a luncheon with Jacques Lardière here in New York and really surprised all of us in attendance with just how tasty it was at age thirty-four! The lovely, roasted nose (1976 was a drought vintage) offers up scents of baked cherries and quince, bonfires, fresh herbs, lovely soil tones and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and still very well-balanced, with lovely length and complexity and impressive grip on the long finish. This is really a very, very tasty bottle of wine that shows no signs of cracking up any time soon! Is all Louis Jadot Beaujolais-Villages drunk too soon? 2010-2020. **88.**

St. Amour- Domaines Visited

Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)- Saint-Amour

I was happy to be able to squeeze in a day trip to visit the Barbet family at Domaine des Billards during my November-December 2010 visit to the Côte d'Or, and it was a beautiful way to finish up a long tasting trip to the region. Domaine des Billards is owned by the Barbet and Teissier families, ancestors of the founding Loron family who first developed this estate in the latter half of the 1700s. In addition to Domaine des Billards, the families also own at least two other Beaujolais estates- the Château de Fleurie and the Domaine de Moulin in Moulin-à-Vent. In addition to all of their activities running their own domaines, the Barbets also were responsible for many, many years for the winemaking, aging and bottling of the large scale Beaujolais-Villages bottling for Maison Louis Jadot, with the bottled wine sent north each spring to Beaune for final labeling and packaging. The father and son team of Xavier and Nicolas Barbet, who currently run Domaine des Billards, very graciously met us in St. Véran and showed us the vineyards of their three family estates in St. Amour, Fleurie and Moulin-à-Vent, before we settled back into their very comfortable home in St. Véran for some late lunch and a fine selection of older vintages. Domaine des Billards is clearly one of the very finest Cru Beaujolais producers in the firmament of the region today, with these St. Amours developing a beautiful red fruity and complex character with bottle age that might give the commune the moniker of the “Chambolle-Musigny of Cru Beaujolais”.

Domaine des Billards is comprised of twelve hectares of vineyards in St. Amour, and in general the estate tends to harvest on the late side and keeps yields quite conservative. The Barbets currently make three distinct cuvées at Domaine des Billards- their basic St. Amour bottling, a Cuvée Réserve and starting in the 2009, a Clos des Billards from a subsection of their vineyard. The Cuvée Réserve is made from a selection of old vines on the domaine's twelve hectares, with the wine completely destemmed so that it can be extracted a bit more and produce

a more structured and longer-lived version of the domaine's fine St. Amour. The estate has been doing this bottling since at least the 2003 vintage, but it is only produced in top vintages that have the underlying structure to support this approach and which will age long and gracefully. The Clos des Billards is produced from a specific section of the vineyard that has quite a unique terroir for the village, as this seven hectare section contains a very good vein of clay subsoil less than one meter down from the more sandy topsoil that is much more common in the cru. This base of clay gives the wines much more structural integrity than one commonly expects to find in Cru Beaujolais outside of the big three of Morgon, Moulin-à-Vent and Côte de Brouilly. The vines planted on this section of the estate are of various ages, but the Barbets take fruit only from the oldest vines (fifty to one hundred years of age) for inclusion in the Clos des Billards. While 2009 is the first official release of the Clos des Billards from the estate, the family has records that indicate that the old vines sections of this parcel used to be picked and vinified separately all the way back into the nineteenth century, when the wine was sold off in casks. The barrels from the old vines in the Clos des Billards sold at a premium back in the day.



The old vines in the Clos des Billards- note that the vines are not trained in the Goblet style.

Vinification for all of the estate's three bottlings at Domaine des Billards is done in large, old oak vats, with indigenous yeasts, and the wines are raised in a fifty-fifty combination of large old foudres and cement vats. I did not write down figures for either the Château de Fleurie nor the Domaine de Moulin, but I assume that both estates are a bit smaller in vineyard

expanse than Domaine des Billards. These are clearly some of the most pure, expressive and refined examples of Cru Beaujolais to be found in the region, and all three domaines clearly deserves to be more widely known amongst the Beaujolais cognoscenti. Rather than list each estate's wines in the regional section for that Cru, I have listed all of the wines here under the Domaine des Billards section and have listed the wines in the order that we tasted them over the course of our visit.

2009 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The 2009 Château de Fleurie had been bottled in September of 2010 (or only three months before I tasted it in early December of that year), but was still showing beautifully. This is a very pure and “cool” 2009, offering up a deep and sappy nose of black cherries, plums, violets, plenty of woodsmoke, a hint of pepper and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and shows off quite a bit of the vintage's structure, with ripe tannins, tangy acids and very fine length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. I would give this a year or two in the cellar to really let it come into its own. 2012-2030+. **92+**.

2009 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

The 2009 Domaine des Billards regular bottling is really a beauty and one of my favorite examples that I have tasted from this vintage. Out of the blocks, it is quite black fruity in this vintage. The very deep and serious nose wafts from the glass in a classy mélange of black cherries, a hint of cassis, cherry skins, espresso, a very complex soil signature and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and suave on the attack, with perfect focus and balance, a great core of fruit, a fair bit of ripe tannin, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This should age beautifully and I will not plan on broaching a bottle for a good decade out from the vintage (despite the fact that it will drink well from early on), as it should age very much along the lines of the great 1989. There is simply too much potential here to be wasting bottles early on! 2012-2035. **94**.

2009 Saint-Amour “Cuvée Réserve”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

The Cuvée Réserve is a special selection of more structured lots of the Domaine des Billards that the Barbets feel will age the best in top vintages, with the wine then kept back in the cellars in bottle for four or five years for additional bottle age prior to being released. It is only two-thirds destemmed, in contrast to complete destemming for the regular bottling. The 2009 Cuvée Réserve shows stunning potential, delivering a beautiful and very vibrant bouquet of sappy black cherries, pomegranate, a very complex base of soil tones, vinesmoke, violets and a bit of stoniness that is not found in the regular St. Amour bottling. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a superb core of fruit, firm, but ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is a stunning wine in the making. 2016-2050. **95**.

2009 Saint-Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

The Clos des Billards is a special, old vine bottling of this great estate, produced from the filet section of the vineyard. My notes do not indicate when it has been produced before, and I suspect that the 2009 vintage is the first where this has been done, as I have not tasted any previous vintages of the Clos des Billards. This is a deep, structured and very pure example of the vintage, offering up a beautiful and youthful bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of blood orange, dark chocolate, deep soil tones, woodsmoke and a nice dollop of juniper berries in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and structured much more like a young bottle of Morgon than a young St. Amour, with a beautiful core of sappy fruit, ripe, firm

tannins and excellent focus and balance on the very long, tangy and primary finish. This will be a great, great example of the vintage. 2016-2050. **95+**.

2008 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine de Moulin

I very much like the style and shape of the 2008 Moulin-à-Vent from Domaine de Moulin, but perhaps it is suffering just a bit from having to follow in the shadows of the '09 Cuvée Réserve and Clos des Billards bottlings. The nose is deep, pure and black fruity, offering up scents of dark berries, black currants, woodsmoke, lovely, dark soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure, with good mid-palate depth, fine-grained tannins and lovely length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. This could use a couple of years bottle age to fully blossom, but as I tasted it a bit more than a year ago, it will probably start to drink very well by this summer. 2012-2030. **89+**.

2005 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The 2005 Château de Fleurie is a very stylish example of the vintage, with enough inherent structure to carry it for a couple of decades and still a bit of backend tannin that suggests a bit more bottle age would not go amiss. The very lovely nose jumps from the glass in a classy mélange of black cherries, pomegranate, currant leaf, chocolate, soil and vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure at the core, with moderate tannins, good acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. The 2005 Château de Fleurie is not quite as thoroughly ripe as the 2009, and will be at its best once the tannins fully drop from sight on the backend. 2012-2030. **90+**.

2005 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

The 2005 Domaine des Billards is outstanding and one of my favorite crus of the vintage. I dearly wish I had gotten my act together when this wine was in the market and put a box away in my cellar, as the wine is getting better and better with each time I taste it. The bouquet is deep, very pure and expressive, delivering a beautiful and sappy blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, a great base of soil and a touch of coffee bean. This is really starting to segue in the direction of the Chambolle profile of top flight St. Amour. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, structured and firmly closed at the present time, with a rock solid core of fruit, moderate tannins, vibrant acidity and outstanding length and grip on the focused and shut down finish. Do not touch a bottle of this great wine for another couple of years, as it is coiled to spring and is going to be something special when it fully blossoms! 2014-2035+. **94**.

2005 Saint-Amour “Cuvée Réserve”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

This is the late release or reserve cuvée from Domaine des Billards, but it does not show this designation anywhere on the label that I could see- something that might be a good idea for the release of the 2009 down the road. The wine is flat out splendid, offering up a beautifully complex and pure mélange of black cherries, pomegranate, beautiful soil tones, a hint of chocolate, incipient notes of gamebird and a bit of rose petal in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with modest tannins, lovely tangy acids, superb complexity and outstanding length and grip on the utterly suave and classy finish. This really shows the affinity of St. Amour to Chambolle-Musigny! I would be inclined still to give this great wine a few more years in the cellar to allow it to fully blossom, as it should continue to drink beautifully for decades. 2014-2040. **95**.

2005 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine de Moulin

The 2005 Moulin-à-Vent from Domaine de Moulin is a superb example of the vintage that is also quite closed at the present time and in need of a bit of further cellaring. The deep, complex and focused nose offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, a touch of mustard seed,

espresso, dried violets and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with firm tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. A very classic example of the vintage and the cru, I would tuck this lovely wine away for another four or five years. 2016-2040. **93.**

2000 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

As a couple of recent bottles have shown, the 2000 vintage is really drinking beautifully for some of the more structured and classic bottlings, and the '00 Château de Fleurie is a lovely example of how these wines have now reached their zeniths and are at the peaks of their powers. The deep and mature nose offers up an autumnal blend of roasted cherries, game, coffee, fresh bay leaf, herb tones, woodsmoke and fallen leaves. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and quite complex, with very good mid-palate depth, tangy acids, melting tannins and excellent length and grip. A lovely example of the vintage that firmly underscores just how enjoyable a fine cru can be with a decade's worth of bottle age. 2010-2025. **92.**



Messieurs Barbet- Père et Fils of Domaine des Billards in the vineyards of St. Amour.

1989 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

I tasted this wine back in the spring of 2010, not long after it had been shipped from France to the US. Crossing paths with a bottle in Beaujolais at the end of 2010 clearly showed that I should have let this wine settle in a bit longer after its trans-Atlantic trip, as this most

recent bottle was even more stunning than the last! This is a great bottle of St. Amour that offers up a very pure and complex nose of red cherries, blood orange, beautifully complex minerality, fresh herb tones, a gentle smokiness and a fine dollop of coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure, with lovely transparency, a magical core of sappy red fruit, superb focus and brightness and a very long, complex and bouncy finish. Just a beautiful bottle from one of the best vintages in Beaujolais in my lifetime, the 1989 Domaine des Billards still has decades of life left ahead of it. 2010-2030+. **95.**

1969 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine de Moulin (375 ml.)

As Xavier Barbet commented when he came up from his cellar with this half bottle, “this will be an experiment, but we just might get lucky that this vintage’s fine character will prove a match for a half bottle.” The wine turned out to be absolutely stunning and fresh as could be for a forty-one year-old half bottle, offering up a deep and beautiful nose of cherries, a touch of orange peel, *sous bois*, bonfires, a bit of fresh oregano and a lovely base of clay and granite soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tangy, with an autumnal personality, lovely intensity of flavor and a very long, complex and still perfectly balanced finish. A lovely wine still at its apogee and showing no signs of slowing down any time soon. 2010-2025. **93.**

Chiroubles

2010 Chiroubles- Domaine de la Chapelle des Bois

The 2010 Chiroubles from Domaine de la Chapelle des Bois is really a very lovely example of both the vintage and the commune, as it offers up a classic and very stylish nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of complex soil nuances and a touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and nicely reserved (this sample had only been bottled a couple of weeks before I tasted it, so there may well be a bit more early succulence to it than was apparent when I tried it in the late spring of 2011), with a good core of fruit and very good length and grip on the tangy and soil-driven finish. A lovely, old school bottle of Chiroubles. 2012-2020. **88+.**

2006 Chiroubles- Domaine du Cret de Ruyère (Jean-Luc Gauthier)

Jean-Luc Gauthier is a terrific producer who I had not been introduced to before and who definitely marches to the beat of his own drummer. He makes his wines to age and does not release them until they have had at least a good handful of years in the cellar, so that the 2006 and 2005 Chiroubles are amongst his current releases. The 2006 is a superb, full-bodied and very complex wine that is now entering its apogee of maturity, as it offers up a classy and autumnal nose of backed cherries, gamebirds, coffee, woodsmoke and the first signs of *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with still a touch of remaining tannin, lovely focus and grip and a long, tangy and tertiary finish. This is a robust version of Chiroubles that is really a superb bottle for drinking over the next eight to ten years. 2012-2020+. **93.**

2005 Chiroubles “Cuvée des Anges”- Domaine du Cret de Ruyère (Jean-Luc Gauthier)

The 2005 Cuvée des Anges does not actually state that it is Chiroubles on the label, as the wine was denied the appellation certification from the board because it lacked *typicité* as Chiroubles. Perhaps Monsieur Gauthier should have used the banana bubble gum yeast so popular with some of the more famous big firms to ensure that the wine showed *typicité*? In any case, the 2005 “Cuvée des Anges” is the exact same wine as the above- just from the previous year- and I am not really sure what *Les Officials* saw to be a problem with this lovely wine. The nose is a complex and still quite youthful blend of dark berries, a touch of balsam bough, coffee

grounds, woodsmoke, a nice touch of spice and a superb base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again quite tertiary, with a lovely core of fruit, a bit of firm tannin and excellent length and grip on the broad-shouldered and complex finish. I would still give this a couple more years in the cellar to fully blossom, but it is a superb wine. 2014-2035. **91+**.

Juliéna

2010 Juliéna- Domaine du Clos du Fief (Michel Tête)

The 2010 Juliéna from Michel Tête is a lovely and very classic bottle in the making, offering up a young and vibrant nose of cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of nuttiness, lovely soil tones and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and quite soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is a lovely middleweight. 2012-2020. **89**.

2010 Juliéna- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2010 Juliéna from Joseph Drouhin is a very pretty and youthfully “crunchy” example of the vintage. The entire Drouhin lineup in 2010 is much more a set of medium-full and transparent crus, with a very classic shape and style that do not deliver the same almost bottomless depth as one found in the 2009s here. The 2010 Juliéna offers up a very pretty nose of cherries, sweet cranberries, fresh herb tones, granite and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and intensely flavored, with lovely focus and balance, good acids and just a touch of tannin perking up the long and complex finish. Just a very classic bottle of Juliéna in the making. 2012-2025. **89**.

2009 Juliéna- Domaine du Clos du Fief (Michel Tête)

In contrast to the quite classic, more middleweight style of the 2010, the 2009 Juliéna from Michel Tête is very much a child of its vintage and a very ripe and powerful young example of this cru. To my palate, the ripeness is almost too much of a good thing- pushing the envelope to the boundary of overripeness- but others may like this style more than I do and should add several more points to my score. The nose is very deep, ripe and expressive, jumping from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, chocolate, fresh herb tones, game and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and chocolaty, with an opulent core of fruit, impressive depth and complexity and just a touch of apricot perking up the long, plush and palate staining finish. This is a most impressive bottle of Juliéna, but my gut instinct is that it will require drinking up in the near-term. 2011-2013+? **89**.

2005 Juliéna- Domaine du Clos du Fief (Michel Tête)

I had expected a bit more from this showing of the 2005 Juliéna from Michel Tête, but this particular bottle was a bit plagued by volatile acidity and which kept its score down a bit. The nose is a deep, complex and still quite youthful blend of cherries, cranberries, peanuts, a lovely base of complex soil tones and fresh herbs- along with the aforementioned VA. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and tangy, with a very solid core of fruit still in reserve, fine focus and very good length and grip on the complex and still tight finish. This wine still needs a few more years in the cellar to fully blossom, but I hope that the VA here is simply a single off bottle, rather than emblematic of how the wine as a whole is evolving, as this wine had such superb potential out of the blocks. 2014-2030+? **88+?**

Moulin-à-Vent- Domaines Visited

Domaine des Moriers (François de Nicolay)

Domaine des Moriers is a small vineyard that was purchased by François de Nicolay of the well-know Savigny-lès-Beaune estate of Chandon de Briailles back in 2005. The vineyard is tiny, with annual production only sufficient to make fifteen hundred bottles each vintage (or one hundred and twenty-five cases), so this has to be one of the smallest scale wines in all of Beaujolais. I have never seen any bottles available for sale except at the lovely wine shop on the property at Chandon de Briailles, but as François de Nicolay was a wine merchant in Paris for several years, I have to assume that his Domaine des Moriers wines were available there in the first few vintages. The vineyard, which lies right along the border of Fleurie and Moulin-à-Vent, is planted with seventy-five year-old vines. The first vintage produced was the 2005 (not a bad vintage to start with I quipped to Monsieur de Nicolay). The vineyard has now been run on biodynamique principals since 2006 and is already certified organic. The wine is fermented in open top cement tanks and aged in a combination of thirty percent old Burgundy barrels from Chandon de Briailles and seventy percent in stainless steel tanks. It is really a terrific example of Moulin-à-Vent that I had been hearing about for a few years now, but had never had an opportunity to taste until my past November trip to Burgundy, where François kindly opened the first five vintages for me to sample. Maybe one day those of us on this side of the Atlantic may be lucky enough to see a little of this wine find its way to the states.

2009 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Moriers

At 13.5 percent alcohol, the 2009 Domaine des Moriers is certainly the ripest vintage that François de Nicolay has produced to date from this lovely, jewel of a vineyard in Moulin-à-Vent. The wine offers up a really refined nose of black cherries, a touch of cranberry, granite, woodsmoke and a nice touch of bitter chocolate in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a lovely sense of reserve, modest tannins and great length and grip on the tangy and still fairly primary finish. This is a very shapely example of the buxom 2009 vintage and three or four years of cellaring should be richly rewarded. Good juice. 2015-2035. **92+**.

2008 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Moriers

The 2008 Domaines des Moriers is as reserved as the 2009, but without the same mid-palate density to allow for a bit of pleasurable sipping during its adolescence and really is demanding a few years in the cellar. The closed and reticent bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, coffee bean, peppercorn and a topnote of incipient bonfire. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and fairly racy, with a fairly modest core, but with lovely focus and balance on the long, tangy and still quite closed finish. This will be a lovely middleweight with a couple more years of bottle age, but I suspect that it will be one of those Cru Beaujolais vintages which presents a pretty small window of peak drinkability. 2013-2020+? **87+**.

2007 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Moriers

The 2007 Moulin-à-Vent from Domaine des Moriers shows the faintest whiff of reduction and is really best if decanted, but once the wine blossoms with a few minutes air, it is a really lovely example of the vintage. 2007s are not particularly big wines- even by Cru Beaujolais standards- but the best wines offer up lovely intensity of flavor and admirable complexity on both the nose and palate. These qualities the 2007 Domaine des Moriers supplies in abundance, as it offers up a fine bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberry, coffee, herb tones, a

lovely base of soil and a nice dollop of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and complex, with a surprisingly deep core of fruit, lovely focus and a long, perfectly balanced finish. Just a delicious bottle for current consumption, and with the balance to also age quite gracefully. Fine juice. 2011-2030. **92.**

2006 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Moriers

Like so many top examples of the 2006 vintage, the '06 Domaine des Moriers is drinking beautifully right now and is at its apogee. The deep, pure and absolutely classic nose jumps from the glass in a blend of dark berries, black cherries, charred wood, a touch of gamebird, fresh herbs, woodsmoke and very stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and impressively light on its feet, with melting tannins and brilliant length and grip on the very refined finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Moulin-à-Vent. 2011-2030+. **93+.**

2005 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Moriers

The first vintage for François de Nicolay at the Domaine des Moriers was an historic year and this wine is simply stunning. This is a much more powerful vintage than any of the subsequent ones of François' period of ownership until one gets to the 2009, but the 2005 strikes me as a decidedly more complete wine than the very good 2009. The deep, pure and very intense nose soars from the glass in a blaze of cassis, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, espresso, gamebirds, dark soil tones and a just hint of the more autumnal elements that will come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerfully built for Beaujolais, with a superb core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long and still moderately tannic finish. It is still very early days for this wine, and while it is already a delicious glass of Moulin-à-Vent, I would be inclined to leave it alone in the cellar a few more years and allow its tertiary layers of complexity to develop. It has the structure and balance to be a very long-lived bottle of Moulin-à-Vent. A dynamite bottle. 2011-2050. **95.**

Moulin-à-Vent

2010 Moulin-à-Vent “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Diochon

I did not taste the 2009 version of this consistently excellent wine, but the 2010 is clearly the finest rendition I have had since the stunning 2005 vintage. I had worried that the estate was perhaps slipping a bit, as I had heard that Monsieur Diochon had been having difficulties returning to full health after an automobile accident a few years ago, but at least based on the stunning 2010 bottling, his health is on the mend. The deep and truly beautiful nose soars from the glass in a sappy and very pure bouquet of cassis, black cherries, currant leaf, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a lovely topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very sappy at the core, with modest tannins, tangy acids and simply great length and grip on the very transparent and complex finish. This is a brilliant vintage of Diochon V.V. 2012-2025+. **94.**

2010 Moulin-à-Vent- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2010 Moulin-à-Vent from Joseph Drouhin is excellent- quite classically cut and shaped and it will be a lovely wine with a bit of bottle age. The youthfully complex and very pure nose offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, a touch of bitter chocolate, woodsmoke, a hint of pepper, fresh herbs and a lovely base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and sappy at the core, with beautifully balance, a fair bit of tannin, bright acids, and very impressive grip on the long, nuanced and intensely flavored finish. This is not as powerful by any means as the 2009, but it is a very focused and soil-driven Moulin-à-Vent that will age superbly well. 2015-2040. **93+.**

2010 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun's 2010 Moulin-à-Vent is a great wine in the making, soaring from the glass in a deep, pure and still quite primary mélange of red and black cherries, nutskins, woodsmoke, a complex base of dark soil tones, fresh herbs and a bit of coffee bean. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the tangy finish. This is still young days for this outstanding Moulin-à-Vent and I would give this at least three or four years to really start to blossom. It should be at its best around its tenth birthday and will keep far beyond that point. 2015-2035. **93+**.



The famed Moulin-à-Vent in the distance- overlooking the vines of the appellation on a summer afternoon.

2010 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Koches”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2010 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Koches” from Domaine du Vissoux is a beautiful wine in the making, offering up a deep and very suave nose of dark berries, cassis, tobacco smoke, black soil tones, a touch of licorice, nutskins and a deft framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a great core of fruit, superb soil signature, moderate tannins and a very long, tangy and palate-staining finish. This is a quintessential example of a soil-driven wine of superb intensity of flavor and no undue weight. A beautiful bottle of young Moulin-à-Vent! 2016-2040+. **94+**.

2009 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos du Grand Carquelin”- Château des Jacques

All of the single vineyard bottlings from Château des Jacques were raised in eighty percent new oak in 2009, which is a step down from the one hundred percent that had been used in the recent past. The diminution in the new wood should make these superb wines even better. The 2009 Clos du Grand Carquelin” is a truly superb wine in the making offering up a deep and very pure nose of cassis, black cherries, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, dark soil and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and nascently complex, with a sappy core of fruit, firm tannins and great length and grip on the impressively soil-driven and intense finish. This is superb and a step up from the very good '09 Morgon bottlings from Château des Jacques. 2016-2040+. **94.**

2009 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos de la Roche”- Château des Jacques

The 2009 Clos de la Roche from Château des Jacques is stellar and one of the best young 2009s I have tasted. The superb nose soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, complex, black soil tones, woodsmoke and cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very urgent on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, great focus and balance, tangy acids, ripe, but, firm tannins and stunning length and grip on the very young and very classic finish. This will be a great, great wine and one of the longest lived examples of the vintage. 2016-2050+. **95.**

2009 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos de Rocheegrès”- Château des Jacques

The 2009 Clos de Rocheegrès” from Château des Jacques is another absolute classic in the making. The very refined and pure nose offers up a sappy mélange of black cherries, dark berries, fresh herbs, bitter chocolate, woodsmoke, cedar and incipient notes of gamebirds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid mid-palate, refined, ripe tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very, very long and youthful finish. There is great backend drive from the underlying *terroir* here that will make this wine very special in the fullness of time. 2016-2050. **94+.**

2007 Moulin-à-Vent- Château des Jacques

It has been eighteen months since I last crossed paths with a bottle of the 2007 “straight” Moulin-à-Vent from Château des Jacques and the wine has come into its own in marvelous fashion. The deep and complex nose offers up scents of dark berries, sweet cranberry, a touch of grilled meat, vinesmoke, a complex base of soil and a deft touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full and very much cut from the structural cloth of the 2007 vintage, but with excellent intensity of flavor, impressive complexity and great length and grip on the modestly tannic and quite tangy finish. This is a superb middleweight that is starting to really drink at its plateau, but will have no difficulties cruising along for a decade or more in bottle. It is really an impressive “off vintage” effort! 2012-2025+. **90.**

2007 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos de Rocheegrès”- Château des Jacques

The 2007 Clos de Rocheegrès from Château des Jacques is one of the '07 bottlings that I had not tasted previously and I was very impressed with this wine. This is much more black fruity in aromatic profile than the regular bottling of Moulin-à-Vent in this vintage, and is a bit less evolved on both the nose and palate. The excellent bouquet offers up scents of dark berries, cassis, a touch of cigar ash, deep, dark soil tones, a bit of gamebird, fresh thyme and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively plush for an '07, with lovely focus and delineation, excellent mid-palate depth, moderate, well-measured tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and soil-driven finish. This has more stuffing to buffer the vintage's

tannins and acids, and consequently, even though it is a touch less evolved than the regular '07 Moulin-à-Vent, it is drinking every bit as well. This should prove to be one of the longest-lived wines of the vintage. 2012-2035. **92.**

2006 Moulin-à-Vent “Champ de Cour”- Château des Jacques

The 2006 Moulin-à-Vent “Champ de Cour” from Château des Jacques was a bit bound up in its structure and pepper when I last had it a year and a half ago, but the wine is blossoming beautifully and it is now pretty clear that I underrated this lovely wine a bit back then. The deep, complex and quite vibrant nose offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, an exotic touch of menthol, beautiful soil tones that are just starting to get a bit autumnal, grilled meat, a touch of acorn and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly structured, with a fine core of dark fruit, good focus and grip, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the soil-driven and still fairly chewy finish. This is a bit more “nobly rustic” in style than the '06 Clos de Grand Carquelin, and consequently, it is not quite as forgiving in its adolescence than that lovely wine. Under the still slightly stern veneer is a very good bottle in the making, but this needs more time in the cellar to unwind, as it is still showing a bit of uncovered wood tannin on the backend that need to be absorbed. It will be superb with time, but this needs to be tucked away another four or five years before really having at it in earnest. 2017-2040. **91.**

2006 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos de Grand Carquelin”- Château des Jacques

The 2006 Clos de Grand Carquelin is a simply stunning example of the vintage, as in the eighteen months since I last tasted this wine it has really blossomed. The deep, complex and superb nose soars from the glass in a mélange of cassis, dark berries, a bit of grilled game, black tea, Moulin-à-Vent’s dark soil tones, woodsmoke, incipient *sous bois* and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, a broad, generous attack, still a bit of well-integrated tannins to resolve and outstanding complexity on the very long and classy finish. The wine closes with a note of bitter chocolate that augurs very well for further development. I would still give it a couple more years to fully soften up its tannins and then drink it over the ensuing several decades, as this will be a long-distance runner. The 2006 Beaujolais vintage has produced a lot of truly classic wines and the Clos de Grand Carquelin from Château des Jacques certainly deserves to be ranked right up there at the head of the class. Just a classic example of Moulin-à-Vent. 2014-2045. **93+.**

Fleurie- Domaines Visited

Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

Alain Coudert of Clos de la Roilette was as jovial and gracious a host as he always is the last time I stopped by the domaine in mid-July of last year. The domaine was the last stop of the day and I was already running pretty late, as the day had started out with an hour long traffic jam on the A6 (this being the day after Bastille Day and the roads had plenty of vacationers headed south to the sun), but Monsieur Coudert kindly offered to call ahead to the restaurant I was to have dinner at that evening- Auberge de Cep- and let Madame Chagny know that I was going to be quite late. With that issue apparently settled (the frosty greeting from Madame Chagny ninety minutes later was probably indicative that it was not quite as settled as it seemed to be at the time!), I hunkered down for a superb tasting of this outstanding estate’s recent vintages and a few older morsels. Given how consistently excellent Monsieur Coudert’s wines have been for as long as I have been familiar with this historic estate, it is pretty hard to say that he has been on a hot streak of late, but the last several vintages here have all

been absolute exemplars of their respective years, and I am very content to have a goodly pile of Clos de la Roilette in my own cellar these days. As they age, these wines get very silky and show great purity and it is my distinct opinion that it is a waste to drink them in their youth. There is now a juicy and classy example of Brouilly produced by Monsieur Coudert and which is sold under the Domaine Coudert label, which hails from a one hectare parcel of vines that had been owned by Alain's grandfather and came to the domaine in the 2006 vintage. Since the 1998 vintage, the domaine also has been producing a Fleurie under the Domaine Coudert label as well, which is labeled as Cuvée Christal and meant to be drunk younger than the two different bottlings under the Clos de la Roilette label. The Cuvée Christal is made primarily from two hectares of vines that the domaine owns closer to the center of the appellation. There is also now a third Clos de la Roilette bottling: Cuvée Griffé du Marquis, which is aged in two wine Burgundy barrels and was quite stunning in the 2009 vintage.

As folks may remember from the short profile of the domaine in Issue Eight, Clos de la Roilette is an estate whose nine of its thirteen hectares lie on the Fleurie-Moulin-à-Vent border and which prior to the adoption of the Appellation Contrôlée system in the region in the 1920s, had been sold by the previous owner of the estate, Monsieur Crozet, as Moulin-à-Vent. He was apoplectic at losing the right to sell his wine as Moulin-à-Vent and he refused to put Fleurie on his labels from that day forward, instead marketed the wine as Clos de la Roilette. The terroir here is granitic and has quite a bit more clay and manganese in its subsoil than is the case in most of the appellation of Fleurie, and this is what gives the wine its added structural integrity and potential for longevity much more akin to the wines of neighboring Moulin-à-Vent. Alain Coudert's father, Fernand, eventually purchased the property in 1967 (which had fallen into neglect by the subsequent generation of the Crozets), replanting the derelict vineyards and quickly resurrecting the reputation of the estate. The appellation "Fleurie" can now be found on the labels of the Clos de la Roilette bottlings (albeit in pretty small typeface), but the wines certainly are stylistically more a synthesis of Moulin-à-Vent and Fleurie than they are clearly emblematic of one cru or the other. The wines age beautifully- in fact much longer than their US importer's website suggests (only five to ten years- come on guys!), and I have little doubt that these are wines that will cruise along beautifully for thirty to forty years in a top vintage. Certainly the 1996 Clos de la Roilette that I sampled on this trip in July of 2011 was still at its absolute apogee at age fifteen and showed all likelihood of continuing on at its apogee for another fifteen years or more! The Clos de la Roilette is the greatest state that I am familiar with in the commune of Fleurie and should be a mandatory purchase of very lover of Beaujolais.

2010 Brouilly- Domaine Coudert

This was the first time I had tasted a Brouilly from Monsieur Coudert and the 2010 acquitted itself splendidly. The deep, ripe and sappy nose offers up a fine mélange of black cherries, plums, a touch of chocolate, plenty of violets and a discreet base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy, with an easy-going and jovial personality, sound acids and very good length and grip on the wide open finish. This is clearly made to be drunk in its exuberant youth. 2012-2016+. **88.**

2010 Fleurie "Cuvée Christal"- Domaine Coudert

The 2010 Cuvée Christal is also drinking very well indeed right out of the blocks, but it shows a bit more profound base of *terroir* than the very good 2010 Brouilly. The nose is deep, complex and again, quite sappy in its mix of dark berries, black cherries, bitter chocolate, a touch

of balsam bough and a really lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and succulent on the attack, with fine mid-palate depth, a nice sense of reserve on the backend and very good grip and focus on the long and bouncy finish. This is very high class juice and not far off the quality of the Clos de la Roilette itself! 2012-2030. **92.**

2010 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2010 Clos de la Roilette is a fine follow-up to the deep, pure and utterly classic 2009. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a classy blend of black cherries, cassis, dark chocolate, violets, a complex base of soil and a nice touch of balsam boughs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more structured than the Cuvée Christal, with a sappy core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance and a nice touch of ripe tannin perking up the long and very refined finish. This is just a beautiful bottle of Beaujolais in the making. 2013-2040. **93+.**

2010 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2010 Cuvée Tardive bottling from Clos de la Roilette is also absolutely stunning, as it offers up superb depth of fruit and a very precise interpretation of its underlying *terroir*. This is made from two parcels of eighty year-old vines and they seem to deliver the goods in every vintage since it was first produced in 1995. The great nose of the 2010 delivers a beautiful and youthful mélange of cassis, black cherries, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, balsam boughs, violets and a brilliantly complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary, with a sappy core of pure fruit, moderate, ripe tannins, tangy acids and superb length and grip on the nascently complex and beautifully focused finish. This does not have quite the same intensity as the brilliant 2009, but this is a great bottle in the making. 2016-2045+. **94+.**

2009 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2009 Clos de la Roilette was showing very well at the time of my visit in July of 2011, but it was a bit more closed down than it had been a year ago and will probably do very well if left alone in the cellar for another four or five years. The nose is deep, complex and quite sappy in its mélange of roasted black cherries and plums, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, an incipient touch of chipotle pepper and a beautiful base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very sappy at the core, with stunning freshness for the vintage, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the pure and palate-staining finish. While this has the raw materials to still drink very well right now, it is going into a period of adolescent hibernation and it would really behoove one to wait on this wine a few more years, as it will be so much better to drink when it fully blossoms. It has closed down more than I initially anticipated and it is really a waste to be drinking bottles of this great wine right now! 2016-2040. **94+.**

2009 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2009 Cuvée Tardive is also a bit more closed than it was a year ago, but its superb quality remains very easy to see. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of eucalyptus, beautifully complex soil tones and a topnote of fresh bay leaf. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, very pure and bottomless, with a sappy core of fruit, beautiful focus and balance, ripe, fairly substantial tannins (particularly for a Cru Beaujolais) and stunning length and grip on the youthful and very sappy finish. This is going to be a great wine, but I would not touch a bottle for at least another five years! 2017-2050. **96.**

2009 Fleurie “Cuvée Griffé du Marquis”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The Cuvée Griffé du Marquis is a new bottling from Monsieur Coudert, that I believe was first produced in the 2009 vintage. This is a beautiful wine, offering up a deep and ripe nose

of black cherries, plums, chocolate, balsam bough, a beautiful base of dark soil tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovely balance and focus, ripe, suave tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very classy finish. Interestingly, this is less reserved today than 2009 Cuvée Tardive. A lovely wine that it is a pity does not find its way to the US market. 2014-2040. **94+**.

2008 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

This was the first time I had crossed paths with the 2008 Cuvée Tardive and I wonder if its setting (following hard on the heels of the superb 2010s and 2009s here) in our lineup made it less easy to appreciate. I had certainly liked the 2008 regular bottling of Clos de la Roilette the last time I tasted it, but the '08 Cuvée Tardive was having tough sledding during my July visit. The nose is deep, youthful and still tightly wound, offering up a very youthful blend of black cherries, cranberries, fresh herb tones, a touch of chipotle, vinesmoke and lovely soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and tightly-knit, with a very good core of fruit, a fair bit of tannin and very good length and grip on the primary and tangy finish. In reality, this wine is probably a bit better than my score, but in the context of all the vinous fireworks going off from the 2010 and 2009 vintages *chez* Coudert, this was just a notch or two below. 2014-2025+. **89+?**

2007 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2007 Cuvée Tardive was showing even better than the 2008 at the time of my visit, and given that it displayed even better potential than it did a couple of years ago, I would strongly suspect that the 2008 will also climb up a few points as it gets a chance to blossom with bottle age. In any event, the 2007 Cuvée Tardive offers up a really pure, blossoming and classic nose of cassis, coffee bean, a touch of new leather, woodsmoke and a beautifully complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and really starting to come into its own, with a fine core of fruit, still a touch of tannin and outstanding length and grip on the complex and refined finish. I would still plan to leave the 2007 Cuvée Tardive in the cellar for a couple more years, as there is another layer of complexity lurking just below the surface. 2014-2030+. **91.**

2002 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

This bottle was plucked off the wine list at Auberge du Cep in July (probably increasing Madame Chagnys' irritation with me, after arriving ninety minutes late for my reservation because of a tasting *chez* Coudert!) and was showing beautifully. The deep, complex and *à point* nose jumps from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, new leather, bitter chocolate, incipient notes of black truffle, fine soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and at its apogee, with just a touch of remaining tannin, lovely acids and very good grip on the long and suave finish. This was the highlight of my dinner at Auberge du Cep this time, as the kitchen was quite adroit at showing its displeasure with my late arrival! 2012-2025. **91.**

2001 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2001 Cuvée Tardive was really drinking beautifully at the time of my visit to the domaine, soaring from the glass in a fantastic mélange of dark berries, black cherries, just a touch of leather, wonderfully complex soil tones, orange rind and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very refined, with a very good core of fruit, tangy acids, fine focus and still a fair bit of tannin remaining on the very long and classy finish. Amazingly, at ten years of age, this still could do with a couple more years of cellaring! A lovely, lovely wine. 2014-2035. **93+**.

1996 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 1996 Clos de la Roilette was a beautiful example of just how well the “regular” bottling of this wine can age, as at age fifteen, the wine is fully at its zenith of peak drinkability and yet shows no signs of declining any time soon. The deep, complex and really superb nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, dark berries, new leather, a touch of coffee bean, fresh bay leaf, woodsmoke and the always present and complex signature of the Clos de la Roilette’s dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully focused, with good mid-palate depth, tangy acids and exceptional balance on the very long, silky and very elegant finish. This is a pretty ringing endorsement for letting all the Clos de la Roilette bottlings rest comfortably in the cellar for an extended period of time, as more recent vintages such as the 2005, 2009 and 2010 are certainly going to be even longer-lived than this beautiful 1996. A lovely wine with years and years of life still ahead of it! 2012-2025+. **93.**



Fleurie

2010 Fleurie “Cuvée Bel Air”- Domaine de la Chapelle des Bois

The 2010 Cuvée Bel Air from Domaine de la Chapelle des Bois is their regular bottling of Fleurie and it is quite lovely in 2010. The very classic nose offers up a pretty and quite sappy aromatic blend of red and black cherries, a touch of dark chocolate, a lovely base of soil, vinesmoke and a lovely topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite

vibrant, with a fine core of fruit, tangy acids, no signs of tannin and really lovely length and grip on the focused and quite classy finish. A lovely bottle of Fleurie. 2012-2020+. **90.**

2010 Fleurie- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2010 Drouhin Fleurie is another quite youthful and promising example of the vintage. The very classy nose delivers a primary blend of cherries, red berries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, fresh thyme and a distinctive topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and tightly-knit, with fine mid-palate depth, superb transparency and a very long, surprisingly structured finish. Most Fleuries tend to start out life a bit more succulent than the 2010 from Maison Drouhin, but the structure here is a harbinger of very good things to come with a bit of bottle age for this wine. 2013-2030. **90+.**

2010 Fleurie- Domaine de la Grand Coeur (Jean-Louis Dutraive)

Jean-Louis Dutraive is a young grower who has only recently begun producing wines from his eight hectare monopole vineyard of the Clos de la Grand Coeur in Fleurie. Amongst his *stages* prior to starting out in Fleurie was a season with Christophe Roumier in Chambolle-Musigny. Christophe still supplies the older Burgundy barrels that Jean-Louis uses for the *elevage* of much of his wine. The 2010 Fleurie is a lovely and very exotic wine, which was raised in two-thirds old Roumier barrels and one-third in old *foudres*. The nose is deep and very spicy in its complex mélange of dark berries, bonfires, white pepper, gamebirds and a potpourri of spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and built to age well, with a tangy core of fruit, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the long, tangy and peppery finish. This is a far cry from classic Fleurie, but I really like the complexity and spicy personality of this wine. Impressive. 2012-2025+. **92.**

2010 Fleurie “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Grand Coeur (Jean-Louis Dutraive)

The old vine bottling from Jean-Louis Dutraive hails from a parcel of sixty to seventy year-old vines in the Clos de la Grand Coeur, with the wine being raised entirely in older Roumier barrels. The nose on the 2010 is deep, pure and sappy, with a great mix of red and black cherries, just a touch of dark berry, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, beautiful soil tones and a bit of white pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite structured, with a pure and sappy core, a touch of firm tannin to resolve and excellent length and nascent complexity on the focused and tangy finish. This will need a couple of years to fully come into its own and should really be a very classy bottle with a bit of cellaring. 2014-2035+. **93+.**

2010 Fleurie- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun's 2010 Fleurie is a deep and classic example of this lovely cru, jumping from the glass in a complex and classy blend of cherries, woodsmoke, coffee, a touch of white pepper and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and quite structured for Fleurie, with a fine core of fruit, sound acids, modest tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and classy finish. While this is already very tasty, it is still quite primary and I would be inclined to tuck this away in the cellar for a year or two and allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. A lovely bottle of Fleurie. 2013-2030. **91.**

2010 Fleurie- Domaine Julien Suinier

The 2010 Fleurie from Julien Suinier hails from one of the highest vineyards in the appellation, which was planted in the early 1960s and is now coming into a fine age. The wine is aged in old Burgundy barrels. The nose on the 2010 is superb, offering up a deep and very complex blend of red and black cherries, a mix of Asian spices, roses, nutskins and a faint whiff of vinesmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and sappy at the core, with superb focus, lovely complexity and a very long, modestly tannin and tangy finish. I love

the grip and balance on this wine, with its exotic note of spice really taking this up a level in terms of complexity. 2012-2020+. **93+**.

2010 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2010 Fleurie “Poncié” from Domaine du Vissoux is a stunning young wine, soaring from the glass in a very pure and perfectly balanced nose of black cherries, a touch of blueberry, vinesmoke, a complex base of soil, espresso, a touch of white pepper and a faint hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with lovey acids, modest tannins and laser-like focus on the utterly suave, soil-driven and tangy finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Fleurie in the making that I like even better than the riper and more powerful 2009 version. This will be a cellar treasure in four or five years, though it will provide very good drinking before that time. High class juice! 2014-2035+. **94.**

2010 Fleurie “les Garants”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2010 les Garants is a deeper and more soil-driven version of young Fleurie than the Poncié, but it shares the same stunning purity and precision on both the nose and palate. The excellent bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, violets, espresso, stony soil tones, vinesmoke, fresh herbs and a bit of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with great mid-palate depth, ripe tannins, superb focus and grip and a very, very long and tangy finish. This is another absolutely beautiful young bottle of Fleurie. 2017-2040+. **94.**

2009 Fleurie “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes de la Cadole”- Domaine de la Chapelle des Bois

The old vine, Cuvée de la Cadole from Domaine de la Chapelle des Bois is made from a parcel of eighty year-old vines, with 2009 being the first vintage where the estate separated out the old vines and made a special bottling. The nose is deep, complex and exceptional, jumping from the glass in a ripe blend of black cherries, pomegranate, roasted nuts, woodsmoke, fine soil tones and a nice touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely reserved in profile, with a serious core of fruit, fine focus and balance and a very long, modestly tannic finish. This will need a couple of years in the cellar to fully blossom, but it does an admirable job of avoiding the overripe elements of many 2009s and is really an excellent bottle in the making. A fine new addition to the firmament of top Cru Beaujolais. 2013-2030+. **93.**

2009 Fleurie “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Coeur

This wine was a recommendation of Madame Chagny at Auberge du Cep and I happily ordered the bottle hoping to recapture my place in her good graces. Alas, the wine was one of the more overripe examples of the 2009 vintage and when I abandoned this wine mid-bottle to order the 2002 Clos de la Roilette, I probably put the final nail in my coffin for gracious service in the future at this restaurant! In any case, the wine is very ripe on both the nose and palate, offering up scents of black cherries, a touch of pruniness, chocolate, a bit of venison and a nice touch of soil underneath. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core of fruit, and a long finish that displays good grip and a distinct touch of *sur maturité* and heat. Not my cup of tea. 2012-2018. **86.**

Régnié

2010 Régnié “Vallières”- Domaine Jean-Marc Burgaud

True to Monsieur Burgaud’s house style, his 2010 Régnié “Vallières” is a deep, structured and very age-worthy example of the appellation. The nose is very classy in its black

fruity mélange of cassis, black cherries, a touch of violet, espresso, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very soil-riven, with a fine core of fruit, a bit of ripe tannin and very good length and grip on the tangy and well-balanced finish. Serious Régnié that is structurally very much worthy of its cru status. 2013-2025+. **89+**.

2010 Régnié- Domaine des Braves (Paul Cinquin)

The 2010 Régnié from Paul Cinquin is a lovely example of the vintage, but crafted in a slightly sturdier style that benefits from a bit of decanting now and will no doubt be even better with a year or two of bottle age. The deep and vibrant nose offers up scents of cherries, sweet cranberries, fresh herb tones, vinesmoke and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch extracted in style, with good core, fine focus and balance and just a touch of tannin perking up the long and classy finish. This has the balance and complexity to age quite gracefully, and while it is quite approachable today with a bit of aeration, it will be even better after a couple of years in the cellar. Good juice. 2013-2025. **90**.

2010 Régnié- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2010 Régnié from Georges Descombes is a really fine bottle of this cru, which sometimes can strike me as a bit unsubstantial in comparison to some of the other crus in Beaujolais. But Monsieur Descombes has turned out a fine wine from this village in 2010, as the wine offers up a deep and bright nose of red and black cherries, pepper, a bit of nutskin, dark soil tones, vinesmoke and a nice touch of dried violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and shows off good mid-palate depth, with modest tannins, good acids and fine focus on the long and classy finish. This is quite tasty with a bit of air already, but it will be emphatically better with a year or two of bottle age. A serious bottle of Régnié. 2012-2025+. **90+**.

Morgon- Domaines Visited

Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

It had been a couple of years since I last visited Domaine Desvignes- in fact, I had been gone long enough that the Desvignes family was convinced that I was never going to return and collect the case of 2005 Javernières "Upper Section" that I had purchased on my way to the airport and left in the domaine's cellars on my last visit- in fact, it had shrunk to a six pack (though my three magnums were still happily awaiting my return)! In any event, given the brilliant quality of the 2010 Javernières, I was very happy to take my missing six pack of the '05 as 2010. This is one of the finest domaines in all of Beaujolais and I consistently like their wines year in and year out. That said, the 2009s are a very ripe and buxom set of wines from the domaine, and some tasters may find them too much of a good thing. This was the certainly the case for me, as I found the '09s across the board to be borderline overripe and not as pure and complex in terms of their soil expressions than I have come to expect from this superb family estate. As the family has always liked to harvest on the late side, the style of these 2009s is not surprising and they are still very well-made wines which I am sure some folks will think I am crazy to prefer the 2010s here, but as is my wont, I will happily trade a bit of the 2009s' power chez Desvignes for the greater purity and transparency of the 2010s. I did not taste the entire range here of 2010s, as we also sampled a few older vintages on my afternoon visit, but I have augmented what we sampled of the 2010s at the domaine with a couple more notes on the domaine's wines sampled at their fine importer, Louis-Dressner's tasting here in New York in October.

2010 Morgon “la Voute Saint Vincent”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

The 2010 Morgon “la Voute Saint Vincent” from the Desvignes family is a very stylish and transparent example of the vintage that offers up impressive depth and complexity right out of the blocks. These are the domaine’s youngest vines at a very healthy forty-five years of age. The nose offers up a complex blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, granite and a lovely topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and wonderfully soil-driven, with a bit of youthful tannin, tangy acids and very fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. While this bottling is made to be drunk from release, I would not hesitate to give it a year or two in the cellar and allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge on both the nose and palate. Lovely juice. 2012-2025. **90.**

2010 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

I have a strong preference for the classic 2010 vintage at Domaine Desvignes over the larger than life and borderline overripe 2009s here, and the 2010 Côte du Py is excellent. These seventy year-old vines have really turned in a command performance in this vintage. The deep, complex and very sappy nose offers up a lovely mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of chipotle pepper, complex, granite-derived soil tones and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a lovely, stony personality, a fair bit of ripe tannin, lovely focus and excellent length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish. This will be a classic with a few years of bottle age. 2014-2040. **92+.**

2010 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

My notes do not state whether or not this is the upper section of the Javernières or the lower section (I know, how could I be so inefficient, given the fact that I am the one who wrote about the differences between the two sections in the first place!), but I imagine that this was the upper section. The nose on this 2010 is deep, sappy and outstanding, jumping from the glass in a blend of black cherries, pomegranate, dark chocolate, a great base of granite soil tones, a touch of coffee bean and a lovely topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully structured, with a fine core of fruit, superb focus and excellent grip on the long and modestly tannic finish. A superb wine in the making. 2012-2040. **93.**

2009 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

The 2009 Desvignes Côte du Py is a pretty ripe puppy, offering up a sappy nose of black cherries, chocolate, game, a bit of stony soil, smoke and a faint whiff of butterscotch in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite chocolaty, with a fair bit of ripe tannins and a long, complex and pretty low acid finish. This is plush and powerful and may float some folks’ boats a bit higher than it did mine- it is certainly a very well-made 2009. 2014-2030+. **89.**

2009 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

The 2009 Javernières from Domaine Desvignes (again, my notes do not state which section this hails from- sloppy, sloppy, sloppy!) is also quite ripe, but seems to not stray quite as far over the line as the 2009 Côte du Py. The deep, plush and complex nose offers up a ripe mélange of sappy black cherries, pomegranate, cocoa, stony soil tones and a fair bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite structured, with a spine of firm tannins, a sappy core of ripe fruit and a very long, closed and powerful finish. This will demand some time in the cellar to come around, and while it is a very well-made 2009 that does not seem likely to ever stay across the threshold into overripeness, I really prefer the transparency and more classic shape of the 2010 version. 2016-2035. **91.**

2009 Morgon “Javernières- Les Impetienents”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

This is the first time that I have seen the moniker of Les Impetienents on a bottle of the Desvignes Javernières, and again, my notes do not indicate if this was a specific cellar selection in 2009 or this is the new name for the Upper Tier bottling. I guess I assumed I would remember when I wrote up these notes, but my visit here was back in mid-July of last year and I cannot recall clearly now what this new designation stands for. The domaine’s US importer’s website does not list the bottling as well. In any case, this is another quite ripe 2009, tipping the scales at 13.8 percent alcohol, but showing no signs of heat. The deep and very ripe nose offers up scents of pomegranate, black cherries and blood orange, as well as notes of granite, coffee bean, woodsmoke and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful, with a rock solid core of fruit, plenty of ripe tannin and a very long, ripe and ready finish. This is quite impressive, but stylistically, it does not move me the way so many other vintages of the Desvignes Javernières have done in the past. 2016-2035. **91+**.

2008 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

When I last saw a bottle of the 2008 Javernières, it was at the Louis-Dressner tasting in October of 2010 and the wine was quite reduced at the time and difficult to get a read on. This particular bottle was not showing particularly well either, offering up a less than pristine nose of cherries, blood orange, herb tones, a touch of pepper and a stony base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and shut down, with a tightly-knit personality that comes across as a tad lean at the present time, but with good length and grip on the focused and moderately tannic finish. This seems like it could still blossom into something very interesting, but at this point in time it is likely that the benefit of the doubt I gave this wine when it was young and a bit reduced may not have been totally well-founded. Not bad, but I thought there was more promise here a year before. 2015-2030. **87+?**

2007 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

The 2007 Javernières is really a pretty marginally ripe example of the vintage, and perhaps the depredations of the growing season simply did not allow this plot of vines to fully ripen even in the good weather of the *fin de saison*. The wine today is tight, fairly hard and a bit herbal, offering up scents of cherries, pomegranate, plenty of herb tones, soil, *sous bois* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full and really showing a touch lean at the present time, with good complexity, moderate tannins and a long, slightly sinewy finish. This does not seem really likely to reach its customary level. 2012-2020+? **85.**

2006 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

In contrast to the rather atypical 2007 Javernières, the 2006 is drinking beautifully today and fully underscores just how fine this vintage was in the region. The deep, young and very pure nose offers up a mélange of sappy red and black cherries, stony soil tones, an exotic touch of eucalyptus, chocolate and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sports a great core of fruit, with ripe, melting tannins, outstanding focus and great length and grip on the well-balanced and really blossoming finish. As good as the 2006 Javernières from the Desvignes family is to drink today, I would still be inclined to give it just a couple more years in the cellar and really let all of its layers of complexity come to the fore. A beautiful wine. 2015-2035. **93+**.

Morgon

2010 Morgon “les Charmes”- Domaine Jean-Marc Burgaud

The Burgaud Morgon “les Charmes” hails from a parcel of south-facing vines below the Côte du Py. The 2010 offers up a ripe and classy nose of sappy black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a hint of fresh apricot and a nice topnote of pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, soil driven finish. This is one of the riper examples of 2010 that I have tasted, but the plush fruit is nicely balanced by a fine signature of soil and a nice touch of youthful, backend pepperiness. Good juice that will need a couple of years to blossom. 2014-2030. **89+**.

2010 Morgon “Côte du Py” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Jean-Marc Burgaud

The 2010 Côte du Py old vines bottling from Jean-Marc Burgaud is a terrific young bottle of Morgon, soaring from the glass in a complex and classic blend of cassis, black cherries, woodsmoke, stony minerality, a touch of gamebird and fresh-ground pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and very transparent, with superb mid-palate depth, firm tannins and great length and grip on the ripely tannic and black fruity finish. Just a superb young bottle of Morgon, but this wine will need some time to unwind in the cellar! 2017-2040. **94**.

2010 Morgon- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2010 Morgon from Georges Descombes is a touch volatile, but underneath the bit of VA is a fine and complex wine. The complex bouquet is a blend of sappy red and black cherries, espresso, granite, woodsmoke and a youthful touch of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely structured, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the poised and youthful finish. Without any volatile acidity whatsoever, this very classy wine would rate three or four points higher, but the slight touch of VA will put off some folks. 2014-2030+. **89+**.

2010 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I really like the style and the shape of the young and very promising 2010 Morgon from Joseph Drouhin. The still quite primary bouquet offers up a very classy blend of red and black cherries, oodles of granite soil tones, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, tight and chewy, with a superb core of fruit, excellent balance, and very fine length and grip on the perfectly focused and very cellar-worthy finish. This is an excellent follow-up to the outstanding 2009 Drouhin Morgon. 2015-2035. **91+**.

2010 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Michel Guignier

The old vine bottling of Morgon from Michel Guignier hails from sixty year-old vines in the vineyards of La Roche Pilée and Les Grands Cras. The 2010 Vieilles Vignes offers up a deep and classic nose of dark berries, pomegranate, lovely, stony soil tones, vinesmoke and a nice touch of pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and classically structured, with a sappy core of fruit, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and nicely sappy finish. A lovely bottle of 2010 Morgon that will not demand any extended cellaring before it starts to really drink well. 2012-2025+. **92**.

2010 Morgon “Bio-Vitis”- Domaine Michel Guignier

The Morgon “Bio-Vitis” bottling from Michel Guignier also hails from sixty year-old vines, from a section of the La Roche Pilée vineyard at the foot of the Côte du Py that were first converted over to organic viticulture and this section is now certified organic- hence the separate bottling. The 2010 Bio-Vitis is a lovely wine, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, espresso, stony minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core of fruit, modest tannins and very fine length and

grip on the youthfully reserved finish. I would give the 2010 Bio-Vitis from Monsieur Guignier a couple of years in the cellar to fully unfold. A fine bottle in the making. 2014-2030+. **92+**.

2010 Morgon- Domaine Julien Sunier

Julien Sunier's Morgon hails from two parcels in the appellation, one being the well-known la Corcelette. The wine is not de-stemmed, fermented in cement tanks and aged in old Burgundy barrels for eleven months prior to bottling. The 2010 is a deep, complex and classy example of Morgon, offering up scents of sweet cranberries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a lovely base of stony soil tones and a nice touch of roses in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and transparent, with a fine core, modest tannins and lovely length and grip. 2012-2030+. **93**.

2010 Morgon- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2010 Morgon from Jean-Paul Brun is a beautiful wine in the making, soaring from the glass in a pure and vibrant blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, nutskins, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and sappy at the core, with lovely delineation and transparency, tangy acids, excellent focus and superb length and grip on the moderately tannic and perfectly poised finish. This has the balance to age for several decades with great aplomb. Lovely juice. 2014-2035+. **93**.

2009 Morgon "Vieilles Vignes"- Château Grange Cochard

The 2010 old vine bottling of Morgon from Château Grange Cochard is a very fine example of the vintage, offering up a deep and ripe bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, chocolate, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and sappy, with a lovely core of sappy fruit, fairly firm tannins and a very long, powerful and moderately chewy finish. This is one of the very well-balanced 2009s that will make old bones, but it will need a few years of bottle age to let some of the tannins fall away. Very good juice from a new producer on the Beaujolais horizon. 2015-2040. **92**.

2009 Morgon "Côte du Py"- Château Grange Cochard

The 2009 Côte du Py bottling from Château Grange Cochard is even ripe than the old vines and will be a bit heavy-handed for some palates. The nose is very deep and almost opulent in its expression of black raspberries, a touch of boysenberry, chocolate mousse, damp soil tones a bit of apricot and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite voluptuous on the attack, with a very good core of fruit, an almost glaze-like complexion from the ripeness of the vintage, fine-grained tannins and a very long, chewy and impressively vibrant finish. This is one of those swashbuckling, very ripe 2009 Cru Beaujolais bottlings, and while it may not be to everyone's personal tastes, it is certainly very well-made in its style. 2012-2020. **90**.

2009 Morgon- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2009 Morgon from Georges Descombes is one of the lower octane example of the vintage, coming in at a very respectable thirteen percent alcohol, and the wine offers up lovely purity and complexity as a result. The deep, complex and very classy nose offers up scents of cherries, a touch of plum, gamebirds, woodsmoke, a bit of chocolate, fresh herbs and a fine base of granite. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and nascently complex, with a very soil-driven personality, a fair bit of tannin to resolve and excellent focus and grip on the very long and tightly-knit finish. I really like the size and shape of this wine, which should be outstanding in three or four years. 2015-2035+. **92+**.

2009 Morgon- Château des Jacques

The 2009 Morgon from Château des Jacques is a very young and sappy example of the vintage. The deep, pure and nascently complex nose offers up scents of sappy cherries, pomegranate, stony soil tones, vinesmoke, a lovely base of soil and a very generous framing of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with moderate tannins, tangy acids and a very long, primary and youthful finish. This will need three or four years to really come into its own- mostly to better integrate its new wood more seamlessly into the body of the wine. It is a very good, structured and quite fresh example of the vintage that should prove to be a long distance runner. 2015-2040. **90+**.

2009 Morgon “la Roche Noire”- Château des Jacques

Despite the Roche Noire Morgon from Château des Jacques only tipping the scales at 13.2 percent alcohol, there is a slight touch of *sur maturité* on both the nose and palate that keeps my score down a touch. The deep and very ripe nose offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, woodsmoke, damp soil and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very ripe, with a sappy core of fruit, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the fairly fruit-driven finish. The plushness of this wine has done a very good job of absorbing all the new wood already, but this will need to develop a bit more soil character with bottle age to keep pace with most of the rest of these outstanding 2009s from Château des Jacques. 2013-2030+. **89**.

2009 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château des Jacques

The 2009 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Château des Jacques was raised in eighty percent new wood (as were most of the crus from this domaine in 2009) and will need a bit of time to fully integrate its new wood, but there is plenty of stuffing here and this wine is going to be excellent with a bit of bottle age. The deep, complex and quite youthful nose offers up a very pure blend of cassis, black cherries, espresso, a beautiful base of complex soil tones, woodsmoke and cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great purity and focus, firm tannins and outstanding length and grip on the well-balanced and still quite primary finish. This will be superb. 2015-2045. **92+**.

2009 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Jean-Marc Lafont

I had never previously tasted the wines from Jean-Marc Lafont and I was very impressed with the quality of his 2009 Côte du Py, which shows off the ripeness of the '09 vintage without ever crossing the line into *sur maturité* and which has retained a really lovely sense of freshness and bounce on the palate. The deep, ripe and very expressive nose offers up a lovely mélange of black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of pepper, a fine base of soil and a nice touch of nutskins in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven for the vintage, with a glossy core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, ripe and well-balanced finish. This is a really lovely example of 2009 Morgon from the Côte du Py. 2012-2025. **92+**.

2009 Morgon “Cuvée Lapierre”- Domaine Marcel Lapierre (served from magnum)

The 2009 Cuvée Lapierre is a lovely and very pure example of the vintage that shows no signs of the overripeness that plagues many other '09s. The nose is deep, complex and very pure, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, coffee bean, a lovely base of soil and a nice touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really well-balanced, with modest tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and ripe finish. Classy juice and a great accompaniment to a Bastille Day celebration. 2011-2030+. **94**.

2007 Morgon “les Vernes”- Domaine du Cret de Ruyère (Jean-Luc Gauthier)

The 2007 Morgon “les Vernes” from Jean-Luc Gauthier is a lovely example of this vintage, with a bit more mid-palate stuffing than is found in most of the wines from this more medium-bodied year. The nose is deep and *à point*, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of backed black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, coffee, forest floor and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very plush for a 2007, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and balance and a long, finish that closes with melted tannins and lovely grip. A very lovely 2007. 2012-2018. **90.**

Brouilly

2010 Brouilly- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2010 Brouilly from the Drouhin firm is really a beautiful and sappy example of the vintage and one of the very best crus in the Drouhin lineup this year. The wine jumps from the glass in a blaze of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of coffee bean, lovely soil tones, violets and a bit of woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very sappy at the core, with excellent focus and balance and a bit of ripe tannin on the long and youthful finish. I would give this wine a year or two in the cellar to really let the tannin fall away and the wine to completely blossom on the palate. It is really lovely. 2013-2025+. **91.**

2009 Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes”- Château de la Chaize

Château de la Chaize used to be one of the “old standbys” in the markets of the east coast of the US, as the large importer of Seagram Château and Estate used to carry these wines and did a very good job of getting them positioned. Since the company was sold to the liquor giant of Diageo, I have seen a lot less of Château de la Chaize bottlings in the east coast markets and I do not even know if the estate is carried by Diageo, as I crossed paths with this 2009 Brouilly at Prowein in Düsseldorf last year. In any case, the 2009 old vine bottling of Brouilly from the Château de la Chaize shows off the ripeness of the vintage on both the nose and palate, but seems to avoid most signs of *sur maturité*, as it offers up a very ripe and succulent nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, soil and just a hint of caramel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and tangy, with a juicy core, good focus and very good length and grip on the complex finish. Given that whiff of caramel, I would assume that this is a wine that will best be drunk over the near-term, before the vintage’s ripeness starts to show signs of pruniness in this very ripe bottle of Brouilly. But, for drinking over the next several years, this is a very good bottle. 2012-2016+. **88.**

Côte de Brouilly- Domaines Visited

Domaine de la Voute des Crozes- Nicole Chanrion

During my trip to Burgundy in July of last year, I made a quick rundown to Beaujolais on the Bastille Day holiday weekend to visit a couple of my favorite producers, amongst which is Nicole Chanrion of Domaine de la Voute des Crozes. Madame Chanrion only makes a single cuvée of Côte de Brouilly, which to my palate is one of the very best Cru Beaujolais bottlings produced in the entire region. I love the purity of soil expression, coupled to beautiful red and black cherry fruit tones, that is found in all but the very, very ripest vintages of Madame Chanrion’s Côte de Brouilly, as it is a very classic expression of this appellation, with a great signature of stony soil tones that infuse all the top examples that hail from this extinct volcano. Madame Chanrion often greets visitors to the domaine with fresh-baked gougères, and on this

visit she had a secret new recipe which she had crafted for “gougères épicées” (she would not reveal the spices used- to my palate these were cumin and several Indian spices beyond my skills to identify) and which went simply splendidly with her wines. Perhaps, her American importer, Kermit Lynch can charm the recipe out of Madame Chanrion and put it in a future newsletter? In any event, Madame Chanrion very kindly opened up a mini-vertical of her wines during my visit in July, with the newly bottled and truly classic 2010 leading off the lineup. These are beautiful wines and should be on every Beaujolais lovers’ short list of “must buy” Cru Beaujolais year in and year out.

2010 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voute des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

The 2010 Côte de Brouilly from Nicole Chanrion is an absolute classic in the making, offering up a deep and very pure nose of red and black cherries, complex granite soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a distinct topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and intensely flavored, with lovely focus and grip, tangy acids and excellent length on the modestly tannic finish. The tannins may well be a bit more evident here due to the recent *mise*, as the wine was bottled only six weeks before my visit. Just a lovely wine and a step up from the much, much riper 2009. 2012-2025+. **93.**

2009 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voute des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

The much riper 2009 vintage has turned out a very uncharacteristically fruit-driven rendition of Côte de Brouilly in Madame Chanrion’s cellars this year. The deep, ripe and sappy nose wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, chocolate, a touch of venison, woodsmoke and a faint touch of crushed violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very sappy, with a great core of fruit, fine detail and a very long, ripe and pretty finish. There are no signs of overripeness here- just plenty of glossy black fruit- but I really miss the great mineral drive that is so evident in less buxom vintages of the Chanrion Côte de Brouilly. Qualitatively, this is an excellent wine and not far off the pace set by the outstanding 2010, but stylistically it is far removed from the traditionally transparent style of Madame Chanrion’s wines. 2013-2030. **92+.**

2008 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voute des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

Madame Chanrion’s 2008 Côte de Brouilly was tasted out of my father’s cellar here in the states soon after my return from Burgundy in November (her wines being his absolute favorites in the region and very well-represented in his cellar). The ’08 had started out a bit tightly-wound, but has blossomed beautifully and is now drinking very well indeed, offering up a lovely nose of sweet cranberries, white pepper, vinesmoke, coffee, a touch of fresh herbs and a complex and classy base of Côte de Brouilly soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full and still a tad on the lean side, with superb complexity, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long finish. This is not a plump wine, but it delivers impressive intensity of flavor and really marries well with food. 2012-2014. **88.**

2003 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voute des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

Following on the heels of the 2009, the 2003 Côte de Brouilly from Domaine de la Voute des Crozes comes across as decidedly more overripe in style- particularly on the backend- but also interesting in its own manner. The nose is really quite vibrant for such a ripe wine, delivering scents of black cherries, dark chocolate, a bit of game and just a bit of pruniness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a fat core and a bit of chewy, firm tannins still perking up the slightly overripe finish. Not a bad result for a 2003, but the 2009 is certainly a more complete wine with much more promise for long-term cellaring. 2011-2020+. **87.**

2002 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voute des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

The 2002 Chanrion Côte de Brouilly is a lovely and quite classic wine that is drinking at its apogee at age ten. The complex and absolutely *à point* nose offers up a fine mélange of black cherries, dark berries, a hint of new leather, a gentle touch of gamebird, woodsmoke and a lovely and complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full, complex and classy, with bright acids, no remaining tannin and lovely focus and grip on the perfectly poised finish. The 2002 is clearly not as complete as the 2010, and given how beautifully this wine is drinking today, I have very high hopes for the eventual style and shape of the 2010 at a similar age. The 2002 Côte de Brouilly from Nicole Chanrion still has years and years of life in it. 2011-2025. **90.**

2000 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voute des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

The 2000 Côte de Brouilly from Madame Chanrion is absolutely stunning and drinking beautifully at age eleven. The fantastic nose shows off more complete ripeness than the 2002 that preceded it in this vertical, soaring from the glass in a beautiful blend of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, gamebirds, lovely spice tones, a fantastically complex base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and wide open, with a sappy core of fruit, stunning transparency, melted tannins and great, tangy acids adding precision and vibrancy on the very long, pure and complex finish. A great bottle of Cru Beaujolais. 2011-2025+. **94.**



Claude and Evelyne Geoffroy of Château Thivin on a beautiful July afternoon in Beaujolais.

Château Thivin- Evelyne and Claude Geoffray

As long-time readers of View From the Cellar may already be aware, Evelyne Geoffray is a well-known cookbook author in France and in July I had the good fortune to time my visit to taste the new releases from Château Thivin at a proper time of day to be invited to stay for lunch and taste a few older vintages with the meal. As Madame Geoffray is a superb chef, this is a very easy invitation to say “yes” to- no matter how busy the day’s tasting itinerary. Château Thivin is one of the most important historic domaines in all of Beaujolais, and Claude Geoffray makes very traditionally structured and deep wines from his scattered parcels on the Mount Brouilly that go into his bottlings of Côte de Brouilly that are slow to unfold, but which offer up a superb longevity that can only be matched by the very top domaines in Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent. As readers may recall, it was Monsieur Geoffray’s grandfather who began petitioning Les Officials in the early 1930s and finally succeeded in the creation of the Côte de Brouilly appellation in 1937. The wines from Château Thivin are quite a bit more black fruity than those from Nicole Chanrion and typically start out life much more buttoned up behind their formidable structures. They age as well as any wines in the region, and while I have only tasted back to vintages from the late 1980s here, I strongly suspect that the wines of Château Thivin in a top vintage such as 2005 will have no difficulty aging gracefully for forty or fifty years. Claude Geoffray is a huge fan of his 2009s- which he places higher than his 2005s- and which he believes will age for a very, very long time in bottle. Some of his ’09 cuvées are quite high in alcohol- the Cuvée Zacharie is 14.7 percent!- but none of the ’09 wines show any signs of sur maturité on nose or palate. While I have bought more sparingly than I initially thought I would from the 2009 vintage for my own cellar- finding a few of the wines riper than I personally like in Beaujolais I plan to cellar for an extended period of time, the 2009s from Château Thivin are brilliant examples of the vintage that I will be happy to pull corks on a decade or two down the road. I am not sure (yet) if I am in complete accord with Monsieur Geoffray in preferring his 2009s over his 2005s (which are very well-represented in my own cellar), but I look forward to considering the two vintages side by side many years from now. The 2010s which I tasted here are absolute classics as well, and while they do not possess the power of the 2009s from the estate, they are absolutely beautiful wines that will most assuredly also find their way into my personal collection.

2010 Beaujolais Blanc “Cuvée Marguerite”- Château Thivin

The Cuvée Marguerite debuted in the 2004 vintage, which is made from chardonnay in a small vineyard that lies on a small outcropping of calcaire soil, inexplicably dropped down on the southern flank of the Mont Brouilly. There are only five barrels of this lovely wine, which is barrel-fermented in old Burgundy barrels. The 2010 Cuvée Marguerite is a lovely wine, offering up a pure and complex nose of apple, pear, a touch of lemon zest and a really classy base of chalky, stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with ripe, framing acids and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced finish. A lovely wine. 2012-2020. **89.**

2010 Beaujolais Rosé- Château Thivin

The 2010 Beaujolais Rosé from Château Thivin is truly excellent and would be a perfect *aperitif* wine for watching the summer sun go down over the rolling hillside vineyards in Beaujolais. The wine offers up complex and very vibrant nose of melons, peaches, orange zest, a nice touch of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very classy, with lovely focus and mid-palate depth, crisp acids and very good length and grip on

the succulent and complex finish. There is nothing “candied” about this superb and very food-friendly Rosé. 2012-2014. **90.**

2010 Brouilly- Château Thivin

The Geoffrays own seven hectares of vines in the appellation of Brouilly, in addition to their holdings in Côte de Brouilly, and I have been happy to see this superb wine much more widely available in the US in the last several vintages. The 2010 is a stellar bottle in the making, offering up a classic and sappy nose of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, lovely, granite soil tones, woodsmoke and violets. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure, with a lovely core of fruit, just a touch of tannin, a fine spine of acidity and excellent focus and balance on the long, complex and tangy finish. A lovely bottle of Brouilly. 2012-2020. **91.**

2009 Brouilly- Château Thivin

The 2009 Brouilly from the Château Thivin is quite a bit riper and even more sappy than the 2010, but shows absolutely lovely purity and no signs of overripeness on either the nose or palate. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark berries, raw cocoa, coffee bean, fresh herbs and a smoky, nutty topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite flamboyant for young Brouilly, with superb mid-palate depth, a touch of tannin and a very long, powerful and still quite primary finish. In contrast to the 2010 Brouilly, which is already quite delicious, I would be inclined to put this more structured 2009 away in the cellar for a year or two to allow it to blossom. It should prove to be quite long-lived. 2014-2030. **92.**

2006 Brouilly- Château Thivin

I have been a fan of the very traditionally styled vintage of 2006 in Beaujolais since I first tasted the wines out of barrel here in March of 2007, and the wines have aged beautifully and are now drinking with great style and grace. The 2006 Brouilly from Château Thivin is excellent, offering up a complex and wide open nose of cherries, cranberries, nutskins, vinesmoke and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and still quite well-structured, with a bit of remaining tannin, impressive complexity and fine length and grip on the tangy and focused finish. A lovely wine. 2012-2025. **90.**

2010 Côte de Brouilly “les Septes Vignes”- Château Thivin

The “Septes Vignes” bottling is the name for the French market of the “regular” Château Thivin cuvée that appears here in the US without any moniker. I have listed it here and below as “les Septes Vignes” for European subscribers, but in the states, this just appears with a Côte de Brouilly label. The 2010 is characteristically tight and structured out of the blocks, but shows outstanding potential in its complex, pure and vibrant bouquet of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of graphite, violets, vinesmoke and a lovely base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, tight and tangy, with beautiful balance, a fine core, moderate tannins and lovely transparency on the very long and focused finish. This will need a couple of years to unwind and should prove to be a very fine and utterly classic vintage from Château Thivin. 2014-2035+. **93.**

2010 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Zacharie”- Château Thivin

The 2010 Cuvée Zacharie had been racked into tank and was anticipating bottling at the time of my visit in July of 2011. The wine is showing great potential, offering up a very lovely and pure nose of black cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, complex soil tones and just a whisper of new wood (it was raised in eight percent new barrels in 2010). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and sappy at the core, with great focus and balance, a bit of ripe tannin and excellent grip on the very long, pure and classy finish. A beautiful bottle in the making. 2016-2040+. **93+.**

2009 Côte de Brouilly “les Septes Vignes”- Château Thivin

The 2009 Côte de Brouilly from Claude Geoffray is a stunning wine in the making and clearly destined to be one of the longest lived wines of this vintage in Beaujolais. The deep, pure and very sappy nose offers up scents of black cherries, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, violets, a touch of fresh herb tones and a beautifully complex and crystal clear base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite structured, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, ripe tannins, excellent focus and superb backend grip on the very, very long and primary finish. I did not note the alcohol level on the regular bottling from Château Thivin in 2009, but if the Cuvée Zacharie is 14.7 percent, I have to assume that this wine is at least fourteen. But it is impressively “cool” on both the nose and palate (with no signs of heat) and shows likely of aging gracefully for a very, very long time. I would give it at least eight to ten years in the cellar before thinking about really breaking open the case! 2020-2050+. **93+**.

2009 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Zacharie”- Château Thivin

At 14.7 percent alcohol, this is the ripest wine I can ever recall tasting from Château Thivin, but the 2009 Cuvée Zacharie is a beautifully balanced wine that should age very well indeed. The deep, powerful and vibrant nose offers up scents of sappy black cherries, dark chocolate, incipient notes of black truffle, intense violets, a lovely base of dark soil tones and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very silky on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, ripe and quite firm tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very well-balanced and still quite primary finish. Tuck this away for a decade. 2020-2050+. **94.**

2003 Côte de Brouilly “les Septes Vignes”- Château Thivin

The 2003 Côte de Brouilly from Claude Geoffray is evolving very nicely indeed and shows no signs of overripeness on either the nose or palate. The complex nose offers up a secondary blend of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of roasted game, leather, *sous bois* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite pure for the vintage, with a fine core and still a bit of firm tannins to resolve on the long and powerful finish. While this is certainly approachable today with a bit of air, a few more years in the cellar would not be a disservice to the wine. A very successful 2003 and one of the best Cru Beaujolais I have tasted from the vintage. 2012-2025. **90.**

1994 Côte de Brouilly “les Septes Vignes”- Château Thivin

The 1994 Côte de Brouilly from Château Thivin is really a lovely wine that has now reached its apogee and offers up excellent complexity on both the nose and palate. Claude Geoffray commented that 1994 was a vintage where it seemingly rained all the time, but no rot afflicted the vines and the wines have turned out better than expected with some bottle age. The nose is really deep and quite beautiful, offering up a complex and “cool” fruit blend of dark berries, new leather, espresso, lovely soil tones and a touch of gamebird. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long, complex and intensely flavored, with lovely focus, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the soil-driven finish. Classy juice that has reached its apogee, but will have no difficulties continuing to drink well for many years to come. 2012-2025+. **92.**

Côte de Brouilly

2010 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2010 Côte de Brouilly from Domaine des Terres Dorées is a lovely middleweight in the making, offering up a complex and vibrant nose of cherries, cranberries, a touch of raw cocoa, stony minerality, coffee and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine transparency, good, bright acids and a long, modestly tannic and classy finish. This is a more forward Cru Beaujolais bottling from Jean-Paul Brun than many of his others, but still with the requisite balance to age very well indeed. 2012-2025+. **90.**

THE ANNUAL LOIRE VALLEY REPORT THE 2010 VINTAGE AND OTHER RECENTLY TASTED GEMS



Domaine Huët's Noël Pinguet in the fabled Clos du Bourg vineyard in November of 2007.

While the 2010 vintage in the Loire will long be remembered as one of the very finest in recent memory, my report on the region in this issue sees the vintage overshadowed by the news that long-time *Chef de Cave* Noël Pinguet of Domaine Huët has departed the estate a bit ahead of his original schedule, which saw him planning to retire in 2015. Monsieur Pinguet, who is the son-in-law of Gaston Huët, the deceased former owner of this great estate, had worked at Domaine Huët since 1971 and had been its Director since 1976. According to Sarah Hwang, President of Domaine Huët, Monsieur Pinguet's decision to retire early had been communicated to the estate at the end of 2011, with his departure set for the end of February of this year. The domaine had already put in place a succession plan aimed at maintaining the same classic style for the wines here, and it was simply accelerated by three years with Noël Pinguet's decision to retire ahead of schedule. Sarah Hwang observed, "as one can imagine, it was difficult seeing a person with Noël's history step down from his role as winemaker at Domaine Huët, but it was also a situation that everyone on the team understood we would eventually have to face." The estate had decided to stay within the domaine's family for Monsieur Pinguet's successor, with long-time vineyard manager Jean-Bernard Berthomé taking over as *Chef de Cave*, assisted by

Benjamin Joliveau, who was hired a bit more than four years ago to eventually assume the role of chief winemaker at Domaine Huët sometime in the future. Monsieur Berthomé has been with Domaine Huët for thirty-three years, working alongside Noël Pinguet in both the vineyards and the cellars, and it seems implausible that there will be any stylistic shifts at this great Vouvray estate.

As was outlined in the historic feature on Domaine Huët back in Issue Twelve in December of 2007, Noël Pinguet has been a driving force in Vouvray for decades, steering the domaine into the realm of *biodynamique* viticulture long before it was fashionable and standing as a constant guardian for the great traditional style of Vouvray that Domaine Huët has been famous for since it was originally founded in 1928. While Gaston Huët was also extremely impressed with the early experiments in *biodynamique* viticulture that began here in 1988, it was Monsieur Pinguet who oversaw the conversion of the entire estate to *biodynamique* principals by the 1990 vintage. His successor, Monsieur Berthomé arrived at this moment in the domaine's history as well. With the sale of Domaine Huët to the Hwang family in 2003, after a few years of participating as investors in the estate at the end of Gaston Huët's life (Monsieur Huët passed away in 2002 at the age of ninety-two), Monsieur Pinguet's continuation on at the estate was seen as a great declaration on the part of the Hwang family to maintain continuity of style and commitment to quality at Domaine Huët. This in fact has turned out to be the case over the ensuing decade, and the first ten years of the domaine's ownership by the Hwang family have certainly been a golden age for the estate's wines. It is expected that the transition to the era of Messieurs Berthomé and Joliveau in charge of the cellars at Domaine Huët will be seamless. But, the retirement of Noël Pinguet represents an end of an era, as he is an iconic figure in the Loire Valley and leaves behind a legacy in the region as deep and historically important as figures such as Aubert de Villaine in Burgundy or Christian Moueix in Bordeaux, and he will be missed. Now, on to the vintage at hand.

The 2010 vintage in the Loire has produced another very good set of wines from the Nantais (Muscadet country) in the west all the way to Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé in the east. It is a decidedly cooler and more classic year than 2009, but it has its own share of issues that make it a tad less consistent than other recent outstanding years such as 2005 and 2006. Where *vignerons* had to deal with the surging ripeness of the 2009 *fin de saison* (and the attendant rise in alcohol levels and the drop in acids), in 2010, the issues were caused by a bit of heavy, late season rain that fell in the Loire on September the 24th - the same date that caused a bit of concern for some growers further south in the Burgundy regions- and which continued on in spurts through much of the remainder of the various harvesting dates in the spread out Loire Valley. Flowering had been late across the region as a result of a very cold winter and cool spring, so everyone was anticipating later harvests in any case, and the late rains played a minor role. As there are a myriad of grapes and a pretty wide spread of different climactic conditions as one moves eastward in from the maritime Muscadet area, across the Anjou and Saumur regions, onto the Touraine and finally arriving at the sauvignon blanc centers around Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé, one is of course going to strike wide variations in growing conditions during the summer and harvest conditions at the time of picking. Muscadet was generally brought in pretty much on schedule and relatively free of concern, with little signs of rot in the vineyards and berries that were in good condition. As the Melon de Bourgogne grape is ready for picking earlier than any other in the Loire, the bit of unsettled weather that began towards the end of September and

continued on into October really did not affect Muscadet in any meaningful way and 2010 is really a very, very strong year for Muscadet.

It is only when one moves further inland and starts to reach some of the regions based in more continental climate patterns that some of the challenges of the vintage are more apparent. Most of the summer had been pretty good for the grapes, with a warm late spring, a bit more rainfall in June than is customary, but dry conditions in the months of July and the first half of August were a cause for concern. The drought of this month and a half was not as pronounced in the inland sections of the Loire as was the case further south in Bordeaux, where grapes started to shrivel up towards the end of the season and which partly explains the unprecedentedly high levels of sugars and tannins in the grapes there in 2010. Anjou was more affected than the Touraine by the dry months of mid-summer, and without the rainfall of June, this could have spelt disaster. Happily, the ground reserves were sufficient to keep the vines functioning reasonably well during the months of July and August, with a few thunderstorms helping out in certain sections. September was cooler than normal, but reasonably sunny and everything kept functioning smoothly in the vines to bring on quite nice ripeness as harvest approached. Rainy weather began to threaten a bit of havoc as the picking was set to commence, as from September 24th forwards, there was a fair bit of off and on again rain throughout the remainder of the harvest, with the reds probably more affected by these rains than the whites based on chenin blanc. Chenin began to be collected in these regions on the 27th of September (after a quick glazing of quite uniform botrytis shortly before), with the cabernet franc not getting started until the 6th of October and continuing on over the course of the next two weeks. The reds had shown outstanding potential leading into October, and hopefully the rain at harvest did not play too severe a role in the ultimate quality of these wines, as the grapes were already getting pretty close to fully ripe prior to the clouds rolling in.

Further east in the Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé areas, the summer drought had not been anywhere near as keenly felt as was the case in the middle Loire, and the ripening process had progressed smoothly throughout the summer months. August and September were cooler than normal here, which has helped maintain the critical freshness and snap that is so important in these wines, and one would have to say that the eastern end of the Loire Valley was the most favored in the vintage of 2010 outside of the *Nantais*. There was no hail in the vineyards here in 2010 (a nice change of pace for the *vignerons* here after bouts with hail in 2007, 2008 and 2009) and grapes were in good shape by the time picking began. But that said, my tastings of the sauvignon blanc-based wines was not quite as uniformly impressive as I had hoped, particularly given the favorable conditions of the 2010 growing season here in comparison to some of the other regions of the Loire, as it seems that yields may have been rather generous at some domaines this year. The wines in general show good snap and soil transparency, but the ones that fail to really excite suffer from more than a bit of mid-palate *fluidité*. But, for the top estate where excessively generous yields are never an issue, 2010 looks to be the very best vintage here since the superb 2005s, and there are some absolutely classic 2010 Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé bottlings that will age long and gracefully in the cellar.

The Loire Valley continues to be one of the real winners in the global warming sweepstakes, and a cooler year such as 2010 is a real example of how this region's fortunes are on the upswing at the present time. A generation ago, the combination of a very late flowering

such as 2010 witnessed, coupled with end of season rains would have meant disaster for the vintage in many cases, but with climate change a very real phenomenon in the Loire these days, this vintage has produced a really lovely crop of classic wines across most of the appellations of this extended region. The result is a very exciting vintage in 2010, without perhaps the same consistency as was evident in 2005, but with an abundance of great wines for near-term drinking and for long-term cellaring. I am particularly fond of the styles of Loire reds that I tasted in 2010, as I love the great purity, focus and soil inflection found in many of the wines from the top producers. In addition to tasting widely across the 2010 vintage in preparation for this report, I of course also have included notes on other recent vintages from the Loire than I have crossed paths with in the last several months. A few of my old favorites who have always been reported upon in the past are not included in this issue, as some have gone to new importing arrangements here in the states and the new, exclusive importers did not feel the need to respond favorably to my request for samples. *C'est le vin!*

The notes that follow are arranged geographically from west to east, starting on the Atlantic coast in the Nantais and working upstream along the Loire River until finally culminating in the central Loire in the sauvignon blanc appellations of Pouilly-Fumé and Sancerre. Within each geographical region, I have listed the wines by vintage from youngest to oldest, and alphabetically by domaine name within each vintage subset. In a few regions, I had the opportunity to taste deeply at a single estate, and in such cases (see for example the section of Domaine Charles Joguet's wines in Chinon), I have grouped the entire lineup from the estate together first in the geographical section, and then followed this up with the tasting notes on the individual wines tasted from various estates. This seemed a more logical approach than simply listing all the wines separately by vintage in the general section, as it may prove useful down the road to see all of the tasting notes from a single domaine located together and easily found if one is referencing this issue at some date in the future.

Muscadet

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine "les Gautronnières"- Jean-Jacques et Rémi Bonnet

The les Gautronnières bottling from Jean-Jacques et Rémi Bonnet is based on a new ten hectare purchase of the Château les Gautronnières which the brothers have purchased in the last year or two. The 2010 is a stunning bottle of Muscadet, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of lime zest, gentle leesy tones, a beautiful base of stony soil and just a whiff of gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and wonderfully complex, with a great core of fruit, a superb signature of soil and outstanding length and grip on the long and snappy finish. High class Muscadet! 2012-2025. **93.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine "les Laures"- Jean-Jacques et Rémi Bonnet

The les Laures bottling from the Bonnet brothers is another absolutely stellar bottle of young Muscadet. The label includes the subtitle of "Granit de Vallet" which I assume is the soil type that this cuvée is produced from, and the wine possess a more stony personality than the les Gautronnières bottling. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, offering up scents of quince, a touch of pink grapefruit, granite, sea breeze and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and wonderfully transparent, with a more reserved personality than the les Gautronnières, but with the same purity, cut and core. This is a beautiful bottle as well, and while it is eminently drinkable today, I might be tempted to tuck this wine in the cellar for a year or two and let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. Superb wine. 2012-2025. **92+.**

2010 Muscadet Côtes de Grandlieu Sur Lie- Domaine du Haut Bourg

This is a really lovely bottle of Muscadet, but the wine is sealed with an artificial cork, so it will need to be drunk up in the first year, as I have had nothing but disastrous results trying to age wines with plastic corks. But, for drinking over the next year there is a lot of pleasure to be had here, as the wine offers up a deep and vibrant nose of lime, green apple, briny ocean tones, a touch of straw and a lovely base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a lovely core of fruit, fine complexity, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the snappy and quite impressive finish. I really wished this wine had been sealed up under natural cork, as the structure here would easily carry this wine for eight to ten years. Good juice. 2012-2013+? **89.**

2010 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine- Domaine de la Louvetrie (Jo Landron)

Jo Landron is one of my current favorites in the Muscadet appellation, and his wines certainly deserve to be ranked right up there with those from Marc Ollivier, Luneau-Papin and Jean-Jacques et Rémi Bonnet. The regular bottling of 2010 Muscadet is a lovely bottle, offering up scents of apple, lemon peel, gentle leesy tones and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and complex, with very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice and a great value. 2012-2016+. **88.**

2010 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine “Hermine d’Or”- Domaine de la Louvetrie (Jo Landron)

Hermine d’Or is a special bottling put out by several like-minded growers who have opted to dramatically limit yields and only hand harvest for bottlings that are to be labeled as “Hermine d’Or.” The 2010 from Jo Landron is outstanding, offering up a deep, complex and nicely reserved nose of green apple, sweet quince, ocean breezes, complex leesy tones, citrus peel and a lovely base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows of a fine core of fruit, with crisp acids, superb focus and grip and a very long, classy and refined finish. Just a lovely bottle of Muscadet that will have no problems aging for a dozen years or more. 2012-2025. **92.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Domaine Pierre de la Grange” V.V.- Luneau-Papin

I was very much impressed with the entire lineup of 2010 from Pierre Luneau-Papin, as he has clearly nailed the vintage beautifully across the board. The Domaine Pierre de la Grange bottling offers up a superb and classy aromatic blend of lemon, beautifully complex minerality, just a touch of brininess, lime zest and fine topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with good mid-palate depth, lovely focus and balance and a very long, complex and minerally finish. Good juice out of the blocks that will have no difficulties aging a decade or more. 2012-2025. **90.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Clos des Allées” V.V.- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2010 Clos des Allées from Luneau-Papin is a beautiful example of this outstanding vintage in Muscadet. The wine delivers a complex and vibrant nose that is a tad deeper and more refined than the Pierre de la Grange, as it offers up notes of green apple, beautiful granite soil tones, orange peel, ocean breeze and gentle leesy tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and laser-like in its focus, with a fine core of fruit, snappy acids and great backend minerality and briny drive. This is an utterly classic bottle of young Muscadet that will age very gracefully. 2012-2025+. **92.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine - Domaine de la Pépière

The 2010 Muscadet regular bottling from Marc Ollivier’s Domaine de la Pépière is a lovely, zesty example of the vintage. The nose offers up a bright and briny nose of green apple, a touch of grapefruit, beautifully complex minerality, lime peel, a touch of straw and a maritime

topnote that is more rippling bay than pounding surf. On the palate the wine is medium-full, snappy and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and a long, crisp and minerally finish. Just a lovely bottle of wine. 2012-2020. **90.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Clos des Briords”- Dom. de la Pépière

The 2010 Clos des Briords from Domaine de la Pépière is stunning on the both the nose and palate and shows every likelihood of aging gracefully for twenty or twenty-five years. The deep, pure and primary nose offers up scents of yellow fruit, very refined minerality, lemongrass, ocean breezes, very gentle and suave leesy tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tightly-knit, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright, ripe acids, superb focus and a very long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Muscadet that I would be inclined to tuck away in the cellar for a couple of years and really let it blossom. 2014-2035. **93.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Sur Lies”- Domaine de la Quilla

I used to quite like this bottling from Domaine de la Quilla, but the 2010 was not singing at the time that I tasted it. It is not that the wine lacks depth or structural integrity, but my samples were showing remarkably simple and lacking in both complexity and style. The nose is a straightforward and perfectly acceptable blend of quince, leesy tones, wet stone and ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids and a long, stony finish. Maybe more complexity will emerge with bottle age, but this seems like one of those well-made, machine-harvested Muscadets that lose a certain *je ne sais quoi* from their encounters with the machines. 2012-2015. **86.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Sur Lies”- Domaine Saint Martin

The 2010 Muscadet from Domaine Saint Martin is a very good bottle that perfectly captures the potential of this vintage in the region. The nose is deep and bright, offering up scents of lime, green apple, briny ocean breezes and a complex base of granite. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and rock solid at the core, with very good focus, snappy acids and just a touch of backend bitterness that comes across as a bit of limepeel. The nice note of lime here on the nose and palate are probably the result of cultured yeasts, but they work very well and this is a pretty tasty bottle that offers up good stuffing and snap for the price. 2012-2017. **88.**

2009 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “La Noë”- Domaine de la Aujardière

The 2009 Muscadet “La Noë” from Domaine de la Aujardière is aromatically quite attractive, but rather remarkably soft-centered and low in acid for a young bottle of Muscadet. The very respectable nose offers up scents of lemon peel, breadfruit, leesy tones, gentle maritime airs and a touch of woody overtones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and fairly complex on the attack, with a bit of dilution at the core and fairly modest length on the notably soft finish. Given the style of the vintage, I would have expected at least a bit more mid-palate depth here, to offset the really soft structure. Not bad for short-term consumption, but this wine is certainly not going to excite those who expect a bit more snap in their young Muscadet. 2011-2015. **86.**

2009 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Goulaine” V. V.- Jean-Jacques et Rémi Bonnet

The old vine bottling of Goulaine from Jean-Jacques and Rémi Bonnet is aged two years *sur lies* before bottling and the 2009 really shows a lot of raciness for this riper vintage. The beautifully deep and complex nose offers up scents of tart lemon, quince, stony soil tones, a complex and very fresh leesiness and a topnote of spring meadows. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb minerality and focus and a

very long, well-balanced and zesty finish that closes with great grip. A beautiful bottle. 2012-2025+. **93+**.

2009 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine “le Fief du Breil”- Domaine de la Louvetrie (Jo Landron)

The le Fief du Breil cuvée is a single vineyard bottling from Monsieur Landron which hails from combination of clay, flint and granite soils. The 2009 is a lovely wine, offering up a stellar nose of gentle orange tones, pear, complex leesy tones, stony soil nuances and a delicate topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with really fine cut and grip (particularly for a 2009 Muscadet), with superb focus and excellent balance on the long and zesty finish. This is very high class juice. 2012-2020+. **93**.

2009 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Le L d’Or”- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2009 Le L d’Or from Pierre Luneau-Papin is a really lovely example of this vintage, but it cannot quite match the cut and sizzle of his 2010s. The wine offers up a deep and very classy nose of bread fruit, complex and refined leesy tones, ocean breezes, beautiful soil tones and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and rock solid at the core, with lovely framing acids, very good focus and nascent complexity and a long, pure and classy finish. On its own, this is really a lovely bottle of Muscadet, but following hard on the heels of a couple of the sizzling 2010s from the domaine, one quickly sees the relative merits of the two vintages! 2012-2025. **92**.

2009 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Clisson” - Domaine de la Pépière

The 2009 Clisson from Domaine de la Pépière is a superb example of the vintage, with a racy spine of acidity that is fairly rare in this riper and slightly softer vintage in Muscadet. The 2009 Clisson offers up a reserved and very classy nose of bread fruit, lemon zest, gentle leesy tones, straw and kaleidoscopic minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully delineated, with excellent mid-palate depth, bright acids, lovely complexity and laser-like focus on the poised and very minerally finish. This needs some time in the cellar, but is a stellar bottle of young Muscadet. 2015-2035. **94**.

2007 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Clos des Noëlls” Excelsior- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2007 Clos des Noëlls from Luneau-Papin is a beautifully complex and suave bottle of Muscadet that is fully into its apogee of maturity and is drinking beautifully. The classy bouquet offers up a refined mélange of dried flowers, meyer lemon, bread fruit, wonderfully refined leesy tones and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and impressively complex, with superb mid-palate depth, great elegance and focus, lovely, framing acids and most impressive length and grip on the wide open, discreet and classy finish. A beautiful bottle of Muscadet for drinking over the next several years. 2012-2020. **93**.

2005 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Cuvée Eden”- Dom. de la Pépière

The 2005 Cuvée Eden, served from magnum, was showing beautifully this past October, as it jumps from the glass in a vibrant mélange of lemon, pink grapefruit, ocean breezes, lovely and very complex soil tones, a whisper of smokiness and a gentle topnote of leesy tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully closed out of magnum, with a superb core of fruit, bright and quite ripe acids, excellent focus and a very long, complex and classy finish. At least out of magnum, I would give this a couple more years to fully blossom. A beautiful bottle of Muscadet. 2014-2040. **93+**.

2004 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Clos des Briords”- Dom. de la Pépière

The 2004 Clos des Briords from Marc Ollivier, which I also tasted from magnum on this occasion, was showing very well in terms of aromatic and flavor complexity, but was a touch

softer than I expected, based on how racy this wine was out of the blocks. The superb nose offers up a deep and complex blend of lemon, grapefruit, briny ocean scents, lovely, granite soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and quite suave on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, good, but not great acids and impressive length and grip on the very classy finish. Good juice. 2011-2025. **91+?**

2002 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Excelsior Clos du Poyet”- Luneau-Papin

The 2002 Clos du Poyet was showing very well this past October, offering up a stunning and completely *à point* nose of green apple, lemon, leesy tones, a complex base of soil and a nice topnote of straw. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and intensely flavored, with crisp, well-measured acids, fine focus, a lovely core and superb length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. This is now fully into its apogee of peak drinkability, but should have no difficulties cruising along for another decade. A lovely bottle of Muscadet. 2011-2022+. **93.**



Anjou Blanc

2009 Anjou Blanc “Les Rouliers”- Domaine Richard Leroy

To my palate, Richard Leroy is clearly one of the greatest *vignerons* in Anjou, as I have never been anything short of blown away by any of his wines that I have had the pleasure to taste. The Les Rouliers bottling from Richard Leroy is comprised of his youngest vines, which are now fifteen years of age. He tends to make a lighter wine with less late harvest character out of this parcel. The 2009 Les Rouliers is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of apple,

orange rind, chalky soil tones, lanolin and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a great core of fruit, ripe, snappy acids and superb length and grip on the off-dry finish. Stylistically, this is like a cross between a Demi-Sec and a light Moelleux. A superb wine. 2012-2035+. **93.**

2004 Quarts de Chaume- Château de Suronde (500 ml.)

The 2004 Quarts de Chaume from Château de Suronde is quite deep amber in color and shows quite a bit of botrytis on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a nicely glazed blend of apricot, oranges, honey, new leather and a nice touch of soil, along with a bit of acetone in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, honeyed and deep, with good acids and focus, but a bit of backend heat that keeps the score down just a tad. This wine could use a bit more complexity, but it does deliver a nice blast of botrytized fruit and reasonably good soil tones to compliment the honeyed fruit. Not bad. 2012-2020. **86.**

1996 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

The 1996 Coteaux du Layon from Moulin Touchais is a beautiful bottle of wine from this outstanding vintage. The very pure and complex nose offers up scents of honeyed pears, fresh apricot, a touch of orange peel, beautifully deep and complex soil tones, dried flowers and hints of the new leather to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just beginning to blossom, with an excellent core of fruit, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This is an absolute classic in the making from Moulin Touchais. 2012-2040. **94+.**

1996 Quarts de Chaume “les Guerches”- Domaine du Petit Metris

The 1996 Quarts de Chaume “les Guerches” from Domaine du Petit Metris is a very heavily botrytized example of the vintage that is not particularly complex, but offers up very good depth and length on the palate. The bouquet offers up a honeyed blend of oranges, apricots, honey, chalky soil tones and *crème brûlée*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite sweet, with very good focus, modest complexity and pretty good length and grip on the now mature finish. Not bad, but not special. 2011-2030. **87.**

Anjou Blanc and Rosé

2010 Anjou Blanc- Domaine Agnès and René Mosse

The 2010 Anjou Blanc from Agnès and René Mosse is a deep and powerful wine that offers up superb intensity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine and ripe blend of pears, sweet quince, a touch of acacia blossoms, orange zest, a bit of honeycomb, a lovely base of mineral soil tones and a musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and decidedly cooler in profile than the riper 2009 version (despite wines both claiming 13.5 percent on the label), with bright acids, fine mid-palate depth and excellent length and grip on the zesty finish. This is a lovely wine that is long on personality and mineral backend drive. 2012-2018. **90.**

2010 Anjou Blanc “La Lune”- Domaine de la Sansonnière

The 2010 Anjou Blanc “La Lune” from Mark Angéli’s Domaine de la Sansonnière is a superb follow-up to his very successful 2009 version. The nose offers up a bright and classic blend of delicious apples, ripe pears, a touch of honeycomb, orange peel, chalky soil tones and a touch of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, sound framing acids and very good length and grip on the full

tilt boogie of a finish. This is an extroverted and very deep wine of impressive depth and complexity. 2012-2016. **91.**

2010 Anjou Blanc “les Fouchardes”- Domaine de la Sansonnière

The 2001 les Fouchardes from Marc Angéli is more reserved and refined than the '10 La Lune bottling and shows off outstanding potential. The deep and classy nose offers up scents of sweet quince, orange zest, pear, a bit of musky floral tones, bee pollen, complex, chalky soil notes and a bit of pear skin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids, fine focus and very good length and grip on the youthful and elegant finish. This is a step up in terms of finesse from the very good 2010 La Lune bottling. 2012-2020+. **93.**

2010 Rosé d'Anjou “Rosé d'un jour”- Domaine de la Sansonnière

I love the word play on the name of this cuvée of dry rosé from Marc Angéli, and the wine is lovely as well. This is a very dark colored rosé (in fact, I thought it was one of the reds from the estate when I first unpacked the samples!), and is deep and classy on both the nose and palate. The lovely bouquet offers up a fine mélange of cherries, rose petals, a touch of blueberry and a bit of new leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and surprisingly sweet, with superb depth in the mid-palate, soft acids and really lovely length and grip on the succulent finish. There was a lot of quick-arriving botrytis in the Anjou in 2010, and this certainly seems to me to be a botrytized example of rosé in 2010. The wine is really well-made and very interesting, but hardly emblematic of one's typical Rosé d'Anjou. 2012-2025. **88.**

2009 Anjou Blanc “les Rouchefer”- Domaine Agnès and René Mosse

It had been a year since I last tasted the 2009 les Rouchefer from Agnès and René Mosse and the wine is aging beautifully, with a fine chassid of acidity to carry the ripeness of the 2009 vintage with great aplomb. The deep, ripe and classy nose offers up scents of pineapple, pears, honeycomb, a touch of beeswax, musky floral tones and complex, chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with superb mid-palate depth, bright acids, a rock solid core, fine signature of underlying soil and excellent length and grip on the fresh and complex finish. This wine does not seem to have budged in a year and is every bit as fresh and pure as it was twelve months ago. A lovely wine. 2012-2025. **92.**

Anjou Rouge

2009 Anjou Rouge- Domaine Agnès and René Mosse

The 2009 Anjou Rouge from Domaine Agnès and René Mosse is excellent and offers up a stunning value for an age-worthy and compelling blend of cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc. The deep and very classy nose offers up a sappy mélange of dark berries, black cherries, espresso, fresh herb tones and a great base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite sappy at the core, with lovely transparency, ripe, moderate tannins, excellent focus and balance and a very long, primary finish. There is a medicinal touch on the backend of this wine that I often find in its youth and is worth waiting out by giving the wine a bit of bottle age, but in terms of depth and future complexity, this is really a terrific bottle in the making. 2014-2040. **90+.**

Savennières

2010 Savennières “La Jalousie”- Domaine du Closel

There are two bottlings of La Jalousie at Domaine du Closel, with this particular example hailing from the second bottling, which was done in early September of 2011. As I was tasting

this example at the end of October of last year, it was still a bit tight from the recent *mise* and I may well have underestimated the wine a touch. The bouquet is deep, complex and youthfully promising, offering up scents of green apple, grapefruit, a touch of lanolin, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely potential with a few years bottle age, and excellent length and grip on the soil-driven and snappy finish. A lovely and quite classic bottle of Savennières in the making. 2014-2035. **90+**.

2010 Savennières “l’Enclos”- Domaine Eric Morgat

Eric Morgat’s family originally hailed from the Coteaux du Layon region across the river, but Eric purchased vineyard land in Savennières 1995 and has been producing and has been producing exclusively Savennières since that time (though he still has a hectare of vines from the old family estate, so perhaps a Coteaux du Layon will be produced in the future). He raises his Savennières in four hundred liter *foudres* for one year prior to blending the different vats, and then aging the final cuvée for an additional year in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling and release. This is not a classic, steely Savennières, as the wood gives the wine a rounder palate impression out of the blocks, as well as a bit of butteriness, but the quality here is self-evident. The 2010 l’Enclos is a really lovely bottle, offering up a deep and complex nose of ripe apples, oranges, a touch of custard, chalky soil tones, corn flowers and a fine base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus, crisp acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. A very fine and quite unique interpretation of Savennières, the 2010 l’Enclos from Eric Morgat will drink well from the start and should have no difficulties aging for a dozen years or so. A superb wine. 2012-2025. **93+**.

2008 Savennières “Cuvée Spéciale”- Château d’Epiré

Last year I tasted the 2009 Savennières bottlings from Château d’Epiré, and I am assuming that they released the riper and softer ‘09s first and decided to give the more structured 2008s an additional year of bottle age. Their 2008 Savennières “Cuvée Spéciale” is excellent, with impressive ripeness at 13.5 percent alcohol, but nicely buffered by classic young chenin blanc raciness. The deep and quite complex nose offers up scents of apple, tart orange, pink grapefruit, lanolin, chalk dusty soil tones, a touch of honeycomb and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, ripe and well-balanced finish. There is just a whisper of backend heat here from its 13.5 percent, but plenty of other material to buffer this. All in all, a very fine bottle of Savennières. 2012-2025+. **92**.

2007 Savennières “Clos du Papillon”- Domaine du Closel

The Clos du Papillon is made from a vines that range from thirty-five to seventy years of age and is always the bigger and more structured bottling from Domaine du Closel. The 2007 was showing beautifully at the time I crossed paths with it in October of 2011, with just a touch of botrytis adding an additional sheen to the deep and truly beautiful nose of honey, a touch of pineapple, chalky soil tones, apples, bee pollen and orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with great nascent complexity, a quite powerful personality, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the very pure and racy finish. Just a lovely bottle in the making. 2013-2035. **92+**.

2007 Savennières- Château de Chamboureaux

The 2007 Savennières from Château de Chamboureaux is the first vintage to be produced under the famed Bordeaux-based consulting oenologist, Stéphane Derenoncourt, who originally hailed from Angers and is purported to still love chenin-based wines. Given his penchant for

monkeying in the cellars with his Bordeaux wines, it is not surprising to find this first effort from Château de Chamboureau, the 2007 Savennières, to be quite marked by its new oak component-though only twenty percent was new in this vintage. The nose offers up a complex and new oaky blend of apple, lanolin, orange peel, chalky soil tones and a generous serving of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, well-balanced and oaky, with a fine core of fruit, solid acids and good freshness on the attack. The finish is long, focused and new oaky, but with the wood seemingly carried by sufficient depth of fruit to not become a problem down the road in terms of balance. This is a well-made wine that really leaves me cold stylistically, as the new wood has really given this an anonymous personality and I cannot really see what it has done to elevate the quality of the wine. The sizzle and chalky drive of classic Savennières is really missing here. A perfect example of how to produce a well-made and inherently boring wine. If Monsieur Derenoncourt were really a lover of chenin blanc, he would lose the wood! 2012-2018+? **84.**

1999 Savennières “Roche aux Moines”- Domaine aux Moines

The Domaine aux Moines holds back a percentage of its production each year for release when the wines are mature, and these three wines are from their reserve selections. The Roche aux Moines vineyard is one of the most famous in Savennières, as it lies right alongside the Coulée de Serrant. All three of these bottlings really needed some time in decanter to blow off their “bottle funk” and show their true colors. The 1999 from Domaine aux Moines offers up a lovely, maturing nose of ripe apple, wet wool, beeswax, deep, complex soil tones, orange peel and a touch of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite forceful in style, with a youthful structural personality, fine mid-palate depth, snappy acids and outstanding length and grip on the intense and complex finish. This is old school Savennières that is still a few years away from its peak at age thirteen! 2014-2030+? **90+.**

1994 Savennières “Roche aux Moines”- Domaine aux Moines

The 1994 Savennières “Roche aux Moines” from Domaine aux Moines is a young and timeless bottle that is still several years away from its true apogee! This took quite a bit of time to blossom in decanter (and was better on day two), eventually offering up a complex nose of apple, quince, chalky soil tones, a bit of honeycomb, orange peel and lanolin. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very soil-driven, with impressive complexity, fine focus and very good balance on the decidedly “old fashioned” and long finish. This was borderline austere for the first few hours that it was open, but once it had started to blossom, it really became quite interesting. It is not an example of the cleanest winemaking style, but there is a lot of personality here- not to mention decades of life still ahead of this wine! 2012-2030+? **88+.**

1992 Savennières “Roche aux Moines”- Domaine aux Moines

The 1992 Savennières “Roche aux Moines” from the Domaine aux Moines is a bit more caramel in color than the ’99 or ’94, and seems to have a bit of botrytis in its aromatic and flavor profiles. The wine offers up a fully mature nose of fallen peaches, new leather, chalky soil tones, orange peel and a touch of tea leaves in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite sound structurally, with a fine core of fruit and a lovely signature of soil. The acids here are decidedly softer than is the case with the still quite youthful 1994 version, but the 1992 offers up very impressive focus and length on the finish. This is a good bottle, but not quite in the league of the ’94 or ’99. 2012-2015. **86.**

Saumur Blanc

2010 Saumur Blanc- Domaine des Hauts de Sanziers

This is the first wine I have ever tasted from the Domaine des Hauts de Sanziers and I found the 2010 to offer up good stuffing and complexity, but in a slightly “forceful” style that detracted from its overall appeal. The nose offers up a complex mélange of green apple, grapefruit, chalky soil tones, a bit of honeycomb, lanolin and grapefruit pith. On the palate the wine is deep and quite full-bodied, with good mid-palate depth, bright acids and a slightly bitter finish that seems likely to be part of this wine its entire life. There is certainly plenty of stuffing and personality here for the price tag, but not a whole lot of charm and this seems like a bottling where “less would decidedly be more.” Not bad, but a bit inelegant- to say the least. 2012-2016+.

83.

2010 Saumur Blanc “Les Pouches”- Caves de Saumur

The single vineyard Les Pouches bottling from the Caves Cooperative in Saumur is really a lovely bottle, but sadly, the 2010 is bottled under screwcap and will need to be drunk up on the young side. The deep and complex nose offers up scents of green apple, grapefruit, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very long, with a fine core of fruit and impressive length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice that would have been even better with a natural cork closure. 2012-2015? **88.**



2007 Saumur-Champigny Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard

The 2007 Brézé Blanc bottling from Clos Rougeard is a terrific wine in the making. This is a one hundred percent chenin blanc cuvée that is aged in a judicious bit of new wood and shows every sign (if premature oxidation does not rear its ugly head with this wine) of aging for several decades with great style and class. The deep, pure and complex nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of apple, orange zest, bee pollen, complex, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very tight out of the blocks, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids, excellent focus and balance and a very long, tight and racy finish. This will be a long distance runner, but it deserves at least four or five years in the cellar to uncoil. A beautiful wine. 2017-2040+. **94+**.

Saumur-Champigny

2009 Saumur-Champigny “Tuffe”- Château de Hureau

Château de Hureau has followed up their superb 2008 Tuffe bottling with another absolutely stellar wine in 2009, and if one cannot afford the Saumur brilliance of Clos Rougeard, then Château de Hureau is the name to know in this appellation. The 2009 Tuffe offers up a deep and utterly classic nose of cassis, dark berries, herb tones, espresso, a beautifully complex base of dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and structurally reserved, with a superb core of fruit, ripe, firm tannins and outstanding length and grip. This excellent bottle of Saumur-Champigny will need a few years of cellaring to blossom and should prove to be quite long-lived. An excellent wine. 2014-2040. **92.**

2009 Saumur-Champigny “Lisagathe”- Château de Hureau

The Lisagathe bottling from Château de Hureau is their old vine cuvée, with most of the vines going into this bottling being fifty-five years of age. The wine is primarily raised in tank after a long maceration, but a bit is raised in older barrels. The nose on the 2009 Lisagathe is excellent, offering up a complex blend of black cherries, cassis, coffee bean, woodsmoke, complex, dark soil tones, fresh thyme and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and young, with a bit more refinement than the “Tuffe” bottling, excellent mid-palate depth and a very long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. The tannins here are ripe and well-integrated, but really need a few years to start to soften and allow the secondary layers of complexity to emerge. This will be a stunning wine in the fullness of time. 2016-2040. **93.**

2007 Saumur-Champigny “Clos”- Clos Rougeard

I have to confess that at least over the first ten or twelve years out from the vintage, the Clos bottling from Clos Rougeard is my favorite of their three superb cuvées, as I love the beautiful expression of *terroir* coupled to a more red fruity personality that this wine shows over that time period. I know that the le Bourg and the les Poyeaux are longer-lived cuvées, but at least in 2007, the actual qualitative differences between those two and the Clos is really quite small, as all three wines are superb in this vintage. The 2007 is a beautiful bottle of wine in the making, offering up a brilliant nose of cherries, red plums, coffee, a touch of nutskin, fresh herb tones and a great base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very intensely flavored, with a great core of pure fruit, modest tannins, superb focus and exceptional length and grip on the wonderfully complex finish. With wines like this out there, I do not lament the price of Lafite anywhere near as much as I could. 2014-2035. **93.**

2007 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard

The 2007 le Bourg is a beautiful and very transparent young vintage for this outstanding wine. The deep, complex and very classy nose offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, coffee, fresh herbs, a lovely base of soil and a deft touch of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very accessible out of the blocks (particularly for this sturdy cuvée), with moderate tannins, outstanding focus, a sappy core of fruit and lovely length and grip on the pure and nascently complex finish. This is a simply stellar example of the 2007 vintage! 2014-2040+. **93+**.

2007 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeaux”- Clos Rougeard

The 2007 Les Poyeaux from Clos Rougeard is another truly excellent example of the vintage, offering up a deep and classy aromatic mélange of red and black cherries, coffee, woodsmoke, gamebirds, a touch of youthful medicinal tones and a stylish base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very tangy, with ripe, measured tannins, lovely nascent complexity, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, perfectly balanced finish. This is more closed than the 2007 le Bourg out of the blocks and will want a few more years in the cellar, but this too is a truly superb wine in the making. 2019-2040+. **93+**.

2006 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard (served from magnum)

The 2006 Le Bourg out of magnum is still a pretty young customer, but the promise of this superb wine is already very much in evidence on both the nose and palate. The deep and fairly powerful nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of cassis, dark berries, a bit of balsam bough, smoke, tarry overtones and a fair bit of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary, with a rock solid core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding grip on the very long and palate-staining finish. Granted this is a magnum and that much further behind in development than a regular-sized bottle, but the 2006 Le Bourg is a very classically structured example of this fine wine and it will need another seven or eight years to really start to come into its own and show off all of its considerable potential. But, clearly the wait here will be very handsomely rewarded! 2019-2050. **94+**.

Bourgueil

Sadly, no notes on the new releases from Pierre Breton in this year’s issue, as I did not see any samples of the 2010s. I am sure the wines are still very good, but you will have to take someone else’s word for it, as I was not sent any bottles! Happily, I was more than compensated with the brilliant wines of Yannick Amirault- whose importer had no problems pulling corks on some absolutely amazing examples of both 2010 and 2009, so I was not feeling in the least bit disappointed not to have tasted the new releases from Monsieur Breton.

2010 Bourgueil “la Coudraye”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

Yannick Amirault is making absolutely stellar examples of Bourgueil these days, and I very much like the quite red fruity character of his wines, which is a pretty rare trait in Bourgueil. The 2010 la Coudraye bottling offers up a deep, pure and very complex nose of cherries, pomegranate, gamebirds, beautiful, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very classic in structure, with lovely purity, a great core of fruit, well-measured and suave tannins and superb length and grip on the complex and beautifully focused finish. High class juice. 2015-2040. **92+**.

2010 Bourgueil “Cuvée Chesnaies”- Domaine des Chesnaies (Lamé Delisle Boucard)

I would love to have a crack at label design for this excellent estate, as they have some of the blandest labels to be found in the world of wine, but man, their wines are outstanding! The domaine has an excellent cellar full of older vintages for sale as well, so for subscribers in Europe, pick up the phone and place an order, as there are wines from the mid-‘90s and even some ‘89 still available for sale! The 2010 Cuvée Chesnaies bottling is excellent, offering up a youthful nose of dark berries, cassis, a touch of coffee bean, gravel, fresh herbs and a bit of youthful barnyard that needs to be waited out (yes, I know this is brett, but it is very mild and will not be an issue in a few years). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely structured, with a fine core, ripe tannins, lovely soil signature and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. Good juice and a fine value. 2014-2035. **89+**.

2010 Bourgueil “Jour de Soif”- Domaine Pierre Gauthier

The 2010 Bourgueil “Jour de Soif” from Pierre Gauthier is really a lovely wine that is still a bit tight on the palate for drinking right out of the blocks, but which shows excellent potential. The bright, complex and vibrant nose offers up scents of dark berries, cassis, a touch of tree bark, tobacco smoke, gravelly soil tones and a nice touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more reserved than the nose suggests, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent complexity, moderate tannins, sound acids and very fine focus and balance on the long and still youthful finish. The tannins here are ripe, but fairly substantial, and a bit of patience will be richly rewarded. Very fine juice, but give it a few years to allow its tannins to fall away a bit and the wine to fully blossom. 2014-2035. **90+**.

2010 Bourgueil “Merci la Vie”- Domaine de l’Oubliée

This is only the second vintage for Xavier Courant at Domaine de l’Oubliée, which he purchased from the Chasle family. The 2010 Merci la Vie bottling shows off a deep and complex nose that is marked by just a touch of brett, but underneath offers up a complex mélange of dark berries, black cherries, chocolate, smoke and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and ripely tannic, with a good core of fruit, and very good length and grip on the palate-staining finish and chewy finish. This will need a couple of years to really hit its apogee. 2014-2030+. **88**.

2009 Bourgueil “les Quartiers” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Yannick Amirault

Les Quartiers is another of the very top vineyard sites in Bourgueil and Monsieur Amirault has a fine parcel of forty-five year-old vines in this chalk and clay-based *terroir*. I had loved the 2008 version of this wine and the 2009 is even a step up in terms of depth and potential, soaring from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, beautifully complex soil tones, coffee bean, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with stunning purity and transparency, ripe, moderate tannins and laser-like focus on the very long and beautifully balanced finish. The 2009 les Quartiers is already approachable, but I would not touch a bottle for another three or four years and let its secondary layers of complexity fully emerge. This is just a stunning young bottle of Bourgueil! 2016-2045+. **94**.

2009 Bourgueil “le Grand Clos”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2009 Le Grand Clos from Yannick Amirault is a bit more black fruity in profile than the les Quartiers bottling, but it too is an absolutely brilliant young example of the vintage. The deep, complex and quite primary nose offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, espresso, a touch of incipient game, dark soil tones and a nice topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is

deep, full-bodied, complex and quite structured, with a great core of fruit, ripe, well-measured tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This too will be a great bottle of Bourgueil with sufficient bottle age. 2017-2045+. **93+**.

2009 Bourgueil “Tenue la Soirée”- Domaine de l’Oubliée

The Tenue la Soirée bottling from Xavier Courant is vinified in cement tanks and then aged in four to five year-old Bordeaux barrels that Monsieur Courant purchases used from Clos Rougeard in Saumur. This is a lovely example of the 2009 vintage, offering up a deep and structured nose of cassis, dark berries, fresh herb tones, a touch of grilled meat and a very good signature of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite buttoned up behind its structure, with a fine core of fruit, very good focus and a long, fairly tannic and tangy finish. This will be a lovely bottle of Bourgueil, but it will also want to be left alone in a corner of the cellar for four or five years before having at it in earnest. 2016-2040. **89+**.

2007 Bourgueil “Perrières”- Domaine Pierre Breton

The 2007 Perrières from Pierre Breton is starting to drink beautifully, as the wine absorbs its new wood and really starts to blossom from behind its structural elements. The deep and very complex nose offers up a superb mélange of sweet cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, fresh herbs and a nice base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still just a touch chewy, with fine focus and balance, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the soil-driven and black fruity finish. A lovely bottle of Bourgueil that is just starting to hit on all cylinders. 2011-2035. **92**.

Chinon

Domaine Charles Joguet (Sazilly)

I tackled all of these Joguet wines, with the exception of the 2004 Franc de Pieds, at the fine trade show in Düsseldorf, Prowein, last March, as again, I did not see any samples arrive from the importer here in the states. The domaine has really struck gold with their 2009s, with the lower level cuvées beautifully synthesizing the ripe and generous fruit of the vintage to fine underlying expressions of terroir and open and accessible structures that will make friends very early for these wines. The “big three” at Domaine Joguet- the les Varennes du Grand Clos, Clos du Chêne Vert and Clos de la Dioterie- are all exceptional in 2009, with beautiful balances of ripe fruit, firm structures and superb terroir. At the early stage that I tasted these wines (ten months ago now), they did not look likely to prove to be as forbiddingly structured in their collective youth as the 2005s were at a similar stage, and it will be interesting to follow their evolutions and compare them to the more powerful 2005s and utterly classic 2008s. I should note that though the 2008 vintage does not have the same sex appeal as the 2009s, it is an utterly classic vintage that has produced stunning wines chez Joguet, and they will also prove to be absolute cellar treasures for those who add some of these to their collections.

2009 Chinon “Cuvée des Terroirs”- Domaine Charles Joguet

The 2009 Cuvée des Terroirs from Domaine Joguet is a lovely wine that will drink very well from the outset. These younger vines are now over twenty years of age and starting to really come into their own. The deep, ripe and classy nose offers up a fine blend of cassis, black cherries, tobacco smoke and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, forward and quite suave on the attack, with a succulent core of fruit, modest tannins, sound acids and very good length and grip on the wide open and very satisfying finish. The Cuvée des Terroirs is from

the domaine's youngest vines and made to be drunk on the younger side and the 2009 will supply a lot of enjoyment over the first decade of its existence. 2012-2020+. **88.**

2009 Chinon "les Petits Roches"- Domaine Charles Joguet

The gravel and limestone riverside soils of the Petits Roches have done extremely well in 2009, with the vintage's ripeness providing a very suave version of this fine cuvée. The utterly classic nose provides a stylish mélange of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a touch of currant leaf, espresso and gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and velvety on the attack, with very good mid-palate depth, nascent complexity, modest tannins and excellent grip on the very long and pure finish. This will be superb out of the blocks, but also has the balance to age very well over the medium term. 2012-2030. **90.**

2009 Chinon "Cuvée de la Cure"- Domaine Charles Joguet

The 2009 Cuvée de la Cure was aged for six months in three and four year-old barrels, prior to be racked into large old wood *foudres* to finish its *elevage*. The 2009 has turned out beautifully, without quite the mid-palate depth of the Petits Roches, but more complexity by way of compensation. The bouquet offers up a lovely mix of cassis, dark berries, a touch of game, gravelly soil tones and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with lovely focus, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. I would give this wine a year or two of bottle age to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. A very stylish example of the vintage. 2013-2030. **90+.**

2009 Chinon "les Charmes"- Domaine Charles Joguet

The les Charmes bottling is one I was not familiar with prior to tasting the lineup that the domaine brought to Prowein last spring, and the 2009 will be the first year that this cuvée is offered in the US market. This is a lovely bottle of Chinon that offers up both structural integrity for aging and a round, suave style that will also make it very accessible early on. The deep and complex nose delivers scents of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, gravelly soil tones and a topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is quite lovely, with its full-bodied format offering up the youthful succulence of the vintage, lovely mid-palate depth, ripe, suave tannins and excellent focus and nascent complexity on the very long and classy finish. Just a lovely and classic bottle of Joguet Chinon. 2012-2030+. **90+.**

2009 Chinon "les Varennes du Grand Clos"- Domaine Charles Joguet

The 2009 les Varennes du Grand Clos is an excellent wine in the making, soaring from the glass in a ripe and complex mélange of black cherries, sweet cranberry, juniper berries, bitter chocolate, lovely, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and a pungent topnote of violet. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, powerfully built and absolutely seamless, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, ripe, firm tannins and outstanding length and grip on the still very primary finish. I love the shape and focus of this wine, which is a bit less austere out of the blocks than was the case with the 2005, but is every bit as deep and long. 2016-2050. **93+.**

2009 Chinon "Clos du Chêne Vert"- Domaine Charles Joguet

The 2009 Clos du Chêne Vert is another monument in the making, as the wine offers up a brilliant synthesis of ripe fruit and a reserved and soil-driven profile. The deep, classic nose delivers a very fine mélange of dark berries, black cherries, tree bark, espresso, woodsmoke and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with laser-like focus, ripe, substantial tannins and a very, very long, palate-staining finish. This is a great bottle of Chinon in the making and I would love to have a box of this to start breaking into a decade down the road! 2019-2060. **94+.**

2009 Chinon “Clos de la Dioterie”- Domaine Charles Joguet

The 2009 Clos de la Dioterie is another brilliant wine in the making. The deep, pure and beautifully sappy nose soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, cassis, dark chocolate, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, espresso and a deft touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a great core of sappy fruit, impeccable balance, ripe chewy tannins and laser-like focus on the very, very long, primary and soil-driven finish. This seems to be a touch less ripe than the 2005 and comes across as a bit more seamless as a result at this stage of its evolution. This is a great, great vintage of Clos de la Dioterie! 2019-2060. **95.**

2008 Chinon “les Varennes du Grand Clos”- Domaine Charles Joguet

The 2008 Varennes du Grand Clos is an absolute classic in the making. The deep, complex and very pure bouquet offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, a touch of tree bark, espresso and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and suavely structured, with a fine sense of reserve, lovely mid-palate depth, lovely transparency and fine length and grip on the ripely tannic, beautifully focused finish. This does not possess the fleshy fireworks of the 2009 version, but in terms of absolute quality, there is very little between the two vintages. 2015-2035+. **92.**

2008 Chinon “Clos du Chêne Vert”- Domaine Charles Joguet

The 2008 Clos du Chêne Vert is another beautiful and very classically styled bottle of Chinon. The excellent nose hops from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, sweet cassis, tobacco leaf, gravelly *terroir*, woodsmoke and a nice touch of juniper berries in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and suavely structured, with a classic sense of reserve, a lovely core of sappy fruit, excellent soil inflection and a very long, ripely tannic and beautifully poised finish. A superb young Chinon that would make Rabelais proud. 2016-2040+. **94.**

2008 Chinon “Clos de la Dioterie”- Domaine Charles Joguet

Picking a favorite between the classic 2008 Clos de la Dioterie and the potentially more opulent 2009 is going to be a lot of fun over the coming decades, as both wines are absolutely stunning young examples of Chinon. The 2008 Clos de la Dioterie offers up a superb nose of cassis, black cherries, bitter chocolate, herb tones, a lovely base of dark soil, woodsmoke and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite reserved in profile, with a rock solid core of fruit, beautiful focus and structure, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very pure and nascently complex finish. A great wine in the making. 2018-2050+. **94+.**

2004 Chinon “Varennes du Grand Clos” Cabernet Franc de Pied- Charles Joguet

This particular bottle of the '04 Franc de Pied was the second one out of my case, with the wine showing decidedly more open than was the case when I opened the first bottle a couple of years ago. The deep and excellent nose is now really starting to blossom, offering up a complex mix of cassis, a touch of menthol, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, espresso and still a touch of youthful bell pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very complex, with beautiful balance, moderate tannins that are firmly starting to step into the background and outstanding length and grip on the poised and classy finish. A lovely wine. 2011-2030+. **93+.**

Chinon

2010 Chinon “les Granges”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2010 les Granges from Bernard Baudry is a beautiful, young bottle of Chinon that will be absolutely stunning with a year or two of bottle age. The deep, complex and youthful nose offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, gravelly soil tones, a touch of tree bark, cigar smoke and dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really sappy at the core, with superb transparency, fine mid-palate depth and excellent focus and grip on the moderately tannic, tangy and very soil-driven finish. The les Granges bottling from Monsieur Baudry is consistently excellent, but I have to give the slight nod to this utterly classic 2010 to the riper 2009. This is going to be a stellar bottle of Chinon with a bit of time in the cellar! 2014-2035+. **92+**.

2009 Chinon “les Grézeaux”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

Domaine Baudry’s fifty year-old vines in this vineyard have done very well in this ripe vintage, turning out a beautifully balanced and very promising bottle of Chinon. The 2009 Grézeaux is a deep and classy example of the vintage that deserves at least a few years in the cellar to really blossom. The complex and very pure nose offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, woodsmoke, gravelly soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and chewy, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthful and focused finish. A lovely wine. 2014-2040. **91+**.

2009 Chinon “le Clos Guillot”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2009 Clos Guillot from Domaine Baudry is a dynamite wine in the making, but it has some tannin to shed before it really starts to deliver on its considerable promise. The vines here are still relatively young (under twenty years of age) and the wine seems to take a little longer to absorb its new wood as a result. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, as it offers up scents of sweet cassis, dark berries, bitter chocolate, woodsmoke, a bit of tree bark, tobacco smoke, a beautifully complex base of dark soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite youthful in its profile, with a fine signature of soil, superb mid-palate depth, bright acids and plenty of ripe tannin to resolve on the very long and classy finish. Some of the tannin here is from the wood and I would love to see this wine raised in less new oak, but the wine is in perfect balance and only requires some time alone in the cellar to really blossom. A superb wine. 2016-2040+. **93**.

2009 Chinon “la Croix Boissée”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2009 Baudry Croix Boissée is a bigger and more structured wine than the ’09 Grézeaux and is destined to be one of the reference point cuvées of Chinon produced in this fine year. The bouquet offers up a very deep, intense and sappy mélange of black cherries, cassis, a beautifully complex base of dark soil, a touch of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, plenty of ripe, well-integrated tannins and superb grip on the very long, focused and youthfully chewy finish. This is a young and palate-staining bottle of Chinon that will be brilliant with sufficient bottle age, but a bit unapproachable right out of the blocks, so show a bit of patience and tuck it away in the cellar for at least four or five years before broaching a bottle. It should prove to be a very long-lived vintage for this fine wine. 2016-2060. **94+**.

2009 Chinon “Clos de la Lysardière”- Cave Cooperative de Chinon

I had unbelievably good luck with several of the wines I tasted for this report from cooperatives in the region, but none surpasses this stunning steal of a Chinon from the local co-op here. The 2009 Clos de la Lysardière is a superb bottle of Chinon and an absolute steal, as the

wine offers up an absolutely classic nose of dark berries, espresso, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones and a nice topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with impressive vinosity, modest tannins, a lovely core and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is great wine for the money! 2012-2025+. **91.**

2009 Chinon “les Pensées de Pallus”- Domaine de Pallus

The 2009 les Pensées de Pallus is very much cut from the same stylistic cloth as the great Saumur-Champigny bottlings from Clos Rougeard. There is a fair bit of new oak here, but done in a very graceful and unobtrusive style that really brings out the best in this wine on both the nose and palate. The deep and beautifully balanced bouquet offers up a quite red fruity interpretation of this vintage, delivering notes of red and black cherries, lovely soil tones, coffee, fresh herbs, a nice touch of spicy oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with fine, nascent complexity, lovely mid-palate depth and excellent length and grip on the focused and moderately tannic finish. This is a very high class bottle of Chinon. 2012-2030. **93+.**

2009 Chinon “les Cornuelles”- Domaine Marc Plouzeau

I tasted a very nice, forward style of Chinon “Rive Gauche” ’09 from Marc Plouzeau last year, but that bottling is not in the same league as this superb 2009 les Cornuelles. The vines for this bottling are fifty years of age and les Cornuelles is one of the top *terroirs* in this section of Chinon, making for an impressive combination. The 2009 weighs in at a very civilized 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a deep and classy bouquet of cassis, espresso, a touch of tree bark, gravelly soil tones, pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with excellent complexity, moderate tannins, fine mid-palate depth and superb length and grip on the youthful and very classy finish. I used to love the bottling made in the late 1980s from this *terroir* from a producer names Serge Sourdais, and it is a great pleasure to again taste a fine example of les Cornuelles. 2012-2030+. **92.**

2007 Chinon “la Croix Boissée”- Domaine Baudry

The 2007 Croix Boissée was not showing quite as well as I had initially anticipated when I last crossed paths with a bottle and I am not sure if the wine is just in a shut-down phase or if I overrated its potential slightly when I last tasted the wine. The bit of overt oakiness the wine showed out of the blocks has been nicely absorbed in the wine and is not an issue, but this particular bottle showed a touch “flat” on both the nose and palate. It is still a very good bottle of Chinon, but I had hoped for a bit more when I tasted it upon release. The bouquet is quite complex, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, a touch of bonfire, gravelly soil and nicely integrated new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and pretty easy-going on the attack, with nascent complexity, moderate tannins and pretty good length and grip on the closed finish. Perhaps this is just a dumb stage for the wine and it will really blossom again with a few more years bottle age. 2013-2030. **88+?**

2006 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault (375 ml.)

I love the fact that Domaine Raffault regularly holds back some of their production for later release, as this superb 2006 is one of the current releases in the market. The deep and classic nose offers up scents of cassis, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, a touch of new leather, cigar smoke, espresso and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and wide open out of half bottle, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive focus and balance and excellent length and grip on the *à point* and classy finish. Perhaps there is a bit more tannin in full bottles than this lovely

half showed, but this is a vintage of Raffault les Picasses that is really starting to hit on all cylinders! 2012-2025+. **92.**

2005 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2005 les Picasses from Olga Raffault is really a beautiful and classic example of this vintage, which in some cellars can be a bit on the heady side. But, the Raffault '05 Picasses is a cool thirteen percent alcohol and absolutely lovely, offering up a deep and primary nose of dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, a touch of tree bark, fresh herbs and incipient notes of the spit-roasted game to come. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful focus and balance and a very long, modestly tannic and tangy finish. There is probably a touch of brett here for those who cannot tolerate any in their wines, but it is very minimal and to my palate, simply provides another layer of complexity for down the road. While the '05 Raffault Picasses is certainly approachable now, I would opt for giving it a few more years in the cellar to allow all of its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. A lovely wine. 2012-2035+. **93+.**

2002 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2002 vintage in Chinon is excellent and the Raffault Picasses is a perfect example of how the slightly less ripe aspects of the 2002 vintage have produced even more vivid aromatic and flavor purity in the wines. The utterly classic nose soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, cassis, new leather, espresso, gravelly soil tones, cigar ash and a touch of woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite transparent, with a very good core, modest tannins, sound acids and lovely focus and complexity on the long, poised and transparent finish. Again, there is a touch of brett here, and if you are a purist, this wine is going to bother you. But, for the rest of us, there is an awful lot of good drinking ahead with this wine, which is impressively complex and beautifully balanced. 2012-2030. **93.**

1990 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 1990 les Picasses from Olga Raffault is drinking very well indeed at the present time, offering up a deep and mature nose of dark berries, grilled venison, espresso, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of brett. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a nicely “cool” palate impression, melting tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and fairly tangy finish. This wine will continue to drink very well for at least another fifteen or twenty years and shows none of the “roasted” character of the '90 vintage, but for folks who cannot tolerate just a bit of brett, this may not be your cup of tea. 2012-2025+. **92.**

Sparkling Wines From the Touraine

François Chidaine Montlouis Brut NV

François Chidaine makes one of the finest sparkling wines in the Loire and the new release of his Montlouis Brut NV is really lovely. The nose is deep, complex and classy in its mélange of green apples, quince, stony minerality, a delicate touch of bread dough and a lovely topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with fine, delicate *mousse*, crisp acids and very fine length and grip on the focused and very refined finish. This is just a lovely bottle of sparkling wine that is good now and will be even better with a few years of bottle age. 2012-2025. **89+.**

Sparkling Vouvray “Non Dosé” Brut NV- Domaine François Pinon

The new release of the Vouvray Brut NV “Non Dosé” from Domaine Pinon is a lovely wine on both the nose and palate. The deep and complex nose offers up a vibrant mélange of pink grapefruit, a touch of delicious apple, chalky soil tones, bread dough and citrus oil. On the

palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with fairly refined *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a very long, soil-driven and classy finish. This is really a lovely wine. 2012-2025. **89.**

Sparkling Vouvray Brut NV- Domaine François Pinon

The newest bottling of the Pinon Vouvray Brut NV that is finished off with a bit of *dosage* is also excellent. The bouquet offers up a soil tones and just a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely poised, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, lovely, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the classy finish. I like the overall sense of balance here just a tad more than in the Non Dosé version, as the touch of *dosage* seems to have more completely filled the mid-palate here. But, both wines are lovely. 2012-2025. **90.**

Montlouis

2010 Montlouis “Clos de Breuil” Sec- Domaine François Chidaine

The 2010 Clos de Breuil Sec from François Chidaine is a stunning, young wine, with equal emphasis placed on both adjectives! The tightly-knit and oh, so promising nose soars from the glass in a nascently complex mélange of pink grapefruit, sweet quince, a gentle touch of beeswax, beautifully ethereal, modestly-chalky soil tones, lanolin, lemongrass and a gentle topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and beautifully delineated, with a superb core of fruit, brisk acids, laser-like focus and outstanding length and grip on the still very young finish. This is a great wine in the making, but it is even more reserved in profile out of the blocks than even the stunning Domaine Huët Sec bottlings in this vintage! 2017-2040+. **94.**

2009 Montlouis “Clos Habert” Demi-Sec- Domaine François Chidaine

The 2009 Clos Habert Demi-Sec from Domaine Chidaine is a beautiful example of the vintage, with the sunshine touch of this year evident on both the nose and palate. The beautifully expressive nose offers up a fine blend of sweet grapefruit, fresh pineapple, honeycomb, beautifully complex and delicate soil tones based on the *tuffeau*, lemon peel, beeswax and citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with a great core of fruit, brisk acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and still quite youthful finish. The vintage's ripeness is apparent here in a touch of backend heat, that will probably dissipate with bottle age, but which jumps out a bit right now- particularly after tasting through the stellar lineup of 2010 Chidaine wines! This is lovely, but give it a few years to more fully integrate its ripeness. 2015-2040+. **92.**

Vouvray

2010 Vouvray “Cuvée Silex”- Domaine des Aubisières

I really like the wines of Domaine des Aubisières, but they are now sealing up the Cuvée Silex under screwcap these days, and my sample was already starting to show a bit of reduction and had to be decanted to allow it to fully blossom and shake off the bit of artificial minerality on the backend that was pinching the finish. Once this was done, the wine was really good, offering up a complex bouquet of quince, apple, lanolin, bee pollen, spring flowers and a gentle base of chalk. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with a succulent attack, pretty solid acidity, good focus and a long finish that closes with good grip and impressive nascent complexity. Needless to say, I really wish this wine was sealed up under natural cork. Good juice. 2012-2025. **90.**



Vouvray's great Clos du Bourg vineyard during my visit in November of 2007.

2010 Vouvray Demi-Sec- Domaine Frédéric Bourillon

The 2010 Demi-Sec from Frédéric Bourillon is sealed with a plastic cork, which means it will need to be drunk up on the young side. The nose is simple and attractive, offering up scents of fallen apples, spring flowers, chalky minerality and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is medium-full, forward and simple, with some nice notes, but not a whole lot of complexity on the modest and bouncy finish. This is decidedly second division stuff. 2012-2015. **83.**

2010 Vouvray- Domaine Champalou

The 2010 Vouvray from Champalou is very much in the style their regular bottling in most vintages that I have tasted the wine- a cross between a pure Sec and a Demi-Sec bottling. In the 2010 vintage in Vouvray, this is probably exactly the type of wine that works well with the raw materials of this vintage, but this is also pretty much how every bottling I have tasted from the domaine has been finished that has not been labeled with “Cuvée des Fondraux” moniker, which seems to be reserved for their Moelleux bottlings. In any case, the 2010 Champalou is quite fine, offering up a refined and complex nose of apple, chalk dust, a bit of lemon peel, lanolin, a bit of pulverized stone and a gentle topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and elegant, with good, but not great depth at the core, bright acids, fine focus and very good balance on the long and lithesome finish. There is just a touch of closing sweetness here. A very good, elegant wine that could have done with just a touch more intensity, but should age well and is quite a lovely wine. 2012-2030. **89.**

2010 Vouvray Sec “les Argiles”- Domaine François Chidaine

The 2010 Vouvray Sec “les Argiles” from Domaine François Chidaine has a touch more residual sugar than the Montlouis Clos de Breuil Sec in 2010 (five grams per liter versus three), and this gives the wine a bit more early accessibility out of the blocks. The deep, complex and very compelling nose soars from the glass in a complex mélange of pear, sweet quince, a touch of honeycomb, orange zest, beautifully complex chalky soil tones, dried flowers and just a whisper of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with beautiful nascent complexity, a rock solid core, bright, seamless acidity and outstanding length and grip. The les Argiles bottling is made from a variety of different vineyards, including the well-known Le Haut Lieu, and like the Domaine Huët version, it shares a certain “feathery” elegance in its youth that is very, very attractive. This wine will allow a year or two of superb drinking, and then probably shut down seriously for five or six years, before it emerges from its adolescent hibernation and starts to really deliver on all of its considerable promise. 2012-2040. **93+.**

2010 Vouvray Sec “Clos Baudoin”- Domaine François Chidaine

I have been waiting ever since François Chidaine purchased the Clos Baudoin for this legendary vineyard to fully recover from its decades of relative neglect and really start to come into its own, and perhaps the 2010 vintage will be looked back upon as the year that this finally happened. The 2010 Sec is an absolutely stunning young wine, soaring from the glass in a complex and utterly refined nose of quince, pink grapefruit, magically complex, chalky soil tones, spring flowers, beeswax, citrus zest and a touch of lanolin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly refined, with a rock solid core of fruit, brisk acids, laser-like focus and a huge intensity on the utterly refined and endless finish. This is an absolutely brilliant young bottle of Vouvray Sec! 2018-2050+. **96.**

2010 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Sec- Domaine Huët (375 ml.)

The 2010 Le Haut Lieu Sec is an utterly superb and crystal clear bottle of young Vouvray Sec. The deep and truly lovely nose offers up a very classic blend of lemon, quince, chalky soil tones, a touch of youthful lanolin, bee pollen and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, beautiful focus and nascent complexity, crisp acids and superb length and grip on the bright, transparent and snappy finish. 2010 may well be the finest young vintage for the dry wines from Domaine Huët as I have ever had the pleasure to taste! A great wine, the 2010 Le Haut Lieu Sec will most likely offer p a couple of years of early accessibility and then shut down for the remainder of this decade.. 2020-2075+. **93+.**

2010 Vouvray “Le Mont” Sec- Domaine Huët (375 ml.)

The 2010 Le Mont Sec is a great classic in the making, as this vintage has produced about as stunning a young group of dry Vouvray as I can ever recall issuing forth from the domaine. The beautiful and youthful nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of quince, tart pear, gentle notes of honeycomb, a touch of orange zest, pink grapefruit, beautifully complex soil tones and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe acids, laser-like focus and stunning length and grip on the youthful and dancing finish. This should have a classic window of one to two years to drink the wine with great enjoyment in its youth, after which I would expect it to close down for the better part of a decade before it begins to stir once again. 2010 is unquestionably a brilliant year for the Sec bottlings from Domaine Huët, but this wine has half a foot in the Demi-Sec camp in terms of aromatics and flavors. 2020-2075+. **95+.**

2010 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Sec- Domaine Huët (375 ml.)

The 2010 Clos du Bourg Sec is another absolutely brilliant wine in the making, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of apple, lemon, a touch of pineapple, bee pollen, stunningly complex minerality and a pungent topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with seamless balance, brisk acids and stunning length and grip on the zesty and laser-like finish. This is still very, very early days for this magnificent wine, but the balance here is so perfect that the wine is a great joy to drink in its youth. Like the 2010 Le Mont Sec, I would fully expect this great wine to shut down in a few years’ time and hibernate for a solid decade, after which it will be pure magic for another fifty or more years! This is a great, great young vintage of Clos du Bourg Sec! 2020-2080. **96+**.

2010 Vouvray- Domaine Laurent Kraft

This is yet another Vouvray that is not labeled as either Sec, Demi-Sec or Moelleux, which I find unprofessional on the part of the *vigneron*, as if the customer does not have any suspicion as to how much residual sweetness the bottling is going to have, they are more than likely to be disappointed. In any case, the wine appears to be a Sec in 2010, as it offers up a quite impressive nose of apple, quince, chalky soil tones, wet wool and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is less interesting than it promises on the bouquet, with its full-bodied format rather ungenerous, sharp and green, with a bit of CO2 on the backend adding further lack of harmony on the fairly long and youthful finish. There is not a whole lot of focus or breed in evidence here, and though it may improve with a bit of bottle age, this is decidedly second division Vouvray. 2012-2020+. **86**.

2010 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

There was very little Demi-Sec produced at Domaine Huët in 2010, but the Clos du Bourg is a magnificent wine in the making and very much proof that this vintage possessed the potential for profound Demi-Sec as well as the great trio of Sec bottlings that the estate has produced. The deep, delicate and stunning nose offers up scents of apple, quince, a delicate hint of tangerine, bee pollen, beautifully complex, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and hermetically sealed, with a great core, stunning focus and balance, a superb girdle of bright acidity and magical length and grip on the seamless and very closed finish. Normally, young vintages of Domaine Huët offer up a modicum of early approachability before shutting down, but apparently, I have missed this window with the 2010 Clos du Bourg Demi-Sec. It is inherently a brilliant wine, but patience will be required! 2020-2085+. **96**.

2010 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux Premier Trie- Domaine Huët

The 2010 Le Mont Moelleux Premier Trie from Domaine Huët, which to my knowledge is the only sweeter wine produced in this vintage by the estate, is beautiful- but not necessarily classic in style. The deep and gently botrytized nose offers up scents of honeyed apples, sweet quince, clementines, lovely soil tones, a hint of the new leather to come, chalk dusty soil tones, honeycomb, a touch of lemongrass and a gentle topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit deeper-pitched than the nose suggests, with a bit of yellow plum in evidence at the core. The wine shows off lovely focus and nascent complexity, a beautiful base of soil, crisp acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long, youthful and beautifully balanced finish. This is a very fine wine in the making, but the botrytis (at least at this point) does not seem as clean as in other recent vintages and it seems likely to age along the lines of the 1990s from the estate, rather than some of the more exalted recent and past vintages. This is not to say that this is not a very fine wine, but rather, by the very, very, very high standards of this superb

estate, this does not seem likely to be a memorable vintage of Premier Trie from Le Mont. 2020-2085+. **93+**.

2009 Vouvray Demi-Sec “Bouchet”- Domaine François Chidaine

The 2009 Vouvray “Bouchet” Demi-Sec from François Chidaine is another beautiful example of the vintage, as these fifty-five year-old vines have really excelled in this vintage. The deep, complex and utterly compelling nose offers up scents of passion fruit, ripe apple, a touch of beeswax, spring flowers, lemon peel, beautifully complex, *tuffeau* soil tones, orange zest and just a whisper of vanillin oak in the upper register (despite all of the *demi-muids* used for the élevage of this wine being used, there is still a trace of wood that is quite attractive). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with superb mid-palate depth, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully-balanced and utterly suave finish. This wine shows a bit of the ripeness of the 2009 vintage as well on the backend, but it so perfectly poised on the finish to carry its considerable 13.5 percent alcohol with ease. For lovers of Coche-Dury white wines, this could well be the wine that opens the door to Vouvray for you, as there are more than a few similarities! 2016-2050+. **94.**

2009 Vouvray “Cuvée Tradition”- Domaine François Pinon

The 2009 Cuvée Tradition from Domaine François Pinon is a fine bottle in the making, but it is beginning to shut down and will be more enjoyable four or five years down the road than it is today. It is starting to show on both the nose and palate some of that “chalk dusty” aspect of Vouvray getting ready for hibernation, but the wine is also stunningly deep and complex. The closing nose offers up scents of green apple, quince, plenty of chalk dust, a bit of beeswax, hints of the honeycomb to come, straw and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully light on its feet, with a superb core of fruit, bright acids and outstanding backend intensity on the very long and classy finish. It is not that this is a bad drink today, but there is so clearly a lot more to come with bottle age that I would bury this wine in the cellar for four or five years and let it push through its adolescence and really turn into a raging glory! 2016-2040. **92+**.

2009 Vouvray “Silex Noir”- Domaine François Pinon

The 2009 Vouvray “Silex Noir” from François Pinon is a really lovely example of the vintage that is already beginning to shut down for a bit of adolescent hibernation and will probably be a much more compelling drink in another four or five years. The wine shows off the ripeness of the vintage on both the nose and palate, but is also a beautifully balanced wine of great mid-palate depth and superb length. The lovely nose is beginning to shut down, but still offers up scents of quince, sweet grapefruit, chalky dusty soil tones (despite the soils here being more flinty), a bit of lanolin, beeswax and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really explosive on the backend, with a great core of fruit, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long, reserved and nascently complex finish. This wine really deserves some time in the cellar to fully blossom, as there is stunning potential here. It can probably be drunk with quite a bit of enjoyment for the next year in its youthful phase, and then will need to be tucked away in the cellar for four or five years after that, before it again reawakens and starts to really deliver on its considerable promise. Fine juice. 2012-2040. **92+**.

2008 Vouvray “Moelleux”- Domaine François Pinon

The 2008 Moelleux from Domaine Pinon is a stunning young bottle of Vouvray, soaring from the glass in a vibrant mélange of honey-glazed quince, apple, orange peel, lovely, complex chalky soil tones and a floral topnote of both spring flowers and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and magically light on its feet, with a lovely core, bright acids and

stunning length and grip on the very complex, pure and dancing finish. This may well be the very finest wine I have ever tasted from François Pinon, as I love the synthesis of intensity of flavor and the very ethereal sensibility of balance on the backend. A beautiful and utterly classic wine of breed and finesse. 2012-2050. **95.**

2002 Vouvray “Le Mont” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

I love the 2002 vintage at Domaine Huët, which I feel is one of the great classic years here in the last twenty-five years. It is very interesting to me to see that the 2002 vintage has not yet begun to shut down, which is very atypical behavior for a top flight vintage at Domaine Huët, whose wines usually start to close for a decade’s worth of hibernation around their fourth or fifth birthdays. But, so far, the 2002s have shown no signs of getting sleepy. The ’02 Le Mont Demi-Sec is a beautiful bottle of wine, offering up a deep and wide open bouquet of tangerine, fresh apricot, very complex, chalky soil tones, a touch of honeycomb, new leather and a fine topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a great core of fruit, moderate sweetness, bright, zesty acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very, very classy finish. There is, across the board, a silky refinement to the 2002 Huëts that is very, very exciting. A beautiful wine that is drinking with great charm still in its relative youth, but the real apogee of this wine is still decades in the future. 2011-2060+. **94+.**

1995 Vouvray “Le Mont” Sec- Domaine Huët

The 1995 Le Mont Sec from Domaine Huët is a superb wine that is beginning to really drink splendidly. The wine delivers a complex and very pure bouquet of honeycomb, sweet quince, chalky and clay soil tones, citrus peel, a bit of receding lanolin and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and quite dry in profile, with a great core of fruit, brisk acids, laser-like focus and superb length and grip on the racy and soil-driven finish. A beautiful bottle of Sec that is just starting to hit on all cylinders. 2011-2045. **93+.**

1995 Vouvray “Cuvée Constance”- Domaine Huët (500 ml.)

This particular bottle of the 1995 Cuvée Constance from Domaine Huët seemed quite evolved- but I have not tasted it in many years, so perhaps this is just the current evolutionary trajectory of the wine. The nose is deep and quite tertiary in its blend of honeyed quince, apricot, orange peel, sweet almonds, *crème caramel*, hints of new leather and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off beautiful mid-palate depth, with very good acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, balanced and zesty finish. I am not sure why I expected this wine to be a bit more youthful at this point in its evolution, but the wine was more ready to drink than I anticipated. That said, it is still a very lovely drink. 2012-2040+. **94.**

1989 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux Premier Trie- Domaine Huët

It had been a few years since I last crossed paths with the 1989 Le Haut Lieu Premier Trie, and the wine continues to drink at its youthful apex and shows every sign of continuing to evolve brilliantly for fifty or sixty more years to come. The deep, complex and supremely elegant nose is now blossoming beautifully, offering up scents of apricot, sweet quince, chalky soil tones, lanolin, a touch of honeycomb and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a touch youthful, with a great core of fruit, snappy acids, laser-like focus and absolutely wonderful length and grip on the pure and complex finish. A great wine in the making, this wine is still decidedly climbing in quality and its true apogee is still many years in the future. 2015-2075. **95+.**

1971 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Moelleux- Domaine Huët

I have had some absolutely stellar bottles of both the Moelleux and the Premier Trie from Clos du Bourg in 1971, but this most recent bottle was the finest I have yet tasted of this particular bottling in this great vintage. The deep and utterly brilliant nose soars from the glass in a blaze of orange, fresh apricot, a brilliantly complex base of soil, new leather, a touch of honeycomb and a lovely topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and electric, with great focus and snappy acids, bottomless depth at the core and simply stunning length and grip on the perfectly poised and wide open finish. A brilliant, brilliant wine! 2011-2060+. **98.**

1959 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

Domaine Huët’s Demi-Sec bottlings age so brilliantly and the 1959 Le Haut Lieu is now at its absolute peak of maturity. The utterly celestial nose soars from the glass in a magical mélange of apple, sweet quince, beeswax, orange peel, lanolin, gentle notes of honey, a bit of caramelized banana, candied lemon, chalky dusty soil tones and a nice touch of almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and extremely low fat in profile, with a fine core of fruit that shows a nice “glossy” element from the vintage’s ripeness. The stunning finish is very long, shows still a good bit of ripe acidity and delivers outstanding grip and laser-like focus. Amazingly, this great wine seems to have just really reached its zenith and should continue to drink with wild abandon for another half century! 2011-2060. **95.**

1947 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Doux- Domaine Huët

The ’47 Le Haut Lieu Doux is a brilliant wine that is at its apogee of peak drinkability and simply stunning on both the nose and palate. The magical bouquet offers up a very deep and stunningly complex nose of cherries, barley sugar, orange peel, heather, brown butter, a beautiful touch of honeycomb, new leather and a glorious base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very complex, with great mid-palate depth, laser-like focus and magically tangy acids that keep this opulent wine very bright and light on its feet. The finish is endless, with a glazed quality to the fruit that is decadently sweet, but never cloying or syrupy. This is a legendary bottle that will have no difficulty cruising along at this magical plateau for another half a century! 2011-2050+. **97.**

Coteaux du Vendômois

The Coteaux du Vendômois is located due north of the city of Tours on the Loir River in what has traditionally been the real backwoods of the greater Loire Valley. The chenin blanc-based Jasnières is the closest well-known appellation up here, with the whites from the Coteaux du Vendômois also made from the chenin grape and the reds here usually fashioned from Pinot d’Aunis. I tasted a couple of very good wines from the region- a dry rosé from the very good local cooperative here and a red from a small estate that is only qualified to sell the wine as “Vins du Pays”, as it is fashioned from cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon, which are not allowed for wines to be sold with the Coteaux du Vendômois designation. Both wines are truly excellent values.

2010 Pinot d’Aunis Rosé- Cave Cooperative du Vendômois

The 2010 Pinot d’Aunis Rosé from the Cave Cooperative du Vendômois is a shockingly good bottle of wine for its truly low price, as this very pale, salmon-colored wine delivers a complex and very classy bouquet of white cherries, a touch of pepperiness, orange peel, pink grapefruit and a surprisingly complex base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep,

full-bodied, pure and quite complex, with crisp acids, lovely focus, very good mid-palate depth and beautiful balance on the long and zesty finish. Just a lovely bottle of dry Rosé that really captures the inherent beauty of the Pinot d'Aunis grape. What a steal! 2012-2015. **92.**

2009 L'Anthocyane- Domaine du Four à Chaux (Coteaux du Vendômois)

This wine is a blend of sixty percent cabernet sauvignon and forty percent cabernet franc, and since only pinot d'aunis is authorized for reds up here for the Coteaux du Vendômois appellation, this has to be sold as a simply Vins du Pays. But the 2009 is really an excellent wine and a great bargain, as it offers up a superb nose of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, espresso and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit extracted in style, but with a good core, moderate tannins and sneaky length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is really a very well-made wine and a superb value! 2012-2020. **88.**

Coteaux-du-Loir Blanc

The Coteaux-du-Loir sub-region, located about forty kilometers north of Tours was a region on the edge of extinction a generation ago, but happily things are looking up a bit and this is now the home to several very good vignerons. The most important appellation here is Jasnières, which is a chenin blanc-based wine that can be finished either dry or off-dry in style, and which possesses a lovely, chalky base of soil in either rendition that marries beautifully with this wonderful grape variety. Jasnières is quite prone to the formation of botrytis in the autumn, so one sees a fair bit of nobly sweet versions made, but the wine is every bit as good finished either dry or sweet. There are also a number of straight Coteaux-du-Loir bottlings produced from outside of the Jasnières region (there are actually two distinct AOCs for Jasnières and Coteaux-du-Loir), but as both of these appellations are small, with Jasnières only comprising thirty-seven potential hectares of vines and the Coteaux-de-Loir only forty-eight hectares. To top this off, due to the brutal frosts that swept through this region in 1956, much of the potential vineyard land is not even planted today!

2010 Jasnières “Prémices”- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

Eric Nicolas is one of my absolute favorite winemakers in the Loire Valley (or is that the Loir Valley?) and his 2010 Jasnières “Prémices” this year is more Demi-Sec than it is Sec, as it shows a fair bit of botrytis influence on the both the nose and palate. The excellent bouquet offers up scents of sweet quince, tangerine, a bit of honeycomb, beautiful, chalky soil tones, orange blossoms and a bit of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with good, but not great depth at the core, lovely focus and intensity of flavor and a very long, pure and youthful finish. This is really a lovely bottle- perhaps cut in more of a middleweight version than was the 2009 from Monsieur Nicolas, but a complete wine in every way, shape and form. Man, this is good winemaking! 2012-2030. **92.**

Touraine Blanc and Sparkling Rosé

2010 Sauvignon Blanc- Domaine de la Chaise

The 2010 Sauvignon from Domaine de la Chaise is a very fresh and juicy example of the vintage that is varietally correct and a pretty good value. The vibrant nose offers up scents of gooseberry, green apple, cut grass, white flowers and a nice touch of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, simple and succulent, with bright acids and a nice, moderately long and grassy finish. This is not overly complex, but is a good quaffer. 2012-2013. **85.**

Altérité- Les Maisons Brûlées (Michel Augé)

The Altérité from Michel Augé's Les Maisons Brûlées is a sparkling Rosé sealed up under a crown top, as is the style of the wines from this naturalist estate in the Touraine. The wine is made up entirely of cabernet sauvignon, bottled with added SO₂, as is the case with all the domaine's wines, and it is absolutely outstanding. The bright and complex nose offers up a classy blend of rose petals, dried cherries, lovely soil tones, a touch of bread dough and a very faint touch of eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and frothy, with beautiful complexity and balance, bright acids and very fine length and grip on the light on its feet and utterly engaging finish. This is a delicious bottle of sparkling Rosé. 2012-2015? **93**.

Touraine Rouge

2010 Cabernet Franc "Petit Bourgeois"- Domaine Henri Bourgeois

This cabernet franc from Henri Bourgeois is a really a lovely wine with fine stuffing and complexity, but to my palate the wine is a bit too marked by the heavily toasted wood chips that have been added here and which mark the wine just a touch too much with this toasted element and keep the score down a bit. But, the depth and complexity here of the raw materials is very good, as the wine offers up a complex nose of cassis, crushed dark berries, a touch of meatiness, soil and toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and impressively complex, with a good core, modest tannins and sneaky length and grip on the focused finish. Cut back or lose the wood chips and this would really be a stunning value, but even as it is, there is an awful lot of wine in the glass here for the price! 2012-2018. **86** (add two points if you like toasty wood aromatics and flavors more than I do).

2010 Touraine Rouge "Cuvée Pif"- Clos Roche Blanche

The Cuvée Pif from Clos Roche Blanche is a blend of cabernet franc and malbec, which in 2010 has resulted in a really excellent bottle. The deep, complex and very pure nose offers up a fine, black fruity mélange of cassis, dark berries, coffee bean, cigar smoke and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and a bit chewy, with a good core, a fine, low fat profile and a long, nascently complex finish. This will really benefit from a year or two of bottle age. 2014-2020+. **88**.

2009 L'Erèbe- Les Maisons Brûlées (Michel Augé)

Michel Augé is producing natural, un-sulfured wines from his Les Maison Brûlées estate in the village of Pouillé, which he bottles with crown caps, rather than corks. I tasted two of his new releases back in October. His L'Erèbe bottling is a blend of Cabernet Franc and Côt, with the 2009 vintage coming in at a very civilized 12.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a deep and black fruity nose of dark berries, black cherries, bitter chocolate, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and pretty low in acidity, with lovely focus and grip, a very good core of fruit and fine length on the palate-staining finish. I never know how to project un-sulfured wines in terms of their potential evolutionary arc, but this certainly seems well-balanced and capable of cruising along in a cold cellar for six to eight years. Good juice. 2012-2019. **88**.

2009 Le Herdeleau- Les Maisons Brûlées (Michel Augé)

The Le Herdeleau bottling from Les Maison Brûlées is a mix of Gamay, Pinot Noir and Pineau d'Aunis, and it too, is sealed under a crown top. The 2009 is a touch reduced when first poured, so give it a little bit of air to blossom. With aeration the wine is quite stylish, offering up scents of dark berries, a touch of tree bark, black cherries, dark soil tones, fresh thyme and a

smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and light on its feet, with solid mid-palate depth, lovely intensity of flavor, just a touch of tannin and a long, tangy finish. On the backend there is the first hint of a bit of volatile acidity to come, but this is a wine of impressive complexity and character. I do not know how long it will last with its no added SO2 regimen, but it is drinking really very well right now. 2012-2015+? **89.**

2008 Le Herdeleau- Les Maisons Brûlées (Michel Augé)

I bet you this is the only newsletter where one is going to find a mini-vertical report on Michel Augé's Le Herdeleau! The nose on the 2008 Le Herdeleau is a touch rustic, but complex as well in its mélange of dark berries, cassis, roasted game, complex soil tones and a whiff of volatile acidity. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very soil-driven, with modest tannins, good focus and a long, tangy finish. The touch of VA here currently does a nice job of lifting the aromatics and sharpening the flavors, but who knows if it will get a bit more strident with bottle age? I would probably opt for drinking the L'Herdeleau a bit on the early side, though again, it seems quite nicely balanced at this point in time. 2012-2015+? **88.**

Cheverny Blanc

The white wines from Cheverny are a wonderful mosaic of the Loire in general, as they can include varying percentages of grapes such as chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, sauvignon gris and Romarantin. In fact, wines made solely from the local grape of Romarantin is given its own appellation here: Cour-Cheverny. The vineyards are located on the outskirts of Blois, about halfway between the cities of Tours and Orléans. In my experience, most bottlings of Cheverny blanc will be generally based on sauvignon blanc, with the other varieties playing supporting roles, but there are a few bottlings that are one hundred percent Romarantin and which may well be amongst the very best whites made in this region of the Loire. Cheverny blanc offers impressive value, and for the intrepid, there are some amazingly fine bargains to be had here, not to mention some very serious and accomplished producers.

2010 Cheverny Blanc "Frileuse"- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The 2010 Cheverny Blanc "Frileuse" bottling from Clos du Tue-Boeuf is a blend of one third each sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and sauvignon gris. The bouquet offers up a complex and vibrant mélange of tart orange, pink grapefruit, musky floral tones, citrus peel and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, bright acids, lovely focus and very good length and grip on the complex and classy finish. I really like this wine in this vintage. 2012-2017. **90.**

2010 Cheverny- Le Domaine du Moulin (Hervé Villemade)

The 2010 Cheverny blanc from Le Domaine du Moulin is absolutely lovely, offering up a deep and complex nose of green apple, a touch of quince, beeswax, very gentle notes of grassiness, orange peel and a beautiful base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a superb core of fruit, outstanding focus and balance and impressive length and grip on the intensely flavored and soil-driven finish. Just a terrific bottle of Cheverny- this is a blend that does not show a whole lot of sauvignon blanc character in the aromatic and flavor profile and I would suspect that it plays a minor role in the *cépage*. 2012-2020. **91.**

2010 Cheverny "Vendanges Manuelles"- Le Petit Chambord (François Cazin)

The Cheverny blanc bottling from François Cazin is a blend of eighty percent sauvignon blanc and twenty percent chardonnay. The 2010 is a bright and vibrant wine that offers up a very classy bouquet of gooseberry, pink grapefruit, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones and citrus peel in

the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and snappy, with lovely personality, good mid-palate depth, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and classy finish. A really lovely bottle and a terrific value. 2012-2018. **90.**

2009 Cour-Cheverny “Vendanges Manuelles”- Le Petit Chambord (François Cazin)

I love the Romarantin grape, and the 2009 Cour-Cheverny from François Cazin is a beautiful example of this rare varietal. The wine offers up a deep, bright and complex nose of grapefruit, a touch of bread fruit, beautiful, stony minerality, a touch straw, citrus peel and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent, with a stony personality, crisp acids, superb focus and balance and a very long, pure and classy finish. This is really a lovely example of Romarantin. 2012-2020+. **92.**

2009 Cheverny “la Bodice”- Le Domaine du Moulin (Hervé Villemade)

The 2009 Cheverny “la Bodice” from Domaine du Moulin is sealed with a glass stopper, which I like a whole lot more than a screwcap. The nose on the '09 offers up a ripe and musky nose of tangerine, a touch of pineapple, grassy tones, candied grapefruit peel and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very ripe, but with no signs of heat on the backend, sound acids and really fine length and grip on the complex and tropical finish. This clearly shows the ripe side of the 2009 vintage, but is impressively clean and balanced on the backend. A wine with a lot of personality, the 2009 Cheverny “la Bodice” from Domaine du Moulin may not be for everyone, but it will provide a lot of wine for those intrepid wine tasters who might be tempted to venture a bit further afield. Good juice in a decidedly riper style. 2012-2017. **88.**

2009 Coeur-Cheverny “les Acacias”- Le Domaine du Moulin (Hervé Villemade)

The 2009 Cour-Cheverny “les Acacias” from Hervé Villemade is sealed under a natural cork, rather than a glass stopper, and it is another very well-made and decidedly ripe example of the vintage. The deep and ripe nose offers up scents of pineapple, orange peel, musky floral tones, some herbal tones and a touch of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, moderate acids and really lovely length and grip on the plenty ripe finish. I have never experienced Romarantin at this level of ripeness- it is a very interesting aromatic and flavor package, but the beautiful transparency that this varietal usually delivers is missing at the higher octane levels. This is an exotic and well-made wine. 2012-2015+? **89.**

Cheverny Rouge

Typically made from a blend of pinot noir and gamay, Cheverny rouge can be one of the best values to be had in the entire Loire Valley, which is saying something, given how many great values are to be found from this region. I very much love the style of the best producers of Cheverny rouge, which I find more complex and complete wines than the vast majority of Bourgogne rouge bottlings- many of which cost more than the top examples of Cheverny rouge. For those intrepid enough to try a few of these wines, there are some absolutely stellar bottles to be discovered and some very serious drinking to be enjoyed at bargain prices.

2010 Cheverny Rouge- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

I do not recall tasting the 2009 version of the straight Cheverny from Clos de Tue-Boeuf, but the 2010 is a really lovely and complex glass of gamay and pinot. The percentage breakdown of each varietal in this cuvée are sixty percent gamay and forty percent pinot noir. The 2010 offers up a bright and very classy, red fruity nose of cherries, pomegranate, a bit of roasted game, lovely, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of bonfires. There is just a touch of volatile

acidity here that may put off some tasters, but which does not bother me one iota. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bouncy and complex, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, and a touch of tannin perking up the tangy and soil-driven finish. This is still pretty tightly-knit and will be better with a year or two of bottle age. For those who do not mind a touch of VA, this wine offers up an awful lot of personality and soil signature. Good juice. 2013-2020+. **89.**

2010 Cheverny Rouge “Rouillon”- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The single vineyard Rouillon bottling of Cheverny rouge from Clos de Tue Boeuf is an inverse of the regular bottling in terms of *cépage*, as it is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent gamay. The 2010 is a tad reduced out of the blocks and requires just a bit of aeration to blossom, but once it opens up it delivers a superb bouquet of red and black cherries, vinesmoke, fresh herbs, pepper, autumnal soil tones and a touch of blood orange in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and intensely flavored, with a good core bound up in tangy acids and a bit of tannin. The finish is long and complex, but this is a wine of only moderate ripeness at 11.5 percent alcohol and it will need a few years to blossom. It should prove to be a very stylish middleweight at maturity. 2014-2024. **89+.**

2010 Cheverny Rouge- Domaine du Moulin

The 2010 Cheverny rouge from Domaine du Moulin is a lovely wine that will need a year or two in the cellar to fully blossom, as it is quite a tightly-knit example of the vintage at this point in time. The nose is deep, youthful and promising, as it offers up a red fruity blend of tart red berries, coffee, fresh herb tones and a complex base of soil. There is also just a touch of volatile acidity in evidence in the bouquet at the present time. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and tangy, with a good core in reserve, lovely focus and good grip on the long and buttoned up finish. It is clear that the ripeness here is not particularly strong, so there is not a lot of youthful succulence to the fruit component, but I like the overall sense of balance here and strongly suspect that bottle age will really work some magic with this wine. But drinking the wine out of the blocks is going to be tough sledding. 2014-2030. **85-88+?**

The Great Sauvignon Blanc Appellations of the Central Loire

Quincy

Even the best terroirs in Quincy are not in the same league as the top sites in Sancerre or Pouilly-Fumé, but these slightly less refined soil tones can often give the best examples of Quincy a fruity exuberance that is very beguiling and works great at the table. The flip side of this of course is that the less well-done examples in the appellation can be a bit inelegant and chunky, as the soils here are pretty deep and not always particularly compelling, but when Quincy is good, it is often a very extroverted and complex wine that nicely compensates for its slight lack of inherent elegance with wonderful personalities of lively fruit and grassy tones. The 2010 vintage seems to have produced some lovely examples of Quincy, as I did not cross paths with any slightly “fluide” examples from the vintage in my small slice of samples from the appellation (in contrast to some of the second division producers in Sancerre for instance), and the Henri Bourgeois version in particular is a terrific value and a wine well worth searching out for those that want a little personality in their Loire sauvignon blanc and great bang for the buck.

2010 Quincy “Haute Victoire”- Domaine Henri Bourgeois

The 2010 Haute Victoire is, by a small margin, the finest example of Quincy I have ever tasted from Domaine Bourgeois, as this bottling seems to be getting better and better with each

passing vintage at the estate. The 2010 delivers the same level of stuffing as the 2009, but with better cut and raciness on the backend. The bright and exuberant nose offers up scents of grapefruit, tart orange, fresh-cut grass, lime peel, a touch of spring flowers and a really lovely base of deep, chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and wide open and ready to drink, with superb mid-palate depth, snappy acids, lovely focus and excellent grip on the very long and intensely flavored finish. This is really good juice and a superb value! 2012-2016. **91.**

2010 Quincy “Trés Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mardon

This is quite a ripe example of 2010 Quincy, but not without a nice balance of soil and complexity. The deep and expressive nose offers up a lovely mix of orange, gooseberry, damp grass and a deep base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a tad on the soft side for a 2010, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and sneaky length and grip on the finish. With a bit more raciness, this would be outstanding, and the ripe character of this wine comes across as a bit of a surprise, given how cool and zesty the 2009 vintage of this bottling showed last year. 2012-2014. **87.**

2010 Quincy- Domaine Philippe Portier

The 2010 Quincy from Philippe Portier is a stylish middleweight that seems just a touch *fluide* in the mid-palate. The nose is bright and zesty, offering up scents of grapefruit, lime, fresh-cut grass, a touch of petrol and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and focused on the attack, with fairly modest complexity, not a whole lot in reserve at the core, but good length and grip on the bright and bouncy finish. With a bit more mid-palate stuffing this would be outstanding, rather than simply pretty good. 2012-2015. **87.**

2010 Quincy “Grandes Vignes de Villalin”- Domaine Villalin

The Quincy from Domaine Villalin hails from a one and a half hectare parcel of vines on the eastern side of the Cher River- which has the finest soils of the appellation (fully ninety-eight percent of the appellation of Quincy is across the river on the western side), with much more flint in the style of Pouilly-Fumé, rather than the deeper, chalky clay found in most of Quincy. The nose on the 2010 Grandes Vignes de Villalin offers up a deep and vibrant nose of gooseberry, pink grapefruit, beautifully complex soil tones, lime peel, cut grass and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with great refinement for Quincy, with a superb core of fruit, brisk acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and complex finish. I do not usually associate Quincy with this kind of elegance and complexity- though the wine possesses all the intensity of flavor for which the appellation is so well known. A superb bottle of Quincy. 2012-2018+. **93.**

2009 Quincy- Domaine du Tremblay

The 2009 Quincy from Domaine du Tremblay is a very good wine on both the nose and palate, but without quite the mid-palate depth that one expects from the ripe 2009 vintage. The bouquet offers up a precise blend of green apple, lime, grapefruit, cut grass and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full and complex, but a touch *fluide* at the core, with sound acids and good length and grip on the finish. This wine should be commended for being as fresh as it is in the 2009 vintage, but this seems to have been accomplished by really high yields! 2012-2014. **87.**

Menetou-Salon

2010 Menetou-Salon- Domaine Alain Assadet

This was the first wine I had ever tried from Alain Assadet and it was not bad, but not top division either. The nose is quite classic in its aromatic blend of grapefruit, lemon, fresh-cut grass, lime blossoms and gentle soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full and a touch dilute at the core, with surprisingly soft acids (particular for the vintage), very respectable focus and sneaky length on the gentle finish. I would love to see this wine with decidedly more core and cut. 2012-2013. **85.**

2010 Menetou-Salon “le Prieuré des Aublats ”- Domaine Henri Bourgeois

The 2010 Menetou-Salon from Domaine Bourgeois is a very pretty example of the vintage, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of grapefruit, lemon peel, a touch of petrol, cut grass and a nice dollop of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and focused, with a very good core of fruit, zesty acidity and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and youthful finish. This is tasty now, but with another six months of unwinding, this will be even better. 2012-2016+. **89+.**

2010 Menetou-Salon- Domaine Gerard Millet

I have never tasted any wines previously from Domaine Gerard Millet, but this 2010 Menetou seems to have been raised in some new oak. The nose offers up notes of green apple, grapefruit, herb tones, chalky soil tones and a bit of rather sour vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full and shows off good fruit and soil tones on the attack, but is sour and a bit unpleasant on the backend. 2012-2014. **86.**

2010 Menetou-Salon “les Bornés”- Domaine Henri Pellé

The 2010 Menetou-Salon “les Bornés” from Henri Pellé is a lovely example of the vintage and another fine bottle from my favorite producer in Menetou. The deep and excellent nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pink grapefruit, lime zest, tart orange, fresh-cut grass, flinty soil tones and incipient notes of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and snappy, with a fine core of fruit, very good focus and balance and a long, classy finish that closes with a nice touch of grassiness. Good juice. 2012-2014. **90+.**

2009 Menetou-Salon “Morogues”- Domaine Henri Pellé

Domaine Henri Pellé is my favorite producer in Menetou-Salon, but the 2009 Morogues suffers just a touch from the ripeness of this vintage. The ripe and complex nose offers up scents of grapefruit, tart orange, damp grass, flinty soil tones and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with very ripe sauvignon flavors and a touch of heat on the long and zesty finish. This is not bad in the context of the vintage, but there are many other vintages of the domaine’s wines that I find more satisfying. 2012-2014. **87.**

2009 Menetou-Salon “Morogues” Le Petit Clos- Domaine Jean-Max Roger

The 2009 Morogues from Jean-Max Roger does a better job of staying fresh and crisp than the slightly more heavy-handed version from Domaine Henri Pellé, but the wine is not quite as complex and is also fairly soft for a young Menetou-Salon. The deep and classy nose offers up a pretty blend of pink grapefruit, green apple, lime peel, damp grass and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very easy-going, with a plump core of fruit and a long, soft and fairly fragile finish. This will need drinking up pronto, but if one could have had a bit more acid spine here, this would have been excellent. 2012-2014. **87.**

2008 Menetou-Salon “La Charnivolle”- Domaine Fournier Père et Fils

The 2008 Menetou-Salon “La Charnivolle” from Domaine Fournier Père et Fils is a tad on the underripe side of the ledger, which has kept it very fresh from its snappy acids, but also just a touch green. The zippy nose offers up scents of grapefruit, lime peel, grassy tones and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full and a touch *fluide* at the core, with bright acids, fine freshness and pretty good length and grip on the snappy finish. This is not bad, but may not have quite enough mid-palate generosity for everyone. 2012-2015. **87.**

Reuilly

2010 Reuilly “les Pierres Plates”- Domaine de Reuilly (Denis Jamain)

Denis Jamain’s lovely Reuilly bottling is decidedly less generous out of the blocks in 2010 than was the case in 2009, but given how quickly the 2009 seems to have evolved, this is all for the good. The deep, cool and classy nose offers up a blend of grapefruit, lime, fresh-cut grass, a touch of petrol, lovely, chalky soil tones and a bit of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a nice, grassy personality, good mid-palate depth, bright acids and very good length and grip on the youthful and focused finish. Good juice that should evolve in a decidedly more leisurely pace than the riper 2009 version, though I do note that the sample I received was sealed with a plastic cork, which does not always promise longevity. 2012-2014. **90.**

2009 Reuilly- Domaine Claude Lafond La Raie

The 2009 Reuilly from Domaine Claude Lafond La Raie is a very pretty wine on the nose and has lovely flavors, but suffers a bit from the soft side of the vintage. The classy bouquet offers up a stylish and soil-driven mélange of grapefruit, tart orange, cut grass and lovely notes of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, soft, and shows a bit of overripeness on the backend, with little acidity, but also pretty good length on the finish. Not bad, but a bit compromised by the style of the vintage. Drink soon. 2012-2013. **86.**

2009 Reuilly “Les Pierres Plates”- Domaine de Reuilly (Denis Jamain)

Denis Jamain’s 2009 Reuilly is another example of the vintage with a really lovely nose and fine flavors, but which is now showing an alarmingly soft palate. A year ago I really liked this wine, which seemed to show very good acidity for the vintage, but one year on it is really already getting a bit soft on the backend. The wine offers up a very refined aromatic blend of lemon, lime, tart orange and pretty, chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very easy-going structurally, with a plump core of fruit and a gentle and fairly soft finish. A year ago this wine was really drinking beautifully, but it is alarming how quick its evolutionary pace is racing forward. Given how crisp it showed only a year ago, I expected this wine to be much less advanced than this particular bottle was showing! Is this bottle representative? 2012-2013. **87?**

Pouilly-Fumé

2010 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine Alexandre Bain

Readers may recall that Alexandre Bain is a young producer who is seeking to make his Pouilly-Fumé from late-harvested grapes, seeking to maximize personality and exuberance in the wines through riper grapes. The wines I have tasted from him are very well-made in their style, but not classic expressions of Pouilly-Fumé. The 2010 is a deep, pure and ripe wine that offers up a complex nose of pink grapefruit, tangerine, a bit of cat pee, musky floral tones, damp grass, citrus peel and flinty soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with very ripe

flavors, modest acids and very good length and grip on the intense finish. This is a very well-made wine, but it leaves me a bit cool stylistically, as I have never been a big fan of the aromatics and flavors of late-harvested sauvignon blanc. For those more intrepid than I, please add four points to the score, as the wine is certainly well-made in its style. 2012-2015. **87.**

2010 Pouilly-Fumé “En Travertin”- Domaine Henri Bourgeois

The 2010 Pouilly-Fumé from Henri Bourgeois is a very good example of the vintage and the appellation. The classic nose jumps from the glass in a grassy in an exuberant mélange of green apple, orange peel, cut grass, flinty soil tones and plenty of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pleasantly herbaceous, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and very good length and grip on the varietally pungent finish. Good juice here. 2012-2015. **89.**

2010 Pouilly-Fumé “Les Pentes”- Domaine Serge Dagueneau

I really like the wines from Serge Dagueneau and the 2010 Les Pentes is a very good wine that does not quite keep pace with the superb 2009. The very lovely and stylish nose offers up a complex and classic blend of pink grapefruit, green apple, lime peel, cut grass, hard limestone soil tones and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tightly-knit, with impressive complexity, a good core of fruit and lovely cut and grip on the long and zesty finish. The 2009 version seemed just a touch longer last year, but perhaps the 2010 is just on the young side still. Good juice and consistently one of my favorite bottlings of Pouilly-Fumé. 2012-2016. **91.**

2010 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine Karine Lauverjat

The 2010 Pouilly-Fumé from Karine Lauverjat is excellent, as it offers up a vibrant and classic nose of grapefruit, tart orange, a touch of petrol, flinty soils, pungent notes of fresh cut grass and a bit of lime blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and snappy, with lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids, fine focus and very good length and grip on the well-balanced, zesty and grassy finish. This is just a classic bottle of Pouilly-Fumé that should drink very well for the next three or four years. Impressive wine. 2012-2016. **90.**

2010 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine Seguin

The 2010 Pouilly-Fumé from Domaine Seguin is an excellent example of the vintage, offering up the classic combination of cut and depth at the core that the best wines of this year have in the central Loire. The nose is deep, complex and vibrant, offering up scents of gooseberries, grapefruit, flinty soil tones, a bit of petrol, fresh-cut grass, a touch of orange peel and a gentle topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, crisp and beautifully focused, with a very fine core, snappy and well-integrated acids and impressive length and grip on the zesty finish. This is a really good bottle of Pouilly-Fumé. 2012-2015+. **91.**

2010 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine Hubert Veneau

This was the first wine I had ever tasted from Hubert Veneau and I was very impressed with the quality of his 2010 Pouilly-Fumé. The wine offers up a bright and complex bouquet of lime zest, green apple, fresh-cut grass, flinty soil tones, a touch of orange and a nice topnote of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus, snappy acids and excellent length and grip on the pure and zesty finish. The bouquet is a touch more refined than the palate here, but this is a reference point example of Pouilly-Fumé from a grower I have every intention of following from here on out. Lovely juice. 2012-2018. **92+.**

2009 Pouilly-Fumé “Les Deux Cailloux”- Domaine Fournier Père et Fils

The 2009 Pouilly-Fumé “Les Deux Cailloux” from Domaine Fournier Père et Fils is one of the freshest examples of the vintage that I have tasted in the last several months, offering up a complex and classy nose of fresh-cut grass, lime, green apples, flinty soil tones and a very pretty topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with impressive complexity, solid, framing acids and very good length and grip on the finish. Like many of the other 2009 sauvignon blanc-based wines, this is wide open and should be drunk up on the early side, but it is showing very well at the present time and is a very good drink. 2012-2014. **89+**.

2009 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine Marcel Langoux

The 2009 Pouilly-Fumé from Domaine Marcel Langoux is a very nice example of the vintage, with the soft acids of the vintage not detracting from either the length or the precision on the backend. The classy nose offers up scents of green apple, grapefruit, fresh-cut grass, flinty soil tones and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite long, with low acids, but impressive complexity and a very fresh core of fruit. The finish is long, gently structured, but with good length and grip. A tasty wine for relatively near-term consumption. 2012-2015+. **88**.

2006 Pouilly-Fumé “Silex”- Domaine Didier Dagueneau

The 2006 Silex from Didier Dagueneau is really a lovely bottle that is drinking splendidly and shows every sign of lasting well to the end of this decade. The deep, ripe and complex nose offers up a lovely mélange of grapefruit, tart orange, fresh cut grass, stony, flinty soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and classy, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine complexity, very good acidity and just a touch of blowsy ripeness showing itself on the very long finish. A fine bottle, but if it had been picked just a touch on the earlier side to retain more cut and race, it might have moved up another three or four points. 2011-2020. **92**.

Sancerre

As noted in the opening, there was a bit of rain to dodge during the harvest in 2010 in Sancerre and its environs, so there is not quite the same consistency to be found here as was the case in vintages such as 2005 and 2006. But, that said, the best 2010 Sancerre bottlings I sampled in preparation for this article are utterly classic and some are destined to be some of the longest-lived and most stunning of recent vintages in this bucolic appellation. A few wines here that I tasted are very clean and correct, with good aromatic complexity and fine flavor profiles, but with just a touch of “fluidité” at the core that puts them in the good, but not great class of Sancerre and suggests that rain played a role in their final quality. However, the stars here in 2010 are utterly brilliant wines, with rock solid cores to go along with snappy acids, great aromatic and flavor precision and stunning bases of soil. For producers such as François Cotat, Edmond Vatan, Pascal Cotat and Gérard Boulay, their 2010s are absolutely stunning and classic young wines that are a refreshing return from the larger than life style of the very ripe 2009s. This is a vintage where it behooves lovers of Sancerre to search out the best producers and stock up on their wines, as they will age slowly and gracefully and are absolute classic examples of their respective terroirs. Happily, this appellation seems to have one of the highest percentages of vigneron producing excellent wines as anywhere in France, as the overall

quality of the top twenty or twenty-five percent of producers in the region is really at a very, very high level, so there should be no shortage of opportunities out there on the market. The 2010 vintage would seem to offer a perfect possibility to get to understand the variations in the different terroirs of Sancerre, and I imagine that wine lovers would have a lot of fun in this vintage tracking down top examples from different villages and doing a bit of blind tasting to compare and contrast the variations of terroir in the region.

2011 Sancerre “Chavignol”- Domaine Yves et Pierre Martin

The 2011 Sancerre from Yves et Pierre Martin is a lovely wine, offering up a deep and complex nose of lime zest, green apple, gooseberry, hard limestone, cut grass, citrus peel and a bit of white pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly crisp, with a fine core of fruit, a very primary personality at the moment and very good length and grip on the bright, but not particularly snappy finish. This is a beautifully made wine, but in the context of so many nervy 2010 Sancerres, this comes across as just a touch gentle in structural terms, despite its impressive depth and nascent complexity. 2012-2020. **90.**

2010 Sancerre “Terroirs”- Domaine Sylvain Bailly

The 2010 Sancerre “Terroirs” from Sylvain Bailly is classic Bué *terres blanches* Sancerre, with a depth and complex refinement that is very special indeed. The deep, complex and classy nose wafts from the glass in a seamless blend of gooseberry, lime zest, tart orange, suave, chalky minerality, white flowers, cut grass and just a touch of white pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a great core of fruit, laser-like focus and cut, impeccable balance and great grip on the very long and intensely flavored finish. This is as good as Bué Sancerre gets! 2012-2020. **93.**

2010 Sancerre- Domaine Gérard Boulay

The 2010 regular bottling from Gérard Boulay is a lovely example of the vintage, and as is often true to this cuvée, it is tightly wound and will repay a bit of cellaring. The deep, complex and extremely mineral nose offers up scents of lemon, grapefruit, a touch of smokiness, gentle grassy tones and kaleidoscopic minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and very long, with an excellent core of fruit bound up behind the girdle of acidity, excellent focus and superb length and mineral drive on the backend. While certainly approachable now, the 2010 Sancerre from Gérard Boulay will be even better with a year or two of bottle age. High class Chavignol! 2012-2020. **90+.**

2010 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- Domaine Gérard Boulay

The 2010 Monts Damnés from Gérard Boulay is simply stunning on both the nose and palate and is one of the reference point wines of the vintage. This bottling is made from forty-five year-old vines in one of the steepest sections of the Monts Damnés and then fermented in large old oak casks. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of green apple, lemon, very complex, chalky minerality, a touch of orange peel, petrol and cut grass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and tight, with a rock solid core of fruit, crystalline minerality, superb cut and focus and a very, very long, tightly-knit finish. Like the wines from Domaines Cotat and Vatan, this beauty is bottled unfiltered and built for the cellar. 2014-2035+. **93.**



Looking out from the top of the Monts Damnés vineyard in Chavignol.

2010 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay

The 2010 Clos de Beaujeu from Domaine Gérard Boulay is another absolutely reference point 2010 Sancerre, soaring from the glass in a blaze of tart orange, lemon, beautifully complex minerality, a touch of chalky overtones, citrus peel and a nice topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with nascent complexity, stunning depth at the core, bright acids and simply superb length and grip on the very racy and minerally finish. The Clos de Beaujeu from Gérard Boulay is also raised in old, 350 liter barrels and bottled unfiltered. A great wine. 2014-2035+. **94.**

2010 Sancerre “La Côte”- Domaine Gérard Boulay

This is the first vintage where the La Côte is being bottled by the domaine, which hails from a subsection of the Clos de Beaujeu in the Grande Côte vineyard in the neighboring village of Amigny. This is a stellar new addition to the lineup at the domaine and they could not have picked a more classic great vintage with which to begin! The nose on the 2010 La Côte offers up a brilliant nose of tart orange, pink grapefruit, a touch of cut grass, lovely, very complex minerality, smoke, orange peel and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and extremely long, with a rock solid core, snappy, ripe acids and stunning length and grip on the laser-like finish. A brilliant bottle of Sancerre that will be extremely long-lived. 2015-2035+. **94+.**

2010 Sancerre “La Comtesse”- Domaine Gérard Boulay

The La Comtesse bottling from Domaine Gérard Boulay comes from his oldest vines in his section of the Monts Damnés (fifty to seventy five years of age) and is barrel-fermented in old wood and also bottled unfiltered. The 2010 La Comtesse is brilliant, soaring from the glass in a very refined mélange of lemon, lime, chalky minerality, orange peel, glorious herb tones, petrol, lime blossoms and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with stunning refinement, superb mid-palate depth and a very long, complex and zesty finish. With wines like these 2010s, I have a hard time understanding why Domaine Gérard Boulay is not spoken of in the same reverential tones reserved for the Cotat cousins, Domaine Vatan and Domaine Didier Dagueneau- these wines are that good! 2012-2030+. **94+**.

2010 Sancerre “les Bonnes Bouches”- Domaine Henri Bourgeois

As Domaine Henri Bourgeois is based in Chavignol, Sancerre is obviously the family firm’s strongest suit and their lineup of 2010 Sancerre bottlings is really exceptional. The Bonnes Bouches is the entry level cuvée and it is lovely in 2010, jumping from the glass in a fine mix of green apple, lime peel, gentle grassiness, and a beautifully complex base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, focused and snappy, with fine mid-palate depth, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced and classic finish. A lovely example and quite a bargain. 2012-2018. **90+**.

2010 Sancerre “la Chapelle des Augustines”- Domaine Henri Bourgeois

The la Chapelle des Augustines is one of the top crus from Henri Bourgeois and the 2010 is stellar. The deep, complex and very classy bouquet offers up a lovely blend of pink grapefruit, flinty soil tones, tart orange, fresh-cut grass, citrus zest and a nice touch of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus, impressive transparency and outstanding length and grip on the very intense and classy finish. This is really a terrific bottle of Sancerre and clearly shows that the top cuvées from Domaine Bourgeois are as good as all but a very tiny handful of producers in the appellation. The 2010 la Chapelle des Augustines has the balance and cut to age long and gracefully. 2012-2022+. **92+**.

2010 Sancerre “Le M. D. de Bourgeois”- Domaine Henri Bourgeois

The M. D. here of course stands for Monts Damnés- Chavignol’s greatest vineyard. I am not sure why the domaine does not simply label the wine as Monts Damnés, but in any event, the 2010 is an absolutely stellar example of the vintage and this superb *terroir*. The exuberant bouquet offers up a very complex and classy mélange of tart orange, lime peel, cut grass, gentle notes of petrol and beautifully complex base of chalky minerality and a nice touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classic in profile, with a rock solid core, crisp acids and outstanding grip and focus on the very long and snappy finish. This is clearly cropped at low levels and attention is paid to every detail during the vinification and *elevage* of this lovely wine, as this is truly a superb rendition of Monts Damnés. 2012-2025. **93+**.

2010 Sancerre “Culs de Beaujeu”- Domaine François Cotat

I love the Culs de Beaujeu (Chavignol’s other great hillside vineyard) bottling from François Cotat and the 2010 is going to be a reference point vintage for this superb cuvée for decades to come! The very, very deep and pure nose offers up a beautiful mélange of orange, pink grapefruit, Chartreuse-like herb tones, a fabulously complex base of chalky soil tones, citrus peel and a touch of smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, magically transparent and very complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, crisp acids, laser-like focus and simply stunning length and grip on the young and utterly classic finish. This is as fine

a young bottling of Culs de Beaujeu from François Cotat as I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2012-2035. **94+**.

2010 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- Domaine François Cotat

The 2010 Monts Damnés bottling from François Cotat is even better than the brilliant Culs de Beaujeu, as the wine soars from the glass in a brilliant blend of tart orange, pink grapefruit, kaleidoscopic minerality, orange peel, a touch of fresh-culled mint, beeswax and Chartreuse botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with bottomless depth at the core, magical minerality, flawless focus and cut and simply profound length and grip on the seamless, young and very energetic finish. This is decidedly more reserved out of the blocks than the Culs de Beaujeu, but its inherent quality is self-evident! The 2010 Monts Damnés from François Cotat is one of the wines of the vintage in the Loire this year, but plan on aging it for an extended period of time to allow the wine to really blossom and hit its true apogee. Great juice. 2015-2035. **95+**.

2010 Sancerre “La Grande Côte”- Domaine François Cotat

The 2010 Grand Côte from François Cotat, is along with Edmond and Anne Vatan’s 2010 Clos la Néore, about as brilliant a young bottle of Sancerre as I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The utterly magical nose soars from the glass in a perfect blend of tangerine, lime, green apple, kaleidoscopic minerality, lime blossoms, a touch of petrol and Chartreuse botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stunningly pure on the attack, with a great signature of crystalline minerality, snappy acids, laser-like focus and absolutely flawless balance on the very, very long, reserved and intensely flavored finish. The balance here is so exquisite that there is no problem drinking this wine today, but it is infanticide to not at least give this great bottle three or four years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to unfold. It will live for a very, very long time. The 2010 Grand Côte from François Cotat is simply grand cru Chablis made out of sauvignon blanc! Pure magic. 2015-2035+. **97**.

2010 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- Domaine Pascal Cotat

The 2010 Monts Damnés from Pascal Cotat is absolutely brilliant wine. The very pure, complex and zesty nose soars from the glass in a blaze of green apples, beeswax, fresh-cut grass, sweet pink grapefruit, a touch of petrol, citrus blossoms, beautifully complex soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and snappy, with a superb core of fruit, outstanding focus and balance, impressive complexity and great length and grip on the pure, zesty and classic finish. This is a great bottle of Monts Damnés that is much more classic in profile than the riper and more powerful 2009 version. When all is said and done and this wine has an opportunity to blossom with a bit of bottle age, it will probably prove that I am underrating it a bit! 2012-2025. **93+**.

2010 Sancerre “la Grand Côte”- Domaine Pascal Cotat

Pascal Cotat and his father Francis have turned out an absolutely stunning version of Grand Côte in 2010. The deep, pure and magically complex nose offers up a superb blend of lemon, green apple, lime, very complex, chalky minerality, citrus blossoms and a lovely topnote of fresh-cut grass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very snappy, with outstanding mid-palate depth, laser-like focus and stunning length and grip on the very, very complex and perfectly balanced finish. There have been some superb vintages of Pascal Cotat Grand Côte over the years, but the 2010 has to be right up at the head of the class! Stunning wine. 2014-2030+. **94**.

2010 Sancerre “la Garenne”- Domaine Fernand Girard et Fils

The 2010 Sancerre from Domaine Girard is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a ripe nose of pink grapefruit, a touch of tart orange, damp grass, lovely, chalky soil tones, a bit of white pepper and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and deep, with a good core of fruit, fairly gentle acids for the vintage and very good focus and length on the finish. This seems just a touch gentle structurally, which suggests that perhaps the domaine was caught with a bit of crop out on the vines when the *fin de saison* rains showed up. But, I really like the depth and complexity here and for drinking over the next year, there is still quite a lot of pleasure to be had with this wine. 2012-2014. **87.**

2010 Sancerre- Domaine Karine Lauverjat

The 2010 Sancerre from Karine Lauverjat is a classic *terres blanches* example of Sancerre, with lovely soil inflection, pure fruit tones and a lovely floral aspect in the upper register. The nose is a fine mélange of gooseberry, green apple, chalky soil tones, gentle notes of grassiness and a nice topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full and shows off impressive intensity of flavor on the backend, with lovely focus and complexity, bright acids and very good length and grip. The wine closes with a touch of youthful white pepper and six months of bottle age should really work wonders on this fine bottle. 2012-2020. **90+.**

2010 Sancerre- Domaine Pierre Martin

This is the first wine I have ever tasted from Monsieur Martin, who is based in Chavignol, and I was quite impressed with the quality and style of this wine. The 2010 Sancerre from Domaine Martin offers up a deep and classic nose of gooseberry, fresh lime, a touch of newly-culled mint leaves, chalky soil, orange peel and cut grass. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with fine complexity, a solid core, beautiful soil transparency, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the snappy finish. A really lovely bottle of Sancerre. 2012-2016+. **92.**

2010 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Gérard et Pierre Morin

The Morins have long been one of my favorite families of producers in Bué, and their 2010 Vieilles Vignes bottling is a lovely example of the vintage. The nose is deep, complex and vibrant, offering up scents of grapefruit, lemon, a touch of white pepper, fresh-cut grass, chalk and lime zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core, lovely balance and a long, snappy finish. Just a classic bottle of Bué Sancerre. 2012-2017. **92.**

2010 Sancerre “Apud Sariaum”- Domaine Philippe Raimbault

The Apud Sariaum is the top bottling of Sancerre from Philippe Raimbault and the 2010 showed beautifully at a recent tasting. The very fine nose is deep and classic, jumping from the glass in a classy blend of gooseberry, green apple, fresh herb tones, chalky minerality and a topnote of limezest. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and snappy, with a good core of fruit, lovely focus and balance and impressive grip and cut on the long and nicely soil-driven finish. A most impressive Sancerre from a producer I had not previously had the pleasure to taste. 2012-2015. **90+.**

2010 Sancerre “Cuvée Les Côûtes”- Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy

The 2010 Cuvée Les Côûtes from Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy is another absolutely excellent example of the vintage, with fine mid-palate depth, pure soil inflection and lovely raciness on the palate. The classy nose is deep and complex, jumping from the glass in a blend of tart orange, gooseberry, chalky minerality, fresh-cut grass, floral tones and a bit of lime peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the

core, with bright acids, fine focus and very good length and grip on the classy finish. Good juice. 2012-2018. **92+**.

2010 Sancerre “la Crêle”- Domaine Thomas et Fils

I have very much liked the la Crêle bottling from Domaine Thomas et Fils in the past, but I had not tasted a recent release from the estate in at least the last decade. I quite liked the 2010 version, but the wine could have done with just a bit more mid-palate depth. The very classic nose offers up a deep blend of gooseberry, chalky minerality, lime peel, cut grass and just a hint of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with good acids and focus, very good grip and just a touch of mid-palate *fluidité* that keeps the score down on the fairly long finish. Not bad at all, but this was probably cropped at a pretty generous level. 2012-2014. **89**.

2010 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Domaine Anne et Edmond Vatan

The 2010 Clos la Néore from the Vatan is utterly stunning and one of the best young vintages of this wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The utterly pure and laser-like bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of lime, tart orange, kaleidoscopic minerality, fresh-culled mint, citrus blossoms and gently grassy tones. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and razor-sharp, with brilliant delineation, a great core of pure fruit, snappy acids, crystalline minerality and utterly magical length and grip on the multi-faceted finish. The 2010 Clos la Néore does not seem to have quite the ripeness of other recent top vintages of this wine, such as 2005, 2002 or 1997, and this gives the new vintage a raciness that is utterly extraordinary. A brilliant wine. 2015-2040+. **96+**.

2010 Sancerre- Domaine des Vieux Pruniers (Christian Thirot-Fournier)

This was the first wine I had ever tasted from Christian Thirot-Fournier’s Bué estate of Domaine des Vieux Pruniers and the wine is an absolute classic, offering up a deep and zesty bouquet of gooseberry, grapefruit, cut grass, beautiful, chalky soil tones, orange peel and a touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, superb focus and cut and outstanding length and grip on the long and still quite youthful finish. This is a very good drink out of the blocks, but it is snappy and will be even better with six months or a year of bottle age, which will allow its structural zippiness to relax a bit. Fine Sancerre. 2012-2018. **91+**.

2009 Sancerre “Belles Vignes”- Domaine Fournier Père et Fils

Like many of the 2009 Loire sauvignons that I tasted in the last couple of months in preparation for this report, the ’09 Belles Vignes from Domaine Fournier Père et Fils is getting a little soft now and probably is best off drunk up over the near-term. The nose is still quite fresh and complex, delivering scents of green apple, gooseberry, grassy notes, lime blossoms and a lovely base of flinty soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fresh and a tad soft, with a good core of fruit and still very good length and grip on the pure and wide open finish. For drinking over the next year or two, there is a lot of pleasure to be had here, but I would not let this wine linger in a corner of the cellar much beyond that point. 2012-2014. **88**.

2009 Sancerre- Domaine Laporte Le Rochoy

The 2009 Sancerre from Laporte Le Rochoy is a good example of the vintage, offering up a fresh and quite vibrant nose for an ’09, with scents of grapefruit, gooseberry, cut grass, chalky soil tones and citrus peel wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and impressively snappy for the year, with good, but not great mid-palate depth, bright acids and a long, focused and classy finish. Good juice. 2012-2014+. **89**.

2009 Sancerre “Ultimus”- Domaine Jean Thomas et Fils

The bottling of Sancerre “Ultimus” from Jean Thomas et Fils is an old vine cuvée that is vinified half in oak and half in stainless steel tanks. The 2009 is ripe and over-oaked, offering up a reasonably complex nose of tangerines, smoke, cut grass, citrus peel, chalk and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is far less interesting than it is on the nose, with its ripe and rigid (from the wood) palate a mix of slightly over the top fruit tones, a bit of backend alcohol, low acids and a fair bit of tannin keeping the wine stillborn on the backend. This is full and really dulled from its sojourn in wood, with a ponderous palate impression. The bottle also weighs in at about four pounds, making it one of the less eco-conscious wines out there. The 2010 la Crêpe from the domaine is far more interesting wine. 2012-2014. **83.**

2009 Sancerre “Les Monts Damnés”- Domaine Thomas-Labaille

Domaine Thomas-Labaille made really splendid wines in 2009 and their Monts Damnés bottling is drinking as well today as it was one year ago. The deep, complex and very high class nose offers up a lovely mélange of lime, green apple, gooseberry, orange peel, complex notes of *terres blanches* and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fresh and racy, with great mid-palate depth, bright, zesty acidity and excellent focus on the well-balanced and very long finish. A lovely, lovely wine. 2012-2016+. **93.**

2009 Sancerre “Culs de Beaujeu”- Domaine François Cotat

At fifteen percent alcohol, the 2009 Culs de Beaujeu from François Cotat is hardly a shy wine, but it is cut very much in the style of the superb 1989s from this estate which have aged so well and which Monsieur Cotat now cites as one of the finest recent vintages from the property. The nose on the 2009 Culs de Beaujeu is deep, complex and impressively “cool” in profile for such a ripe wine, offering up scents of grapefruit, lemon peel, very complex minerality, Chartreuse-like herb tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and minerally, with a rock solid core of fruit, great cut and focus and a long, youthful and racy finish. There are really no signs at all of its hefty alcohol to be found here on either the nose or palate today and this wine should age quite gracefully for many years to come. 2014-2040. **93.**

2008 Sancerre “le Chêne”- Domaine Lucien Crochet

As Monsieur Crochet’s US importer does not have the common courtesy to answer emails or voicemails, I do not taste this fine Bué-based producer’s wines with much frequency. As a sommelier I used to pour this cuvée by the glass (the importer never had a problem answering my phone calls then!), so I was happy to cross paths with the 2008 at a good friend’s home out in California. Given that 2008 was a pretty difficult vintage in Sancerre, the ’08 Crochet le Chêne has to be ranked as a success, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of gooseberries, lime zest, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with fine focus and cut, moderate mid-palate depth and a long, snappy finish that betrays just a touch of “greenness” from the vintage’s inherent struggle to ripen the grapes fully. But all in all, good juice. 2011-2016. **89.**

2008 Sancerre “Cuvée Silex”- Domaine Fournier Père et Fils

The 2008 Cuvée Silex from Domaine Fournier Père et Fils is a very lovely bottle of Sancerre at its apogee, offering up a deep and complex nose of green apple, gooseberry, fresh-cut grass, spring flowers and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and very good length and grip. As has been the case with several other 2008 Sancerre bottlings that I have tasted in the last couple of years, a

bit of bottle age seems to have done a nice job of allowing the wines to blossom a bit from behind the slightly green austerity of the vintage and really provide a nice window of drinkability. A fine bottle that still has a couple more years of life in it. 2012-2014. **90.**

2007 Sancerre “Grande Cuvée”- Domaine Fournier Père et Fils

I very much like the 2007 Grande Cuvée from Domaine Fournier, which offers up impressive complexity on both the nose and palate, but the wine is getting just a touch soft at age five and probably should be drunk up in the next couple of years. The classy nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of green apple, lime, freshly-mown grass, a nice base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite long on the backend, with a good core, fine focus and a rather gentle structure at the present time. There is still sufficient acidity here to keep the wine bright and light on its feet, but it is no longer climbing in quality and will probably be best off drunk up in the next year or two. 2012-2014. **89.**

2007 Sancerre “Culs de Beaujeu”- Domaine François Cotat

In contrast to the very ripe and powerful version of Culs de Beaujeu from François Cotat, the 2007 is an absolutely classic example of this fine bottling. The wine is deep, complex and just starting to really develop a bit of secondary complexity on the nose, offering up scents of orange, pink grapefruit, stony minerality, Chartreuse-like herb tones and a topnote of limepeel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very transparent, with crisp acids, excellent focus and cut and a very long, well-balanced and soil-driven finish. I love the style of the 2007 vintage, as in my experience one really sees the brilliance of the Cotat style best in the leaner, snappier vintages. It is still very early days for this lovely wine. 2012-2030. **93.**

2005 Sancerre “Monts Damnés” Cuvée Buster- Domaine Thomas-Labaille

The 2005 Cuvée Buster from Domaine Thomas-Labaille is showing very well at age six, but clearly is now getting to a point where its best drinking will not carry more than a handful of years further into the future. The deep, complex and mature nose offers up scents of lime, orange, green apple, chalky soil tones, a touch of honeycomb and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and showing just a touch of late harvest character, with a good core, sound acids and very good length and grip on the complex and bouncy finish. A lovely wine. 2012-2016. **92.**

2002 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Domaine Edmond Vatan

I bought a fair bit of the 2002 Clos la Néore from Edmond Vatan and so have the luxury of drinking this superb wine with a bit of frequency. It is pretty amazing that as the wine reaches its tenth birthday, it still seems almost untouched by time and is as fresh and zesty as it was upon release. I would be very surprised if this wine does not last forty years or more at the rate it is going! The most recent bottle was yet another fresh and vibrant wine, jumping from the glass in a beautifully suave nose of green apple, lime, pulverized, chalky stone, cut grass, orange peel, a touch of fresh almond and a lovely topnote of Chartreuse-like herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully transparent, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids and superb length and grip on the laser-like and very pure finish. Just a beautiful wine that continues to cruise along in the prime of life. 2012-2035+. **95.**



Sancerre Rouge

While I like Sancerre rouge as well as the next person, I have had so many truly transcendental Sancerre rosé bottlings that I often wonder if it would not make sense to devote more of the pinot noir plantations in Sancerre to the production of high class rosé, rather than making as much Sancerre rouge as is currently out on the market. I fully understand the historical significance for domaines to continue to produce a rouge bottling of Sancerre, and would be the last one in the world to downplay the importance of maintaining historical continuity and respecting one's vinous legacies in the region, but with the continued surge of interest in dry rosé throughout the world and the already demonstrated beauty of Sancerre rosé, it would seem to me to be an interesting time on the part of more vignerons in the appellation to expand their production of rosé- even if this means dialing back the production of Sancerre rouge.

2009 Sancerre “les Bonnes Bouches” Rouge- Domaine Henri Bourgeois

The 2009 Bonnes Bouches rouges is quite nice from Henri Bourgeois, with just a touch of weediness keeping the score down a bit. The bouquet is quite fine, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of bonfire, coffee, herb tones, game and chalky soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and solid at the core, with moderate tannins and good length and grip on the slightly weedy finish. Good, solid juice that should be even better with a year or two in

bottle, but will always probably be a touch on the herbaceous side of the pinot noir ledger. 2012-2020. **87.**

2009 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Gérard et Pierre Morin

The Morins make some of my favorite Sancerre rouge bottlings and there 2009s are quite fine in quality. The 2009 regular bottling offers up a fresh and classy nose of cherries, orange peel, woodsmoke, a touch of nuttiness, chalky soil tones and a nice touch of autumn leaves in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and nicely transparent, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the finish. Good juice that will be even better with a year or two in the cellar to allow the tannins to fall away. 2012-2025. **88.**

2009 Sancerre “Belle Chaume” Rouge- Domaine Gérard et Pierre Morin

The Belle Chaume cuvée of Sancerre rouge from the Gérard et Pierre Morin is made in a more structured style and really needs a couple of years in the cellar to blossom. The wine is aged for eighteen months in old oak *foudres* prior to bottling. The 2009 Belle Chaume offers up a deep and youthful bouquet of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, chalky minerality, espresso and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully structured, with a very good core of fruit, a bit of firm tannin, and a lovely backend signature of chalky soil tones on the long and chewy finish. Good juice, but tuck it away in the cellar for a few years to allow it to really blossom. 2014-2035. **89+.**

2009 Sancerre “Terres Blanches” Rouge- Domaine Thomas et Fils

The 2009 Sancerre rouge from Domaine Thomas et Fils is quite marked by its rather raw new wood component and consequently is not a particularly enjoyable glass of wine today. The nose shows some nice fruit and soil tones under the new oak, with notes of black cherries, blood orange, chalky soil tones and smoke fighting up through the very generous coating of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full and currently quite rigid from its oak treatment, with moderate depth and a dried out, oak tannin finish that will at the very least need some time in the cellar to absorb the wood. I am not sure that there is enough stuffing here to actually ever carry the wood seamlessly, but there is a chance that the wine will eventually come around a bit. Right now, it is not a pleasant drink. 2015-2020+? **80-85+?**

Sancerre Rosé

2010 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine François Cotat

The 2010 Sancerre Rosé from Domaine François Cotat is about as stunning a bottle of Rosé as I have had the pleasure to taste in a long, long time. The wine offers up a simply beautiful bouquet of white cherries, oranges, beautifully complex, chalky minerality, spring flowers and a nice touch of cherry skin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and flat out stunning, with a rock solid core of fruit, brisk acids, laser-like focus and simply great length and grip. Given the possibilities for Rosé made out of pinot noir in the great soils of Chavignol, it seems to me a shame that more producers in the village do not focus exclusively on producing rosé from their pinot vines and skip producing Sancerre rouge altogether! This is a breathtakingly stunning bottle of dry Rosé! 2012-2020. **94.**

THE BAROLO BRILLIANCE OF MARCARINI



Marcarini is one of the great classicists in Piemonte. The estate is located in the town of La Morra, where it has been based since it was originally founded five generations ago. The domaine has been run since 1990 by Luisa Marcarini Marchetti and her husband Manuel Marchetti, who have received the reins of the estate from Luisa's side of the family. Luisa's mother, Anna Marcarini Bava is still actively involved in the estate as well. Marcarini's superb cellars have always been based in a superb building just outside of the town center of La Morra and which dates back to the 1700s. It lies alongside the medieval tower in the town that looks out upon the vineyards of the eastern sector of La Morra. The estate is one of the oldest in Piemonte, as it can trace back its origins to the 1850s and the birth of Barolo as a modern wine. Despite this long and illustrious history, as well as prime holdings in two of the greatest Crus in Barolo and an enviable track record of flat out brilliant winemaking for decade after decade, Marcarini curiously travels a bit below the radar in many circles of lovers of the wines of Piemonte. The estate is never spoken of with the same hushed reverence reserved for the likes of the estates of Bruno Giacosa, Giacomo Conterno or Bartolo Mascarello, but the wines are clearly amongst the very greatest made in the last fifty years in Piemonte and deserve to be far better known than they are today.

The history of today's Marcarini estate can be traced all the way back to the mid nineteenth century, but it has only been commercializing wine under its own label since the 1958

vintage. Prior to 1958, the wines were sold off in bulk or in demijohns, with only the percentage retained for the family's personal cellar bottled up four years out from the vintage. The estate also for a long time sold a significant percentage of their vineyard production off as grapes each year. Like many of today's venerable estates in Piemonte, Marcarini began as a large, mixed agricultural concern, with their vineyard parcels tended by sharecroppers, who would receive a percentage of the harvest as compensation for their tending the vineyards during the growing season. One has to remember that for much of Piemonte's history in the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, cereal production in the region was far more important as a cash crop than grapes. As current Marcarini Director, Manuel Marchetti observes, in the old days "the Marcarinis did not live off of the sale of wine or grapes, as the Langhe was a very poor area" and it was not possible for an estate to survive solely from the wine business, so "my wife Luisa and myself are the first generation that only lives from the profit of the wine." But, as is the case with several other old line estates, such as the Rinaldis, the Marcarinis have always had a shrewd eye for the best vineyard crus and have added parcels as fate would allow- if and when top plots came onto the market.

The Marcarini estate takes its name from Generale Sebastiano Marcarini, who was born in 1841. He was the son of Teresa Borgogno (born in 1820) and Pietro Marcarini (who originally came from the village of Neive over in Barbaresco country). It was Teresa Borgogno's family (no relation to the Borgogno family who are well-known Barolo producers today) who was already established in La Morra as grape growers and wine producers. Sebastiano Marcarini's children, Giuseppe Marcarini (1875-1927), Teresa Marcarini (1877-1944) and Giulio Marcarini (1884-1961) all continued to oversee the direction of the family estate. The youngest child of his generation, Giulio Marcarini married Anna Sosso, who came from another important wine-producing family in La Morra in the early twentieth century, the Tarditi family, and it is from the Tarditi family that the building in town that today houses Marcarini's winery and cellars originated. Giulio and Anna's son, Giuseppe Marcarini would take over the reins of the family estate from the previous generation, and it was during his tenure that Marcarini would begin to bottle some of their production and make the wines available for sale in bottle, rather than solely in cask or demijohn. Giuseppe Marcarini also designed the familiar gold label that continues to adorn bottles of Marcarini to this day (with only slight variations incorporated over the years).

It was Giuseppe Marcarini who hired the estate's first full-time winemaker, Elvio Cagno in 1958, to begin to produce and sell the Marcarini wines in bottle. It was a very good vintage to start with, as 1958 was one of the very finest years of the post-war period. Signor Marcarini and Cagno soon earned a very fine reputation for the wines that were beginning to appear under the distinctive gold Marcarini labels, as the '58 vintage was deemed of high enough quality to produce both a *Normale* and a *Riserva Speciale* bottling of Barolo from the estate. Importantly, the very first Marcarini Baroli sold in bottle from the 1958 vintage were labeled as Barolo "Brunate", making them the very first Barolo to be sold with the name of the cru on the label. I had originally believed that the 1965 Barolo "Marcenasco" from Rennato Ratti was the very first wine sold in Piemonte with the name of the cru on the label, but it now appears that the Marcarini Brunate from 1958 was the very first to make this important distinction on the label of the wine. Elvio Cagno would go on to have a very long and successful career at Marcarini, eventually becoming a partner in the firm for many years, so that some bottles from the decade of the 1960s will be labeled as hailing from the estate of Cagno-Marcарini. Elvio Cagno would

also receive some of the production as part of his compensation with the estate back in those early years, so that one can sometimes find bottles of Barolo “Brunate” labeled as coming from Elvio Cogno. To my knowledge, the last vintage where one could find Marcarini wines under the Cogno label (prior to the establishment of his new estate in Novello- starting with the 1990s) was the 1978 vintage.

The Marcarini estate has been home through the years to some of the most accomplished winemakers in Piemonte. Today, the winemaking is handled by Armando Cordero and Luisa Marcarini Marchetti. As Signor Cordero arrived at the estate just in time for the 1990 harvest, he never had the opportunity of working alongside the previous cellar master, Elvio Cogno before Signor Cogno purchased his own estate. During his tenure at Marcarini, Elvio Cogno was widely recognized as one of the most talented winemakers in Piemonte, and much of the credit for the Marcarini estate’s exceptional reputation must be given to the superb work that he did while patrolling the family cellars in La Morra. However, with the departure of Signor Cogno from Marcarini happening right before the 1990 harvest to purchase his own estate in the region (the former Poggio Peterchino property in nearby Novello), one can imagine that the timing was far from ideal for the Marcarini estate. Signor Cogno left with the grapes ripe and ready to be picked, so it is easy to imagine that this did not endear him to the owners of the estate. Indeed, the Marchetti family is a bit reticent about the last period of Signor Cogno’s tenure at Marcarini and it is probably safe to assume that the Cogno era at Marcarini did not end on a happy note. What is important to keep in mind is that the transition from the Cogno era of winemaking to that of Armando Cordero and Luisa Marcarini Marchetti was a seamless one in terms of the quality and style of the wines, and the wines at Marcarini have continued to be fashioned in the same uncompromising, traditional style since the very first vintage was commercialized with the 1958s.

Marcarini currently owns seventeen hectares of vines (primarily within the township of La Morra), with two of their largest holdings in the famous crus of Brunate and La Serra. These two great Barolo vineyards that Marcarini owns parcels in lie alongside each other on the hillside on the southern end of La Morra, right on the border with the municipality of Barolo proper. This group of hillsides, which rise from an elevation of 230 meters at the base of Brunate (just across the border in the township of Barolo) to 405 meters above sea level at the top of this vineyard, and to just over 450 meters at the top of La Serra, also houses another of La Morra’s greatest vineyards, Cerequio, which lies below the eastern section of La Serra in the center of the slope. The Marcarini estate is one of the most important vineyard owners in Brunate, owning a total of just under four and a half hectares of vines in this prestigious cru, with the larger section of vines on the La Morra side of the boundary. The totality of Brunate on both sides of the border is twenty-five hectares, so the estate owns just a bit under twenty percent of the cru. The larger Marcarini parcel in the La Morra section of Brunate lies right in the center of the vineyard, running down from the top of the slope under the road that separates this vineyard from the vines of Boiolo to the bottom of the hillside in La Morra. The La Morra side of Brunate has primarily an exposition of due south, but this shifts around towards the southeast as one moves up towards the end of the vineyard in the direction of the town itself. However, the Marcarini section in the center of the cru has a perfect southerly exposition and is one of the choicest plots in the entire vineyard. Not to be discounted is the smaller section of Brunate that the estate owns across the border in the village of Barolo, as this too, is beautifully-situated, lying right below the Cascina

Brunate owned by Francesco Rinaldi y Figli, with the Marcarini parcel sandwiched between the Brunate holdings in the village of Barolo owned by the two Rinaldi cousins' estates: Giuseppe Rinaldi and Francesco Rinaldi y Figli.

Since its origins in the 1850s, the Marcarini name has been firmly tied with that of Brunate, as this has been the family's primary Barolo cru since the very beginning. Of the 4.5 hectares that are currently owned by the estate, much of this can be traced back to the very earliest years of the family property. As Manuel Marchetti observes, "the parcels we have in Brunate have changed a bit over the years, but the largest part belonged to the family and was in one large piece in the Fontanazza village", while "other parcels were added over the years- like the one in Barolo- and some others were lost because of family divisions due to inheritance." Today, 3.87 hectares of the 4.5 owned by the Marcarini estate in Brunate lie in the La Morra section of the vineyard, with .63 hectares carrying over the border into the parcels of Brunate in the village of Barolo. As Signor Marchetti has noted, each successive generation of the family to own the estate has added to the vineyard patrimony at Marcarini, so that the .63 hectare section of Brunate lying in Barolo was the last piece to be added to their Brunate holdings.

Brunate is one of the great crus of Barolo and to many connoisseurs, Brunate produces one of the archetypical examples of Barolo, with its combination of youthful power and structure giving way in the fullness of time to an almost velvety texture on the palate and beautifully complex perfume. The wine, when vinified and aged in the classic style (as it has always been at Marcarini), can start out life firm and slightly austere, with the great purity of red and black cherry fruit bound up in youthful elements of tar, soil and camphor. Young Brunate is always a robustly tannic wine, but also always showing very clear signs of the inherent elegance of this cru that emerges with a few decades of bottle age to fully define the wines from this vineyard. It is one of the warmer crus in La Morra, and with the Marcarini's vines right in the center of the slope and facing due south, one often finds in their wine at maturity a slightly chocolaty aspect from this extra touch of perfect ripeness. In fact, the Marcarini version is about as classic an example of Brunate as one can find, as the blend of the two parcels of vines fully captures the complete expression of this long-lived cru. The Barolo side of the vineyard is generally considered to provide wines that are slightly more dominated by their structure and a tad more austere out of the blocks than the wines that hail from the La Morra side of the vineyard, and with the Marcarini parcels split between the La Morra and the Barolo side of the vineyard, the resulting wine is an absolutely classic interpretation of Brunate. In a top vintage, one should not expect the Marcarini Brunate to really start to come into its own until twenty years has passed, and as the notes below on the beautiful 1978 and 1971 will attest, the twenty year mark is only the point of departure for these wines and they continue to blossom and improve for the first fifty years of their existence.

While the Brunate bottling is the more famous of the two Baroli from Marcarini, the La Serra vineyard is also one of the great wines of La Morra and should not be overlooked. The estate owns the largest plot of vines in La Serra, with three and a half hectares of vines planted to nebbiolo and an additional 1.5 hectares planted to dolcetto and barbera. The Marcarini parcels are located on lowest section of the hillside (with the exception of one small plot higher up the slope), just above the upper reaches of Cerequio and the adjacent vineyard of Case Nere. La Serra is the highest vineyard in elevation of the five crus that occupy the hills in this section of

La Morra, ranging from a peak of 450 meters above sea level at the top of the slope down to 370 meters at its lower section in which the Marcarini vines are located. This is the coolest microclimate located on these hillsides, as cold air often descends down on La Serra from the village of La Morra up above the vineyard on the ridge to the north, and this cooler location often translates into wines from this vineyard that are a tad more austere and less ample than those of neighboring Brunate. The soils are also not as deep as either Brunate or Cerequio, as erosion over the years has reduced the amount of topsoil in La Serra. The expositions of La Serra shift around quite a bit, with the top section closest to the vineyard of Boiolo facing due east, whereas the lower sections shift around orientation to the southeast and due south. Happily for the Marcarini estate, almost all of their nebbiolo vines lie in the lower and best-situated section of La Serra with its due south exposition, with the exception of their one lower parcel that lies right above Cerequio, which shares the same southeasterly exposure as its more famous neighbor. The domaine also has a small plot of vines in La Serra further up the slope and separate from the remainder of their parcel in the vineyard, which lies right below the vines of Gianni Voerzio and which also faces due south. Of all the dozen or so landowners in the vineyard, Marcarini has the finest holdings in La Serra.

La Serra is by a good margin the younger of the two Marcarini Barolo cru holdings, as the first parcels in the vineyard were purchased in 1973, and the last addition was bought in 1978. Giuseppe Marcarini's daughter, Anna Bava, who succeeded him as the head of the family estate, began purchased the family's holdings in La Serra in the year after her father passed away in 1972, and the first Marcarini La Serra bottling was released onto the market in the great 1978 vintage. Interestingly, the family has never produced a *Riserva Speciale* or *Riserva* bottling from the cru of La Serra, as this designation has always been reserved for a selection from the Brunate vineyard. Throughout the tenure of Elvio Cogno at Marcarini, a Brunate *Riserva Speciale* or *Riserva* was produced in most top vintages, starting with the inaugural commercial release of 1958. However, since the 1990 vintage, the family has decided to simply bottle their two crus as *Normale* bottlings, opining that both Brunate and La Serra are sufficiently fine on their own to be bottled without spending an additional year in *Botti* to be labeled as *Riserva* under the new DOCG regulations. While much of the wine world is often focused almost exclusively on the Marcarini Brunate bottling, their La Serra is another world class bottle of Barolo and does not receive anywhere near the attention that its consistent excellence deserves. In fact, in an era of climate change, it is possible that somewhere down the road the cooler microclimate of La Serra may well end up being the more cherished of the two crus by future generations!

The wine of La Serra from Marcarini is always a beautiful and classic Barolo, without quite the inherent power one finds in the Marcarini Brunate, but sharing the same beautiful transparency down to the soil and the beautiful perfume of great Barolo. Ironically, despite the wine often starting out life a tad more austere in style, the Marcarini La Serra invariably comes around more quickly than the Brunate and is usually ready to drink fully five years ahead of its more structured Barolo brother. The fruit component in La Serra is almost always completely to the red fruity side of the spectrum, with notes of cherries and blood orange often augmented by a distinctively rose petal tone to its floral aromatics. La Serra also shares similar notes of camphor and autumnal soil tones with next door Brunate, but it is always a wine that seems more transparent and less tarry out of the blocks than the vineyard next door. At full maturity, it is often quite Burgundian in its style parameters, with notes of gamebird and *sous bois* adding to its

layers of complexity. While it does not possess the same power or intensity in the mid-palate as Brunate, it is a beautiful wine in the hands of the talented winemakers who have graced the cellars at Marcarini for many decades and is a wine that is often unfairly overlooked in the long shadow of the Marcarini Brunate bottling.



Snow-covered vineyards in Barolo. © 2005 John E. Morris

The vinification style at Marcarini for their two Baroli is utterly classic, with macerations lasting a full four weeks these days and the wines aged for two solid years in large, two thousand to four thousand liter, old Slavonian oak *Botti* prior to bottling and further aging in the cellars. There are no differences taken in the cellars between the two wines, as both macerate on the skins for the same period of time, are fermented at similar temperatures and aged for the same length of time prior to their release on the market. Both vineyards are planted with the Nebbiolo strains of Michét and Lampia, with the most recent plantings in some of the farm's parcels of Brunate taking place in 1980 and 1986. Both the La Serra and Brunate start out life firm and structured in the style of the grand old classics of Barolo, with the need for extended bottle age to unlock the magic inherent year in and year out in these two great wines. At the time, there was some talk in Barolo-loving circles soon after the departure of Elvio Cogno that the wines at Marcarini might change a bit, but this has emphatically not proven to be the case and today it is quite clear that the style at Marcarini has remained consistently traditional and excellent since the first commercial releases in the 1958 vintage. As the replanting was pretty extensive in the mid-to-late 1980s both in Brunate and La Serra, it is possible that there was a slight dip in concentration in the early 1990s in both wines from some of the replanting, but this may well

have simply been a reflection of the styles of vintages such as 1993 and 1995, rather than any effect from the replanting. Certainly the blockbuster 1996 Brunate shows no signs of any less concentration than would have been the case with the old vines back in a vintage such as 1978. And, of course, the family has always blended the production from the youngest vines in their two crus into their Nebbiolo Delle Langhe bottling.

In addition to their two beautiful Baroli cuvées, the family estate also produces a full range of classic Alba bottlings, including a Dolcetto d'Alba from Fontanazza, a Barbera d'Alba "Ciabot Camerano", a Nebbiolo Delle Langhe "Lasarin", a Roero Arneis, and a Moscato d'Asti. The examples I have tasted of these bottlings are all quite classic in style (I have never had the pleasure of tasting the Roero Arneis, as this classic Piemonte white wine is a recent addition to their lineup), with the exception of the Barbera "Ciabot Camerano", which is raised in a combination of older *Botti* and small French *barriques* and shows off a quite modern and new oaky personality. Happily, it is the only wine that is not done in the classic style of tradition at Marcarini, as the 2010 that I tasted in preparation for this report was not particularly to my tastes. The Nebbiolo bottling is made up of some old vine plantings outside of the Barolo DOCG region in the family's newest vineyard acquisitions in Roero, near the estate's Arneis vineyard, as well as the young vine production from the Marcarini parcels in Brunate and La Serra. I do not taste it with any regularity, but have always found it to be a lovely middleweight and a good value when it crosses my path. In addition, Marcarini also produces a second Dolcetto bottling, from pre-phylloxera, ungrafted, very old vines planted in the late 1800s, which is labeled as Dolcetto d'Alba "Boschi di Berri". It is made in very small quantities and I have never had the pleasure to taste a bottle. The Marcarini lineup is rounded out with a very good Moscato d'Asti bottling. While the whole lineup at the estate that I have tasted is excellent, there is little doubt that Marcarini is first and foremost a Barolo estate and it is the superb Brunate and La Serra bottlings on which the fame of the domaine has been based for more than half a century.

I have had the good fortune to attend three recent Marcarini verticals in the last few years, from which many of the notes below were gleaned. The Rare Wine Company kindly invited me to a comparison of Brovia Rocche and Marcarini Brunate back in June of 2009, which really served as a catalyst for this feature. Then in September of 2010, my good friend, Dr. Markus Strobel put together another fine lineup of Marcarini wines after one of our long days tasting together in German wine country. Finally, another good friend, Ray DeAngelo organized a Marcarini Brunate vertical this past month here in New York to finally get this article across the finish line. While not all of the notes that follow hail from these three tastings, they played an invaluable role in building up the base of tasting notes necessary to make a feature like this possible. A word of thanks should also go out to a gentleman who set me off on my journey of Marcarini appreciation all those years ago, John Ferris (who may not even remember the dinner!) who kindly put together a vertical Marcarini Brunate evening back in the late 1980s and was willing to share even bottles of the precious 1971 with a young and overly exuberant wine merchant who had no clue about Barolo at the time. My appreciation for the beautiful wines of Marcarini would certainly have been far later in coming without his extreme generosity early on in my career. I should also thank the Marchetti family and the importers of Marcarini here in the states, Empson USA, for also providing me both with some samples and assisting in digging up much of the historical information on the estate that appears here. It is funny that an estate that has had such a long and consistently excellent run of vintages, spanning decade after decade, can

keep such a relatively low profile in the world of traditionalist Barolo, but this is exactly been the case with Marcarini since at least the dawn of the 1960s. I hope this article contributes a bit to the long overdue praise that the great wines of this fine estate so richly deserve.

Moscato di Asti

2011 Moscato di Asti- Marcarini

This was the first time I had ever tasted a bottle of Moscato from one of my favorite Barolo producers- Marcarini- and I was quite impressed with the quality of this bottling. The nose is bright, succulent and floral, offering up scents of fresh-picked pears, tangerine, acacia blossoms, lovely, stony minerality and a nice touch of coriander seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and lively, with lovely, gentle *mousse*, fine focus and a long, juicy and zesty finish. A very nice bottle of Moscato di Asti. 2012-2013. **88.**

Dolcetto and Barbera

2010 Dolcetto d'Alba "Fontanazza"- Marcarini

I have always liked the Dolcetto Fontanazza bottling from Marcarini, which I first began drinking with some frequency in the 1989 vintage. The 2010 is a very pretty and forward example, offering up a vibrant nose of black cherries, dark chocolate, herb tones, charred wood and a nice base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full and a touch *fluide* at the core, with pretty modest acids and a soft, moderately long finish. A nice simple quaffer, but perhaps this reflects the rains that plagued this vintage throughout the year. 2012-2014. **86.**

2010 Barbera "Ciabot Camerano"- Marcarini

The Barbera "Ciabot Camerano" is a very modern-styled wine by the classic standards of Marcarini, as the wine shows a very new oaky signature on both the nose and palate. The wine is still well-balanced, but I am not such a fan of all this vanilla in my Barbera. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a dollop of peanuts, fresh herb tones, soil and a bit of smoky, toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite round from its sojourn in *barrique*, with a good core, sound acids and just a touch of backend bitterness from the wood tannins on the long finish. Here the wine shows the mid-palate depth that is not in evidence with the 2010 Fontanazza, but at the same time, it has lost just a bit of character from the new wood. Not bad, but the underlying raw materials here seem better than the finished wine and I would be a huge fan of seeing the Marcarini firm go back to producing a completely "old school" version of Barbera. 2012-2017+. **87.**

Barolo

I have grouped my notes on both La Serra and Brunate together here, with the wines listed in chronological order from youngest to oldest (the way I like to drink my Barolo at vertical tastings, I might add, as I have some friends who adamantly prefer to tackle the older vintages first and finish up with the more robust, younger wines!). As you will see from the notes, there is a big gap in my tasting notes between the 2007 vintage and the 1997 vintage, as I inexplicably missed buying Marcarini wines for my cellar in the 1999, 2001, 2004 and 2005 vintages. It was a major mistake I have no doubt, as I cannot imagine that both the Brunate and the La Serra from Marcarini have not excelled in these vintages. I am particularly sad not to have secured any of the wines from the estate in 1999, as readers will recall from previous domaine profiles on producers such as Giuseppe Mascarello y Figli, Giacomo Conterno and Bartolo Mascarello, just how huge a fan I am of the style and quality of the 1999 vintage in

Barolo and Barbaresco. So please do not misconstrue the hole in the chronology of vintage tasting notes as implying that the estate was not spot on in these vintages as well. Perhaps, once I get over to visit and taste in the Marcarini cellars the Marchetti family will help me fill in my missing tasting notes from these four important recent vintages!

2008 Barolo “La Serra”- Marcarini

I very much like the size and shape of the 2008s from Marcarini, which may well age along the lines of the lovely 1988s from this superb estate (and which I have not seen in many, many years). The 2008 La Serra offers up a deep, elegant and classic nose of red and black cherries, road tar, fresh oregano, a beautifully complex and refined base of soil, nutskins and a perfumed topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and very classic, with firm, well-integrated tannins, very good mid-palate depth, and superb length and grip on the focused and very youthful finish. This is a very lovely example of the elegant side of La Serra. 2022-2050+. **92.**

2008 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

The 2008 Brunate is going to be a beautiful bottle of Barolo in the fullness of time. The deep, pure and youthful nose wafts from the glass in a fine mix of red and black cherries, road tar, gamebirds, fresh herbs, incipient notes of forest floor and a nice touch of camphor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more masculine in profile than the '08 La Serra, with a superb core of fruit, plenty of firm, ripe tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the still quite primary and structured finish. A classic Brunate in the making. 2025-2060. **93.**

2007 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

Having had a very pleasant bottle of '07 Burlotto Monvigliero only a couple of weeks before this '07 Marcarini Brunate, I was hoping for a bit more from this wine. The 2007 Brunate was showing a decidedly confectionary glaze to its bouquet of candied red cherries, marinated orange peel, venison, oak leaves, peanut shells, road tar and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and a touch sweet-sour on the backend from its alcohol, with moderate tannins and a long, ripe and slightly dulled finish. The tannins here will need a few years to soften, but given the obvious ripeness here, I would still make plans to drink this on the early side, rather than roll the dice with questions of balance down the road. The wine carries its obviously substantial alcohol quite well, with no signs of heat on the backend at the present time, but the overall profile of the wine is of a rather marinated wine that does not really show a lot of Brunate soil character. It is not a bad drink, but a far cry from a top vintage of Marcarini Brunate, and the more classic 2008 is a significant step up in quality. 2015-2025+? **87.**

1997 Barolo “La Serra”- Marcarini

The 1997 La Serra from Marcarini is a pretty good example from the torrid '97 vintage, but the year's signature of excessive ripeness has certainly removed some of the customary elegance and precision that are the La Serra calling cards in most other vintages. The deep, complex and developing nose offers up a very ripe blend of roasted cherries, camphor, a bit of coffee, forest floor, bonfires, a touch of barnyard, fallen leaves and chestnuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and bit chunky, with good core of fruit, rather blurry soil signature and still a fair bit of tannin to resolve on the backend. The finish displays quite good length and grip, but there is a real lack of focus here at the present time and the wine closes with a fair bit of tariness. Perhaps more detail will emerge with further bottle age and this is just a transitory, adolescent stage for the wine. Ultimately, this seems to be a tasty wine that is really a bit lacking

in focus and suffers a bit from the style of the '97 vintage. It is not in the league with the '97 Brunate. 2012-2030+. **88.**

1997 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

The 1997 Marcarini Brunate shows just a touch of its hot vintage character in its ever so slightly roasted character, but this is a deep, structured and serious example of the vintage that is just beginning to drink well and clearly has many years of life still ahead of it. The deep, ripe and classy nose offers up scents of gently baked cherries, hazelnuts, road tar, fresh herbs, smoke, camphor, a touch of blood orange and a lovely topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very fresh for a '97 Barolo, with still just a bit of firm tannin to drop on the backend, lovely focus and balance, bright acids and superb length and grip on the complex finish. There is a tad more mid-palate stuffing here than in other hot vintages, such as 1990, as perhaps the yields were not as high in '97. One of my favorite examples of the 1997 vintage in Barolo. 2010-2035+. **91.**

1996 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

The 1996 Marcarini Brunate is still a very young wine and needs a minimum of six or seven years more cellaring, but its immense potential is already self-evident. The bouquet offers up a beautiful, youthful mélange of red cherries, fennel seed, incipient notes of camphor, a gentle touch of road tar, autumnal tones and rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and still fairly primary, with a beautiful core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and lovely length and grip on the tangy and still slightly austere finish. While this should be starting to drink well around its twentieth birthday, it is really going to be singing a dozen years from now. 2016-2050. **93+.**

1996 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini (served from magnum)

At our vertical in February, we tackled a magnum of this wine to see how it was doing in larger format, and it was not surprisingly, every bit as promising and even more closed than the regular-sized bottle. This is going to be a very, very good Brunate, but I am not sure if there is the mid-palate generosity in reserve here to ever have it reach the heights of vintages such as 1989 and 1964. The nose is deep, young and very promising, offering up a reserved blend of black cherries, road tar, a touch of dark chocolate, charred wood, cherry skins and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly shut down, with a firm core of fruit, substantial, ripe tannins and a very long, tangy and still very primary finish. There is a certain edge of austerity to most of the top 1996s that I have chewed through in the last couple of years that suggests that these wines may never quite hit the great heights initially forecast for them- or if they do, they will take a long, long time to finally reach their zeniths! Magnums of the '96 Brunate are likely to need a good decade more in the cellar than regular bottles. 2025-2075. **93+.**

1995 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

I would guess that this bottle of '95 Brunate is not pristine, as I bought it at auction and the embossing on the top of the capsule seemed to indicate that the cork had been pushed at some point and then pounded back into the bottle. Despite its mishandling, there is an awful lot to like about this wine, and I am sure that well-stored bottles are stellar. My less than perfectly stored bottle shows a very complex nose of dark berries, road tar, camphor, a bit of roasted game, *sous bois*, charred wood, nutskin and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with an excellent core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. I have to assume that this bottle has lost some of the fruit freshness and “pop” of a well-stored bottle, and that its finish is a tad muddled from its less than pristine

storage. That said, there remains enough depth, complexity and stuffing here to declare that properly-cellaried bottles of this wine are superb! ????



The big Botti in the Marcarini cellars in La Morra.

1993 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

While the 1993 Marcarini Brunate is still a couple of years from fully reaching its apogee, at age thirteen it is already a beautiful drink. The bouquet is about as transparent as any Barolo that I have ever tasted, as the wine roars from the glass with precision and striking purity. The aromatic mélange of sweet black cherries, fennel seed, road tar, incipient notes of underbrush and brilliantly pure minerality is utterly beguiling. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and focused, with fine mid-palate depth, excellent acidity, modest tannins, and superb length and grip on the long, soil-driven finish. I am hard-pressed to think of a better, “under the radar” vintage of Barolo than 1993, and the Marcarini Brunate is clearly one of the top wines of this grossly underrated vintage. 2008-2020+. **93.**

1992 Barolo “La Serra”- Marcarini

Who would have expected this- a dark, youthful bottle of Barolo from an “off” vintage that is still a bit on the young side for primetime drinking at age nineteen! After a couple of hours of decanting, a youthful and classy nose emerges to deliver scents of licorice, black cherries, camphor, a bit of roasted gamebird, fresh oregano, road tar, lovely soil tones and incipient notes of curry. On the palate the quality of the vintage is apparent in a slight angularity that is not typical of Marcarini, but this wine is quite full, complex and long, with a good core, still a bit of tannin, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long and moderately chewy finish. The off vintage character here is really more a lack of precise delineation and seamless structure, rather than dilution or lack of complexity. A lovely bottle and at twenty dollars- which is what I

paid for this wine at auction- it is really a lovely drink that may improve with a bit more bottle age. It is certainly not going over the edge any time soon! 2011-2030. **87.**

1990 Barolo “La Serra”- Marcarini

Like so many of the overrated 1990 Baroli, the '90 La Serra is now fully into its apogee of maturity and probably will not stay there particularly long by the standards of this fine cru, as it seems to already showing a bit of incipient oxidation on both the nose and palate. The wine was aromatically impressive when I first decanted it, but some signs of overripeness quickly emerged as it unfolded in carafe. The ripe and slightly roasted style of the vintage has produced a much more black fruity La Serra than is typical, offering up a complex mélange of black cherries, licorice, spit-roasted game, *sous bois*, a bit of caramelized onion, camphor, tar and the first signs of the oxidative nuances to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good base of tarry black fruity, fine soil inflection, a bit of firm tannin and very good length and grip on the ever so slightly oxidative finish. The complexity here is very impressive and in a top vintage, this wine would still be a touch too young structurally for primetime drinking, but the creeping hints of oxidation and the slight dip in the mid-palate already present suggests it is time to drink this up in the relative near-term. It makes one wonder about how similarly overripe years like 2007 are going to develop, given that it is more excessive than this '90 and it is already getting a little wearied. To be fair, I only had this single bottle of the '90 La Serra and perhaps there are better bottles out there. 2012-2020+? **87.**

1990 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

The 1990 Brunate seems more successful than the 1990 La Serra, but again, perhaps I was just a bit luckier with my bottle of Brunate. This was showing quite well and is one of the nicest 1990 Baroli I have tasted in the last couple of years, as it offers up a deep and complex nose of desiccated red and black cherries, *sous bois*, venison, oak leaves, road tar a bit of bonfire and dried herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with again, just a touch of a dip in the mid-palate, but very good length and grip on the still slightly tannic finish. There is very good freshness here for a 1990, and while the wine is probably not going to get better with further bottle age (despite still having a bit of unresolved tannin), it should also continue to drink quite well for at least another dozen years. It is not a great bottle of Marcarini Brunate, but it is a very good example of the 1990 vintage. 2012-2030. **89+.**

1989 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

The 1989 Brunate from Marcarini is a reference point vintage for this wine and clearly the greatest vintage since the legendary 1964. The nose is deep, young and absolutely sappy, as it soars from the glass in a brilliant mélange of black cherries, roses, licorice, incipient notes of nutskin, gamebirds, fresh herb tones, a hint of dark chocolate, road tar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and utterly seamless, with great intensity at the core, stunning sweetness to the fruit, brilliant soil inflection, firm, ripe and still quite substantial tannins, tangy acids and magical length and grip on the seamless and still youthful finish. This is a timeless legend that may eventually outpace even the 1964. I wish I had been smart enough back in the day to have salted away a couple of cases of this great, great Barolo! 2020-2075. **96+.**

1986 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

1986 is a very overlooked vintage in Piemonte, and the last few examples that I have tasted from this vintage have been superb. The 1986 Brunate from Marcarini is fully mature and drinking splendidly well, as it wafts from the glass in a classic mélange of cherries, licorice, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh almond, gentle notes of camphor, fresh herbs and road tar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very pure, with beautiful focus and balance, a great core of sweet red fruit, still a bit of residual tannin perking up the backend, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish. A real sleeper. 2010-2035+. **93.**

1985 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

(Again, we seemed to not have a totally pristine bottle of the '85 at our February vertical, as the wine showed nowhere near the punch of freshness at the core that all previous bottles of this wine had displayed. I am assuming that the bottle at the vertical was slightly unrepresentative and have reverted to a note from December of 2009, which was the last time I had tasted this wine prior to our New York vertical tasting.) The 1985 Marcarini Brunate is still a few years away from peak drinkability, but with an hour in decanter, it is still a great joy to drink today. The nose is deep, complex and stunning, offering up notes of candied black cherries, intense licorice, woodsmoke, a bit of tariness, incipient notes of the roasted gamebirds to come, roses and with air, loads of toasted almond. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and refined, with a sweet core of fruit, still a bit of ripe tannin, and plenty of acidity keeping the wine young and bouncy on the very long, powerful finish. I would give this wine still another five years to fully apogee, and then drink it with wild abandon over the next twenty or so. It is a great example of the vintage. 2009-2030+. **94+.**

1982 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

Our bottle at the vertical was a bit bounced around (never a good thing for nebbiolo-based wines with sediment, as there is no more bitter and intrusive sediment in the world of wine than that from older Barolo!), as there were concerns that it might not show at its best if double-decanted many hours before the event. So, my note on the '82 Brunate here may be a bit on the conservative side, as there was certainly a trace of sediment evident on the backend of this wine. The nose is deep, complex and shows a slightly herbal character that is enticing in its mélange of dried black cherries, road tar, a touch of eucalyptus, autumnal soil tones, gamebirds and camphor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a very good core of fruit, still some tannin to resolve and very good length and grip on the focused and slightly bitter (from sediment) finish. I suspect that there is a bit more mid-palate sweetness in truth in this wine than our slightly shaken bottle demonstrated at the vertical, and my score is probably at least a couple of points too low for this wine. I had not tasted it in more than a decade, but had loved its potential the last time I crossed paths with a bottle. 2015-2035+? **91-93+?**

1978 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

I am not sure what I have been doing right in the last few years, but I have now crossed paths with the stunning 1978 Marcarini Brunate on more than half a dozen occasions. This is a great Barolo that is just now reaching its apogee of maturity and offering up absolutely scintillating drinking. The deep, complex and classic nose offers up a beautiful blend of cherries, orange peel, *sous bois*, a touch of road tar, fresh hazelnuts, licorice, a gloriously complex base of soil, a bit of chocolate and an exotic gentle topnote of cinnamon. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a fine core of fruit, flawless balance, still a bit of tannin and simply outstanding length and grip on the tangy, complex and wonderfully focused

finish. Just a classic in the making, the 1978 Brunate is a joy to drink now- but give it a few hours in decanter, as it is still a fairly young wine! 2012-2040+. **95.**

1974 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

The 1974 Marcarini Brunate has been fully mature for years already, but is at a lovely mid-point of its plateau of maturity and is drinking very elegantly at the present time. Our bottle at the recent vertical was very, very good, but not quite as fresh as the one I had tasted the year before. The deep, complex and *à point* nose wafts from the glass in a complex and ethereal mélange of cherries, a touch of blood orange, camphor, bonfires, fresh herb tones, nutskins and a lovely base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very transparent, with beautiful tertiary complexity, melted tannins and very good length and grip on the almost delicate and tangy finish. I do not know how much longer this wine will continue to cruise along at its apogee, but for at least the next eight to ten years this will be a lovely bottle of fully mature Barolo. 2010-2020+? **90.**

1973 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

After having one maderized bottle of this wine out of this same batch earlier this year (this note dates back to 2004), I was very pleased to find this bottle still extant and really quite lovely. 1973 is not a particularly good year in Piemonte, and even most of the successful wines of this vintage are already well into decline. The '73 Marcarini Brunate is only medium-full and a tad on the delicate side for Barolo, but it is a complete and very tasty bottle of mature wine. The nose offers up a complex mélange of red cherries, venison, plenty of forest floor, toasted nuts, herb tones, summer truffles and an intense topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is focused, poised and still drinking very well, with fine balance, sufficient depth in the mid-palate, and a long, elegant finish that remains bright through sound acidity. I had no expectations that this wine would be this good. A very pleasant surprise that I would opt for drinking over the next handful of years. 2004-2015? **88.**

1971 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

I have now had the pleasure to taste the magnificent 1971 Brunate from Marcarini on three occasions in the last eighteen months and it is a truly magical bottle of Barolo that is just about into its zenith of peak drinkability. Sadly, we did not have a bottle at our February vertical, as this is one of my favorite vintages for this great wine. The stunning nose on the '71 Brunate is very deep, pure and complex, delivering a vibrant mélange of red and black cherries, camphor, a nice touch of tariness, nutty tones, fresh herbs and a very complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit on the youthful side of its absolute apogee, with a beautifully deep core of fruit, stunning complexity, still a bit of ripe tannin and simply stunning length and grip. With sufficient decanting time, this is a great drink today, but it still has decades of life ahead of it. 2013-2040. **95.**

1971 Barolo “Brunate” Riserva Speciale- Marcarini

The 1971 Brunate Riserva is a beautiful wine that is also still a tad on the young side and really takes at least a good hour in decanter to fully blossom and show every last nuance. Initially, the extra years' worth of aging in barrel prior to bottling shows a bit in a slightly more rigid profile than the 1971 *Normale* bottling of Brunate, but with air this wine simply explodes. The stunning nose is a mélange of red and black cherries, tar, a touch of walnut, brilliant spice tones, woodsmoke, orange zest, autumn leaves and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very complex, with still a bit of firm tannin in need of resolution, bright acids and stunning length and grip. A beautiful bottle of Barolo, the 1971

Brunate Riserva may eventually eclipse the equally lovely Brunate *Normale* from this vintage, but it will need a few more years in the cellar to reach its full apogee. 2015-2040. **94+**.

1970 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

The 1970 Brunate from Marcarini is a beautiful example of this very underrated vintage. I have had this wine a couple of times in the last year and found it consistently lovely. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of cherries, autumnal soil tones, camphor, porcini, hazelnuts, fresh herbs, orange zest, just a touch of road tar and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive elegance and focus, melted tannins, good acids and really impressive length and grip on the wide open and seamless finish. This is not the blockbuster that the 1971 Brunate still is today, but rather a snapshot of what the '71 may look like with another twenty years of bottle age. Just a lovely bottle of Barolo at its transparent and refined peak. 2012-2030+. **92**.

1969 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

1969 is a completely unheralded vintage- with good reason- but this '69 Brunate from Marcarini is really not a bad drink at all. It suffered a touch in our February vertical, with so many other more classic vintages in the lineup, but if this was served on its own there would be few complaints heard around the table! The mature and impressively vigorous nose offers up scents of forest floor, desiccated cherries, gamebird, summer truffles, a gentle touch of nuttiness, a bit of sweet onion skin (which usually suggests that oxidation is beginning to loom on the horizon) and a nice touch of dried oak leaves. On the palate the wine is fullish, nicely balanced and quite transparent, with good focus, just a whisper of tannin and a long, complex and fairly delicate finish. This still has a few years of good drinking in it, but the writing is on the wall and regular-sized bottles should probably be drunk up over the next half dozen years or so. Not bad at all and a very pleasant surprise. 2012-2018+? **86**.

1967 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

I have now had the good fortune to drink more than a half dozen superb bottles of the '67 Brunate over the last few years, and when this wine is on, it is one of the greatest Marcarini Barolos I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The wine has been fully mature for ages, so not every bottle today is going to be in pristine shape, as this was also not a vintage that was particularly touted at its release and I have seen a lot of really badly stored bottles of '67 Baroli scattered around the market over the last several years. Sadly, the bottle at our February vertical had been badly stored and was not representative, so I revert to my most recent note on the wine tasted back in 2009 in Germany. The wine is beautifully mature on both the nose and palate, offering up a hauntingly beautiful blend of red and black cherries, summer truffles, sweet black licorice tones, a beautiful base of autumnal soil tones, candied roses and a gentle underpinning of tariness. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and absolutely *à point*, with a sappy core of fruit, magical transparency, bright, beautifully integrated acids, melting tannins and stunning length and grip on the perfectly focused and oh, so complex finish. A great wine from this unsung vintage and just a shade behind the brilliant 1964 Brunate! 2009-2020+. **95**.

1967 Barolo “Brunate” Riserva Speciale- Marcarini

While I have not tasted the '67 Brunate Riserva Speciale with anywhere near the frequency that I have been lucky enough to taste the straight '67 Brunate, on the couple of occasions that I have had the Riserva, I have never found the wine quite in the same league as the *Normale*. It is still an excellent bottle of mature Barolo, but it lacks just a touch of vibrancy and fresh purity *vis à vis* the *Normale* in this vintage. The nose is deep, complex and very soil-driven in its mélange of dark berries, leather, road tar, a bit of roasted venison, gentle nutskins, forest

floor and a touch of coffee grounds in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fairly broad-shouldered, with modest tannins, lovely complexity and fine length and grip on the *à point* finish. A lovely bottle, but it misses just a bit of the great purity of fruit of the *Normale* '67 (or at least this has been the case with the couple of bottles of the Riserva Speciale '67 that I have tasted- perhaps there are better bottles out there?). 2011-2035. 92.

1964 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

One of the most recent bottles of the 1964 Brunate that I tasted was even better than the magnum I reported on back in Issue 29, as the wine was a touch more fully at its apogee and even more flawlessly resolved out of regular bottle. In contrast, the bottle at our Marcarini vertical dinner in February was more along the lines of the magnum- still a tad on the young side, a bit more black fruity and chocolaty, but oh, so deep, pure and magical. This note is from the bottle tasted just prior to the vertical, where we had the good fortune to catch the wine wide open and at full bloom. The utterly profound nose offers up a celestial blend of cherries, quince, pungent roses, *sous bois*, camphor, nutty overtones and gloriously complex base of soil and a topnote of distant bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly pure, with perfect resolution, stunning mid-palate depth, exceptional focus and balance and a very, very long, complex and completely elegant finish. Here, the tannins have fully fallen away, but the wine still retains the glorious core of pure fruit of a wine at its zenith- a stunning combination. A great, great bottle of Barolo. 2012-2035+. 96.

1964 Barolo “Brunate” Riserva di Famiglia- Marcarini

I have only had the good fortune to cross paths with this extremely rare bottling on one occasion- back at a Rare Wine Company Marcarini and Brovia dinner out in Napa in the summer of 2009, and there was some speculation that the wine was slightly corked when it was first poured. Sadly, I succumbed to the group mindset and did not take a proper note on the wine (agreeing that it was slightly tainted), which was later purported to have cleaned up a bit with further aeration- but, I had already dumped my glass! All I wrote down was that the wine was deeper, more black fruity and younger than the regular bottling of the '64 Brunate which was served alongside of it, with a bit more tannin and perhaps even a bit more length on the backend. I am sure completely sound bottles are pure magic and probably a half step ahead of the magical '64 Brunate *Normale*!