

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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**CHÂTEAU LA MISSION HAUT-BRION  
ONE OF THE GRAVES' GREATEST ESTATES-  
CHANGING FOR THE BETTER?**



*The graceful and supremely tasteful inner courtyard at Château La Mission Haut-Brion.*

Château La Mission Haut-Brion and its sister estates of Château La Tour Haut-Brion and Château Laville Haut-Brion (recently redubbed La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc) are three of the greatest properties to be found anywhere in the starry realm of Bordeaux. Since 1983, all three of these Pessac estates have been owned by the Dillon family, who has owned Château Haut-Brion across the street since the first half of the twentieth century. To many lovers of Château La Mission Haut-Brion at the time, the sale of La Mission to its cross-street rival of Haut-Brion was seen as a disappointment, as the feeling amongst the passionate legions of La Mission lovers was that the friendly competition between the two estates had spurred both on to higher levels of quality and that the Dillon family would never allow La Mission to ever eclipse their First Growth of Haut-Brion, once both properties were under the same umbrella. However, it has been my perception that since the purchase of La Mission by the Dillon family in 1983, the two estates have both been run with the same passionate pursuit of excellence and there has been no effort to keep La Mission from eclipsing Haut-Brion in any given vintage, if Mother Nature happened to favor one over the other for some reason. In fact, until the most recent vintages, where it seemed

during barrel tastings that both estates have lost their way a bit in the very high alcohol haze of the difficult growing conditions in the Graves in 2009, 2010 and 2011, the two properties have been run with exemplary guardianship by the Dillon family and their talented technical teams and both properties have attained the highest possible quality in each vintage since 1983. We will touch upon this a bit later in the article.

It is thought that vines have been cultivated in the lands that today comprise La Mission Haut-Brion since Roman times, but the recorded identity of this special property as a recognized wine-producing estate dates back to the sixteenth century, as the property was first noted in records of the time in the year 1540, though it remained part of a greater Haut-Brion for another ninety years. In 1630, according to the second edition of David Peppercorns' fine book, Bordeaux (published in 1991), in 1630 Olive de Lestonnac donated the property of La Mission to the a group of priests known as the Lazarites. In 1698, the Lazarites built a chapel in the property that was to form the nucleus of today's La Mission Haut-Brion, and consecrated the building as "Notre-Dame d'Aubrion." The Lazarite order were famous in their epoch for the meticulous work that the order did both in the vineyards and the cellars and the reputation of the wine that they produced during their ownership of the property earned the estate quite a following amongst wine lovers of this era. The Lazarites led a congregation known as "*le Congrégation de la Mission*" and the property would eventually take its name from this diocese. During their ownership, the remaining parcels of forested land on the property were cleared and planted to vines, so that the entirety of arable land on the confines of La Mission became dedicated to vineyards. In 1713, the living quarters on the property would be expanded and modernized by the renowned architect of Etienne Buissier, and the nexus of today's La Mission buildings was created at this time. For more than a century and a half, the Lazarite order farmed and produced the wines at La Mission Haut-Brion, but at the time of the revolution, the property was confiscated by the state and was auctioned off in 1792 to a Martial-Victor Vaillant for what was considered a very high price at the time, reflecting the superb quality of the wines that the Lazarite priests had crafted here during their custodianship of the property.

The ownership of La Mission Haut-Brion passed from Martial-Victor Vaillant's relatives, the Flury family, to Célestin Chiapella in 1821 and La Mission would remain in his family's hands for much of the remaining nineteenth century. Célestin Chiapella was a very interesting character in his era, having been born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana in 17764 and having purchased La Mission Haut-Brion as a retirement home for himself and his family in 1821, after a successful career in what was then the French colony of Louisiana. The history of La Mission under the ownership of Monsieur Vaillant and the Flury family had not been particularly illustrious, as the property was fairly neglected during their tenure, but Monsieur Chiapella and his family would recapture the spirit of the Lazarites during their tenure and the reputation of La Mission's wines would once again win renown, capturing a gold medal at the International Exhibition in London in 1862. Using his long-standing commercial ties in New Orleans, the wines of La Mission Haut-Brion were shipped extensively into the port of New Orleans during the Chiapella era and became quite known in the fledgling United States during the nineteenth century. In 1884, Célestin Chiapella's son, Jérôme, sold the property to the Paris-based wine merchants of *Etablissements Duval*, who would own La Mission for eleven years, before selling it to the Bordeaux-based wine merchant of Ferdinand de Constans, who in 1903, would again flip the property to another Bordeaux merchant, Victor Coustau. The ownership of La Mission by

Monsieur Coustau would be most noteworthy for uniting for the first time the two properties of La Mission Haut-Brion and La Tour Haut-Brion, as he had bought the nearby property in Talence in 1893. The two estates would become part of the same family legacy from 1903 through 1919 with the Coustaus, separated again in 1919 and then reunited under the Woltner family in 1933.

The modern history of La Mission Haut-Brion can really be said to begin in 1919 when Frédéric Woltner and his family purchased the property. It is not that the wines of La Mission were unappreciated or lacking quality in the era previous to the Woltner family purchasing La Mission, but the Woltner era is certainly one of the golden ages of this superb property, and building upon the success La Mission Haut-Brion had enjoyed throughout its history, the Woltners took the property to new heights of quality and consistency during their tenure that made La Mission one of the most popular and highly-regarded wines in all of Bordeaux. The day to day direction of La Mission (and later neighboring La Tour Haut-Brion, which began to be managed by the family in 1924 and was purchased in 1933) was quickly handed over to Frédéric Woltner's two sons, Henri and Fernand, and it was Henri Woltner that showed a great flair and passion for the wine business and left his mark most discernibly on the two estates during his long guardianship of the properties, which officially began in 1921. Henri had taken a degree in oenology at the University of Bordeaux as a young man and he was well-prepared to assist his father in the management of La Mission and La Tour Haut-Brion. The Woltner era at La Mission Haut-Brion was characterized by one of innovation in the cellars and great respect for *terroir* in the vineyards, and as fine as the reputation was for La Mission Haut-Brion during the preceding three hundred years, it reached a new pinnacle under the early days of the Woltner family's ownership of these two properties.

One of the first dynamic changes that the Frédéric and Henri Woltner brought to the management of La Mission was the installation of new, glass-lined stainless steel fermentation tanks at the winery. During this era in Bordeaux, fermentation tanks were all made out of oak and it was Henri Woltner who first installed stainless steel tanks to hold the wines during their alcoholic and malolactic fermentations, as he was a great and early proponent of trying to control the temperatures during fermentation, and found this was far easier to do in the squat, glass-lined tanks that he began to install at La Mission on an experimental basis here in 1926. After several vintages and the following of the wines in the bottle to see how they evolved, Henri Woltner was prepared to undertake the complete outfitting of the cellars at La Mission with these glass-lined, stainless steel fermentation tanks, but the hardships of World War II intervened and it was not until the 1951 vintage that La Mission Haut-Brion was finally outfitted entirely with stainless steel tanks for fermentation in the cellars. Temperatures for fermentations were always targeted to thirty degrees Celsius for La Mission and seldom climbed above thirty-five degrees. Change was also to reach at the estate in the 1927 vintage, as this was the first year that the Woltners produced a white wine at La Mission Haut-Brion, which was initially called La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc and later had its name changed to Laville Haut-Brion. Frédéric Woltner passed away in 1933 and left La Mission and La Tour Haut-Brion to his three children, Henri, Fernand and their sister Madelaine Woltner, with son Henri overseeing the day to day direction of the properties.

Henri Woltner was a great proponent of balance for the wines both of La Mission and La Tour Haut-Brion, which comes as a bit of a surprise, as during the Woltner era, both wines were known to be some of the more robust and “meaty” examples of red wines produced on either side of the Gironde. But, as David Peppercorn recounts, Monsieur Woltner was a great advocate of not harvesting too late in the vineyards at La Mission and La Tour Haut-Brion, as he felt that “in the most favorable years, the falling acidity must be watched as closely as the rising sugar level, and when they have reached equilibrium, picking should begin if a properly balanced wine is to be made.” As Mr. Peppercorn continues, “Henri Woltner believed that some properties today make the mistake of picking too late, thus either endangering their crop without the prospect of making any better wine, or making a wine where there is too much sugar and not enough acidity (essential for a wine to keep well).” We will have to keep this tenet in mind when we get to discussing the most recent iterations at La Mission Haut-Brion in the last several vintages. Interestingly, during much of the Woltner era, the wines were not actually bottled on the property, but at a specially-designated annex of the estate in the city of Bordeaux itself. For the vast majority of the Woltner’s ownership of La Mission Haut-Brion, the wine here would be bottled two and a half years after the harvest, having spent a relatively long *elevage* in cask with a very low percentage of new oak used. This would change when the Dillon family purchased La Mission and La Tour Haut-Brion in 1983.

Henri Woltner passed away in 1974 and his brother Fernand the following year. After the two brothers passing, the ownership of La Mission Haut-Brion and La Tour Haut-Brion passed to the next generation of Woltner cousins, with Francoise Dewarvin-Woltner and Francis Dewarvin managing the estates on a day to day business. However, the pressures of inheritance and disagreement about the direction of the two properties amongst the various Woltner cousins eventually led to the sale of the properties to the Dillon family, owners of Château Haut-Brion in November of 1983. The 1983 vintages at La Mission, Laville and La Tour Haut-Brion were still made by the Francis Dewarvin’s technical team, and commencing with the 1984 vintage, the viticultural management and winemaking at both estates was taken over by Haut-Brion’s longtime Cellar Master, Jean-Bernard Delmas and his team, and the present day era at the three properties could be said to have begun at this time. Monsieur Delmas quickly changed a few factors at La Mission, as the percentage of merlot in the blend was increased and the wine began to be raised in one hundred percent new oak starting with the 1985 vintage. In 1987, the Dillon team completed the installation of a new, modern vatting room for La Mission Haut-Brion as well and the once trailblazing, squat stainless steel fermentation tanks so prized by Henri Woltner were no more. However, it would not be correct to say that La Mission changed its stripes overnight, as the wines produced here in the latter half of the decade of the 1980s were outstanding and all have aged long and gracefully.

Château La Mission Haut-Brion is located in the appellation of Pessac-Léognan these days, which is considered the filet section of the greater Graves region. However, the property and its vineyards actually straddle the boundary between Pessac and the next door commune of Talence, with the vast majority of its just over twenty-nine hectares of vineyards lying in Talence, just a couple of miles southwest of the center of the city of Bordeaux. Its former sister estate, La Tour Haut-Brion’s four hectares of vines also lie in the commune of Talence. This is effectively a city neighborhood these days- perhaps a tad more suburban than urban- and the properties’ vineyards are quite surrounded by commercial and residential buildings and a far cry

from more rural viticultural areas. However, as wine-loving geologist James Wilson has written, probably the largest concentration of the very finest *terroir* on the west bank of the Gironde River is actually found underneath the city of Bordeaux, and it is not surprising that both La Mission and Haut-Brion have been cited as two of the most *terroir*-driven wines in all of Bordeaux. La Mission sits on a slightly elevated section of vineyard land, as does neighboring Haut-Brion, with a profoundly deep bed of gravel lying over a substrata of clay and sand. In fact, during the Woltner era, when Henri Woltner sought to extend the cellars here, it was discovered that the gravel mound on which La Mission sits is fully eighteen feet in depth, before one strikes a layer of clay and sand (and below that the limestone base of *Calcaire à Astéries*), and it is this profound base of gravel in the *terroir* here that gives La Mission Haut-Brion its profound and very distinct character. According to geologist James Wilson, the surface drainage at La Mission (as well as La Tour Haut-Brion), is not as fine as across the street at Haut-Brion, and the gravel mound is not quite as deep (eighteen versus the thirty feet in the deepest pockets at Haut-Brion), and this may be one of the reasons that La Mission has traditionally produced a bit more powerful style of wine than the more ethereal profile of Haut-Brion. Today, the entirety of the property at La Mission is planted to vines, with 2.55 hectares devoted to white grape varieties for the production of La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc (formerly Laville Haut-Brion) and 26.6 hectares planted to red grapes. In the Woltner era and before, the percentage of cabernet sauvignon was a bit higher here than under the ownership of the Dillon family. Writing back in 1969, Edmund Penning-Rowsell cites the vineyards at La Mission and La Tour Haut-Brion as having been planted to sixty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-five percent merlot and ten percent cabernet franc, but in its new incarnation, the vineyard planting strategy has evolved so that now the vineyards are planted to forty-seven percent cabernet sauvignon, just under forty-three percent merlot and the cabernet franc remaining approximately the same. For the white wine here, the plantations have also changed from the Woltner era to the Dillon era, as prior to 1983, the white wine here was comprised of a blend of sixty percent sémillon and forty percent sauvignon blanc. However, over the course of the quarter century of the ownership by Estates Clarence Dillon, La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc (as it has been known again since the 2009 vintage, with the name of Laville Haut-Brion having been retired) has evolved into a wine that is far more heavily based on sémillon, so that today, the section of vineyards planted to white wine grapes is eighty-five percent sémillon, fourteen percent sauvignon blanc and one percent muscadelle.

Monsieur Jean-Bernard Delmas' change to raising in La Mission-Haut Brion in one hundred percent new barrels in 1985 eventually rolled back a bit, so that today the *grand vin* at La Mission is raised in eighty percent new oak each year. With the much higher percentage of new wood used for the *elevage* of La Mission since 1985, the length of time spent in cask has been appropriately shortened as well, and the days when the *grand vin* would spend nearly two and a half years in cask are now a thing of the past, with La Mission Haut-Brion typically bottled these days after eighteen to twenty-one months in barrel, depending on the style of the vintage. The old, squat, glass-lined stainless steel fermentation tanks that first made their appearance in the cellars in La Mission in 1926 and became the sole fermentation vehicles for the wines in 1951 were retired in 1987 and replaced by modern stainless fermentation tanks at that time as part of completely revamping the *chais* at the property. Further changes in the organization of the three properties of La Mission Haut-Brion, Laville Haut-Brion and La Tour Haut-Brion have taken place in recent times, with the two latter small estates once ostensibly independent, but

formally rolled into La Mission Haut-Brion in more recent times. The Dillon family, in fact, did away completely with La Tour Haut-Brion after the 2005 vintage, with the vineyard officially becoming part of La Mission Haut-Brion's patrimony. La Tour Haut-Brion during the Woltner era at La Mission, acted as a hybrid "second wine" of La Mission Haut-Brion, with the grapes from the four hectares of La Tour Haut-Brion's vineyards brought to La Mission and crushed and fermented there. After the end of malolactic fermentation, which was always done in tank here at that time, a barrel by barrel selection process would be made to decide which casks would be earmarked for La Mission Haut-Brion and which would be made into La Tour Haut-Brion. Typically, more press wine would be used in the La Tour Haut-Brion final blend than La Mission, so that the wine often took even longer to come around in bottle than La Mission and in this respect, it was a far cry from today's "second wines" which are generally made for earlier consumption than the *grand vin*.

This practice of using production from La Tour Haut-Brion for La Mission (and vice-versa) during the Woltner era ended after the 1983 vintage, as Monsieur Delmas immediately began segregating the production from each estate, and he also changed the custom of using plenty of press wine in La Tour Haut-Brion, so that subsequent vintages of La Tour Haut-Brion did not have the same muscular personality and serious structural elements of the Woltner era. Starting in the 2006 vintage, the Dillon family created a proper "second label" for La Mission, which is called La Chapelle to La Mission Haut-Brion, and which is made from the younger vines on the estate (with the vines at La Tour Haut-Brion now having been officially subsumed into La Mission) and aged in twenty to twenty-five percent new wood, rather than the eighty percent for the *grand vin*. I am sure from a commercial standpoint, the decision to kill La Tour Haut-Brion in favor of a new second wine for La Mission makes sense, but it is a bit disrespectful of the fine history that existed for the very, very high quality of La Tour Haut-Brion's wines in the past, and it would have been nice if there had been a commitment on the part of Estates Clarence Dillon to continue the legacy of La Tour Haut-Brion. Certainly, the argument can be made that La Tour Haut-Brion for most of its years under the Woltner family was not a distinct wine in any case, as it was the *de facto* second wine of La Mission in this era, and the Dillon team has simply organized this in a much more professional manner since the 2006 vintage with the change to La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion. However, I have had the good fortune to taste enough older vintages of La Tour Haut-Brion to really feel that this wine was far more than a second wine of La Mission in its heyday and its own unique expression of *terroir* was always in evidence from the inclusion of a very significant percentage of the production from its own four hectares of vines. I would be very surprised if these are not now typically part of the La Mission blend, with La Chapelle relegated to a wine for the young vines throughout the property.

One of the most notable and laudable attributes of La Mission Haut-Brion during its long history has been its outstanding legacy of producing very good wines in less than optimal vintages. When one looks back on the older literature on the region of Bordeaux, be it Edmund Penning-Rowsell, David Peppercorn or Robert Parker's earliest books, one repeatedly sees statements of just how great this property has historically performed in "off vintages", and I have had my share of excellent La Missions over the years from minor vintages. In fact, very early on in my career as a wine professional, I can recall one of America's top importers, Peter Weygandt, having me over for a dinner and opening a bottle of 1958 La Mission Haut-Brion to



go along with our main course. I commented that I had no idea there were any good wines produced in Bordeaux in this vintage, and he replied that “La Mission Haut-Brion had an amazing track record for making very good wines in difficult vintages” and indeed, the wine was simply outstanding! In my experience, only Château Latour could match the consistent excellence, in good years and bad, of La Mission Haut-Brion and there are a greater number of fine wines from these two properties between the end of the second world war and the 1980s than from any other estates on the Left Bank in Bordeaux. I do not know if La Mission’s penchant for making transcendent wines in minor years predated the post-war period, as I simply have no broad experience with these vintages of La Mission, but my gut instincts suggest (and older literature on the region seconds the notion) that this property’s great legacy of producing top wines in minor vintages dates back to the very earliest days of the Woltner era at La Mission Haut-Brion. This is something to keep in mind when shopping for older claret at auction, as the very top old vintages of La Mission are now very, very expensive wines these days.



La Mission Haut-Brion, for almost the entirety of its long history, has also been one of the longest-lived wines to be found in Bordeaux, and though my tasting experience only stretches back to the post-war era, I have heard that many of the top vintages from the first half of the twentieth century continue to drink very well indeed. As I have alluded to a few times in the preceding pages, the last few vintages at La Mission that I have tasted seem to indicate that a change in style is afoot at this great old property, and if this indeed turns out to be the case, then



it is quite clear that the newer style here will not be crafted to stand the same test of time as previous vintages. However, it is still too early to say definitively that La Mission has cashed in its former structured and long-lived style for some more immediately gratifying and specious, as the vintages that caused such consternation for me were the 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 La Missions, and all four of these vintages were hardly classic growing seasons in the Graves and perhaps Mother Nature played a forcing hand in crafting such high octane, fruit-forward and seemingly modern-styled wines at La Mission. And all of these vintages do have their share of tannins, just not the customary balance of wines destined for long and prosperous lives in bottle. Particularly, the exceedingly ripe wines produced at La Mission in 2009 and 2010 cause one to pause and really wonder where the Estates Clarence Dillon team wishes to take this wine stylistically in the future, as the 2009 La Mission tips the scales at 14.7 percent alcohol and the 2010 at an even more discordant 15.1 percent- numbers more fitting for a pedestrian, second division zinfandel than one of the historically greatest estates in all of Bordeaux! And though I did not write down the octane level on the 2011 La Mission, it is no shrinking violet when it comes to alcohol either, and the 2012 was a very disappointing 14.95 percent and fully sixty-two percent merlot. To be fair, cabernet sauvignon was particularly difficult to ripen in well-drained soils in 2012, due to months of hydric stress, but does this really explain nearly fifteen percent alcohol for this merlot-dominated wine? I have very serious reservations that any of these vintages of La Mission will evolve well in bottle.

When one looks at the changes that have been wrought at La Mission Haut-Brion over the course of the first quarter century of the Dillon family's ownership of the estate, with the percentage of merlot plantations increased from twenty-five to forty-three percent from back in the day, the attendant drop in cabernet sauvignon in the blend, the dramatic increase in the percentage of new wood used for the *elevage*, and in recent times, the far more prominent role that new wood plays in the aromatic and flavor profile of the *grand vin* (as different tonneliers and different levels of toast are clearly in play in the cellars here), it seems quite clear that though the estate's management team continues to pay homage verbally to the past style of wines crafted at La Mission Haut-Brion, there is not any real affinity for those wines and a change in the style of wine at the property is an unstated policy of the team at La Mission today. As the notes below will show, I do not have experience with the vintages at La Mission from the start of the new millennium until the 2009, so I do not know precisely when the new style started to take root in the cellars here, but I suspect that the first stirrings of a change of direction were felt soon after Jean-Bernard Delmas retired as Technical Director for Estates Clarence Dillon in 2003. I had requested of the Dillon team to taste the 2008 vintage here, while I was preparing my in the bottle report on this outstanding vintage a couple of years ago, but they declined and I do not have a sense if the rather striking changes seemingly afoot since the 2009 vintage at La Mission were to be felt in the 2008s from the property (or from even earlier vintages). In any event, it is pretty clear that one does not increase the percentage of merlot in the blend of an historically long-lived wine such as La Mission Haut-Brion if one is not seeking to make the wine more accessible in its youth, or at least soften up the rather sturdy, often brawny, youthful veneer that La Mission was renowned for back in the Woltner era.

However, in the world of wine, the mantra is "to discover and to lose", as wines change style with generational change, shifts in climactic conditions, the economic fortunes of ownership, historical disruptions or simply chasing the chimera of fashionable tastes, and the

best way to keep a firm footing in the world of wine is to simply revel in the joy one finds in individual wines or epochs from great estates such as La Mission Haut-Brion and steer clear of the less than stellar moments in a producer's timeline. And as the notes below will attest, for such a long, long period of this estate's history (not to mention its sister estates of Laville Haut-Brion and La Tour Haut-Brion) the legacy of truly brilliant, long-lived and utterly classic wines was second to none. Today, if one reviews the literature that Estates Clarence Dillon turns out about La Mission Haut-Brion, it is quite clear that the team here is overtly seeking to have La Mission Haut-Brion elevated to the official status of a First Growth, in much the same manner as Baron Philippe de Rothschild managed to have Mouton-Rothschild promoted in 1973 from Second to First Growth. As La Mission Haut-Brion was not part of the famous classification of the Médoc in 1855 (Château Haut-Brion was the only non-Médoc-based estate included in the classification), it does not have the same platform of already being officially a Second Growth with which to base its spring at the group of First Growths, and this may well assist it down the road in making the leap to official inclusion in the group of First Growths on the Left Bank (as one could easily make the argument that a promotion of La Mission to First Growth would simply correct an historical oversight). However, if the most recent vintages here are any indication, the stylistic shifts that the team here has seemingly undertaken in recent times, with the high alcohol, overripe fruit and overtly new oaky profile of La Mission of the last years, the management of this property has embarked on an ill-advised path to First Growth status, as if these alarming trends continue, La Mission Haut-Brion may well end up virtually indistinguishable from any of hundreds of modern cult wines produced in the anonymous international style. This is hardly the enlightened path to First Growth status, and though stranger things have happened of late in greater Bordeaux, these types of wines will never be truly worthy of First Growth status, no matter what the INAO might proclaim.

In any event, the purpose of this article is not to focus on the current changes that may be afoot at La Mission Haut-Brion, but to celebrate the truly magnificent vinous history of this great, great estate over the vast majority of its illustrious history. For partisans of La Mission, and there are a great, great many the world over, have always been particularly enthusiastic for the wines of this property and are probably some of the most passionate of Bordeaux fans. For as long as I can recall in my professional career, partisans of La Mission Haut-Brion have been very vocal for their claim that La Mission Haut-Brion has always been a "true First Growth in quality"- no matter what the classification of 1855 might proclaim- and these not insignificant numbers of devotees have placed this wine at the very pinnacle of Left Bank claret. While I have loved the wines of La Mission Haut-Brion for as long as I have been drinking Bordeaux, and I cut my teeth on claret when I started in the wine trade all the way back in the early 1980s, I have always felt that La Mission's proper place in the firmament of Bordeaux was as one of the finest of the "Super Second Growths", with its proper place of honor alongside wines such as Ducru-Beaucaillou, Pichon-Lalande, Vieux Château Certan, Trotanoy, Figeac, Canon, Magdelaine and the like and its very important legacy widely-hailed as one of the most important estates in the long history of the region. La Mission does not need to be officially recognized as a First Growth to occupy a very considerable place in the roster of Bordeaux's greatest wines, it simply has to continue doing what it has done for so long, make such brilliantly long-lived, complex and uniquely compelling wines that so beautifully reflect its very magical *terroir*.

As I touched upon briefly above, James Wilson in his superb book, *Terroir*, observes that La Mission Haut-Brion, as well as the former La Tour Haut-Brion and Laville Haut-Brion (now included in the greater La Mission) sit on an exemplary gravel mound that must be ranked amongst the finest to be found on the Left Bank of the Gironde. The history of these estates surviving (alongside Haut-Brion and Pape Clément) the urban sprawl of the city of Bordeaux is a firm testament to the outstanding quality of their underlying *terroir* and the superb litany of excellent wines that have been produced here for so many centuries. As Mr. Wilson notes, the immediate vicinity of the city of Bordeaux, in Pessac and Talence, once included fifty-three separate wine-producing estates and the initial fame of the wines of Bordeaux really was based on the quality of the red wines of the Graves (long before the estates of the Médoc were recognized or even widely planted), but this number has been whittled down in recent times to six properties (if one continues to count La Tour Haut-Brion and Laville Haut-Brion as individual estates) and it is only the very finest *terroirs* that have been able to avoid being bulldozed under as the city has expanded. In fact, as recently as the late 1970s, the urban needs of the area took precedence over the vinous legacy of the region, as La Mission Haut-Brion lost a small swath of vineyards to the construction of the Bordeaux-Toulouse autoroute. One of the important aspects of the vineyards of La Mission Haut-Brion being virtually surrounded today by the sprawl of the city is that the ambient temperatures here are higher than they are further out in the countryside of Léognan and the more southerly sections of the Graves, which may well have been a bit of an advantage in the 1970s and 1980s, but in an age of climate change, this is perhaps no longer advantageous for La Mission and its neighbors.

The style of wines produced at La Mission Haut-Brion for at least as long as I have experience with them (dating back to the early post-war vintages) is for a fairly powerful, structured and black fruity wine that is often almost “meaty” in its robustness and is quite unique in the firmament of Bordeaux’s greatest wines. The deep bed of gravel here always delivers a very strong vein of *terroir* to the resulting wine, with the combination of black fruit, gravelly soil tones, cigar ash and robust meaty tones often making La Mission Haut-Brion a fairly easy wine to spot when tasting blind. The wine traditionally took its proper time in reaching maturity, and throughout the top vintages of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the wine demanded a full twenty years’ worth of bottle age to really start to drink with generosity and start to approach its apogee. In this era, eighty to a hundred years or more of potential longevity would be the norm in classically structured vintages. While the wines have had an outstanding track record of excellence throughout the latter half of the twentieth century (and one presumes for at least the few very earliest vintages of the twenty-first), the Woltner era, which was so remarkable for its quality in so many facets, was not without a few hiccups as well, with volatile acidity occasionally a problem one could find in certain vintages of La Mission Haut-Brion and its sister estate of La Tour Haut-Brion. The 1970 vintage in particular of La Mission has witnessed issues with volatile acidity, and I have had some particularly unstable bottles of this vintage over the years. There have also been issues with brett as well in certain years and certain bottles. I do not know the details of the off-site bottling that used to be utilized for La Mission Haut-Brion back in the day, but I would imagine that La Mission, like so many other wines from the past in Bordeaux, was bottled in a number of lots, rather than in a single *assemblage* per vintage, and so issues of volatile acidity or brett might have been more prevalent in certain bottling runs of a given vintage than in others. These issues have only been minor irritants over the course of my history with the wine, but have occurred with sufficient frequency that they do merit mention.

However, there is no denying that La Mission Haut-Brion, at its best is Bordeaux incarnate at its best, and the wine has traditionally been one of the most unique and compelling wines of the entire region. The intense depth of black fruit of traditional La Mission turns sweet and suave with sufficient bottle age, with the profound base of dark gravelly soil omnipresent, the meatiness often remaining quite prevalent and the cigar ash elements morphing into beautiful smokiness augmented by notes of sweet black truffles and hot wax. Sometimes young vintages of La Mission, particularly in cooler growing seasons, can also have an almost medicinal element to them that ages out of the wine over time. It is a beautifully complex and soil-driven wine at full maturity, and though never the most elegant of mature claret (that mantle is probably shared on the Left Bank by cross-street neighbor Haut-Brion and Lafite-Rothschild), there is a depth and seamless character to mature La Mission that makes it one of the world's greatest cabernet sauvignon-based wines. How the more recent vintages, with a higher percentage of merlot in the blend will evolve remains to be seen, as the merlot portion of the blend has gently climbed since the earliest days of the Dillon era at La Mission, and with more new wood used as well these days, it may be that the character of the wine at full maturity will be a bit different from the vintages of the latter 1990s and early 2000s than was the case with the historical profile of the wine. Certainly, the last handful of vintages, with their much higher levels of alcohol than was customary here, as well as their attendant more new oaky personalities (as wood tannins leach far more aggressively into solution at higher octanes) will bear little resemblance to great wines here such as the 1945, 1949, 1955, 1959, 1961, 1975 or 1989, and they will be completely different animals whenever they reach their peaks of maturity than the La Missions of the past. As I have observed above, I hope this is only a passing moment of overtly heady wines at La Mission Haut-Brion, brought about by specifically challenging growing season, but I suspect it is more a reflection of unrest amongst the decision-making *cadre* at Estates Clarence Dillon and La Mission will remain a changed wine for at least a few more years, until illumination again returns to the offices and cellars here. Happily, the magical base of *terroir* of La Mission Haut-Brion will still be waiting when the team here again turns its thoughts to making this the focal point of the wine.

The following wines have mostly been tasted over the last handful of years, but a few notes on some of the more important vintages of La Mission and its sister properties date back a bit further, and are included here to give a good sense of where the wine would be drinking today, despite the note being a bit out of date. Given La Mission Haut-Brion's traditional track record for longevity and outstanding aging, the utility of these older notes should be greater than they would be in the case of a shorter-lived wine. As always, amongst the mature vintages, the date the wine was tasted can be discerned by looking at the first date of the proposed window of drinkability listed at the end of the note. A few of the most important historical vintages of La Mission Haut-Brion I have not tasted in the last seven or eight years, and so their notes are not included here. I should mention that amongst my favorites that I have had the pleasure to taste, but not recently, the 1982 is a very, very strong vintage for the estate, the '86 still a bit bound up in its structural elements, but showing promise, and the 1961 one of the greatest bottles of claret I have had the pleasure to drink. As I hope the notes below will convey, I have loved La Mission Haut-Brion, La Tour Haut-Brion and Laville Haut-Brion for a very long time and continue to be delighted to drink the classic vintages here whenever possible. They are reflections of some of the greatest *terroir* to be found in all of Bordeaux, and in a region where the notion of *terroir* is

often solely paid lip service, while the profile of the wine is crafted in the cellars, to find wines that speak so clearly of their underlying soil signatures in this region are a gift that should be cherished whenever possible- one bottle at a time amongst close friends and family.

### ***Château Laville Haut-Brion or La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc***

While I only briefly touched up the white wines of La Mission Haut-Brion in the sections above, there is little doubt that this too has traditionally been one of Bordeaux's greatest wines. The wine was originally dubbed La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc back in its earliest vintages, commencing with the 1927, and the wine has reportedly been one of the longest-lived, dry white wines produced anywhere in the world since its very earliest vintages. The vast majority of the vintages produced here were named Laville Haut-Brion, as this was once a separate estate in nearby Talence that can trace its origins back to 1611, when a Marie de Laville purchased the property that eventually came to incorporate her name in its own. I am not sure of the earliest origins of La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc, as the estate's website lists the first vintage as hailing from 1927, but Wikipedia cites the Woltner family has not having purchased Laville Haut-Brion until 1931. I would suspect that the very earliest handful of vintages of white wine produced here were made from purchased grapes, probably from the owners at that time of Laville Haut-Brion and that eventually the Woltners decided that they should purchase the property in 1931. In any case, from 1931 forwards, the white wine produced here was from the vineyards of Laville Haut-Brion, which lie in the commune of Talence in a section of the village's *vignobles* that is planted on less gravelly soils with more clay in the topsoil, though still over that fine substrata of fossilized starfish known as the *Calcaire à Astéries*. The original expanse of vineyard land at Laville Haut-Brion was approximately six hectares, but this was cut in half by the expansion of the city when the rail line from Bordeaux to Bayonne was shifted in the 1960s or early 1970s (according to David Peppercorn) and three hectares of vineyard land at Laville Haut-Brion were sacrificed to the re-routing of the railway, so that today, according to the estate's website, there only remains 2.55 hectares of vines committed to the production of white wine at the property. As noted above, Laville Haut-Brion in the older literature from the 1960s through the 1980s, was comprised of a sixty-forty blend of *sémillon* and *sauvignon blanc*, but the percentage of *sauvignon blanc* in the *cépages* has steadily decreased under the ownership of the Dillon family and today fully eighty-five percent of the blend is made up of *sémillon*.

For much of the history of Laville Haut-Brion, the wine was considered one of the greatest three dry white wines produced in Bordeaux, alongside those of Haut-Brion and Domaine de Chevalier, and it was also one of the longest-lived dry white wines produced anywhere in the world. When one looks back through the two fine tomes of Vintage Wine written by Michael Broadbent, one is struck by the fact that the oldest vintages that he has tasted of dry white Bordeaux are all Laville Haut-Brion bottles, with the wines still extant and offering up fine drinking pleasure all the way back to the legendary 1934 (with his oldest note dating back to the 1931, the year that the Woltner family purchased Laville). Since its earliest days under the Woltner family, Laville Haut-Brion as barrel-fermented, rather than fermented in tank, and prior to the Dillon's purchasing the property, the wine was bottled on the early side, with the *mise* taking place in the spring or summer after the harvest. Once Jean-Bernard Delmas took over the technical decision-making in November of 1983, the *elevage* of Laville Haut-Brion was extended quite a bit, with the bottling taking place several months later than was the norm in the Woltner era, but the traditional character of Laville remained intact. Today, this is not so obviously the case, and the La Mission website's description of the white wine here as when

young possessing “characteristics of a premier Gewurztraminer” is hardly reassuring or particularly emblematic of a team that understands what a precious jewel of a wine they had in Laville Haut-Brion.

Older incarnations of Laville Haut-Brion, always were quite tightly-knit and bound up in their fine structural elements when young, and took a leisurely approach to blossoming and beginning to drink well. Given Henri Woltner’s penchant for wines of balance, it is not unlikely that the Laville of the Woltner era was a fairly low alcohol wine by today’s standards, and this probably helped it achieve such astonishing longevity during this epoch. In fact, the most recent bottle of the 1964 Laville Haut-Brion, that I just drank this past August, was at its absolute zenith of peak drinkability, with magical complexity and no shortage of brightness, bounce or verve of youth, and still had several decades of potential profundity still to deliver. However, as has been the case with the red wines of La Mission Haut-Brion, I have noted that the alcohol level has crept up in the last few vintages here, and La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc, as it has been known since the release of the 2009 vintage, is now a decidedly more heady wine than was the case with Laville back in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. In most recent times, the 2011 vintage tipped the scales at a crazy 14.6 percent alcohol and the 2010 at a slightly less aggressive 14.2 percent and the most recently released 2012 again at 14.6 percent. This will certainly make the wine far more approachable early on, as with alcohol levels this heady, acidity is hardly going to shut down the wine early on, and raising the wine now in forty to fifty percent new oak will also give it an earlier appeal. After extending the *elevage* for Laville Haut-Brion in the earliest days of the Dillon era, the wine is now bottled after nine to twelve months of barrel aging, which is less than Jean-Bernard Delmas reportedly allowed for the fine vintages of Laville from 1983 to 1990 and which are probably some of the finest to ever be produced from this property.

I should note that Laville Haut-Brion, as is the case with the other top tier dry white wines from the Pessac-Léognan section of the Graves, seems to have also been suffering from premoxy since at least the 1996 vintage. The only recent example of Laville from this era that I have crossed paths with was the 1996, which was solid, but alarmingly mature for a Laville of this age, starting to slide structurally and in need of prompt drinking up when last tasted a couple of years ago. I have not tasted the 1994 Laville in quite some time (this would have been one of the greatest recent vintages for white Graves wines, if premoxy had not arrived also with this vintage), but would peg this vintage as the first to have potential premature oxidation issues, though perhaps the top wines in Pessac-Léognan were also mildly affected in the 1993 vintage. That said, when I last crossed paths with the 1994 Laville back in 2006, it was drinking very well and not showing any signs of imminent collapse. In any event, Laville Haut-Brion in its heyday was a wine that often started out life tight and almost waxy in personality, with gooseberry (from the higher percentage of sauvignon blanc in the blend back then) and lemony notes, as well as plenty of soil and petrol notes in evidence on both the nose and palate, and usually with a fairly discreet framing of vanillin oak. In my experience, ten to fifteen years were necessary before the wine really began to drink well, with a few notable exceptions such as the 1989 Laville, where the sheer depth and dimension of the wine made it still accessible at age seven or eight, and one typically would not want to start drinking the wine until it was at least twelve to fifteen years of age. Premoxy has certainly changed this calculus, and perhaps the changes in *cépages* and octane here in the last few vintages are an attempt to make a more accessible wine that will drink well before potential premature oxidation can come into play. Given the historic longevity of this bottling, it is a wine that I always look out for at auction, as well-stored bottles from at least the



decades of the 1970s and 1980s remain brilliant wines that are, for the most part, still in their primes. The newest vintages of La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc, with their very high alcohol levels relative to classical Laville Haut-Brion releases, are a bit mystifying and really quite unappealing to my palate (even the 2011, which is the best of the last four). But, someone obviously thought that Laville Haut-Brion was broken and needed fixing. From where I sit, it is La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc that is in need of repair, and the sooner the better!

### **2012 Château La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc**

The 2012 La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc is the ripest of the three white wines produced by the Dillon family in this vintage, coming in at a rather strident 14.6 percent alcohol. Needless to say, the wine is not one of the great white wines to be found in the Graves in this vintage. The very ripe and musky nose offers up scents of figs, oranges, a touch of petrol, citrus peel, chalky and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and heady, with good acids, but also plenty of heat poking out on the long finish. This is a big, powerful and cumbersome wine that is a far cry from the great Laville Haut-Brions of yesteryear. Perhaps the name change was a good idea, as it signaled a distinct departure from great classic white Graves of exemplary quality for parts unknown. This is very disappointing by any measure, but particularly in the context of a fine vintage for dry white wines in the Graves. 2013-2025+? **87.**

### **2011 Château La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc**

A few years ago, one hectare of semillon here was grubbed up and replanted to sauvignon blanc. 2011 is the first vintage to include that young vine sauvignon blanc fruit in the La Mission Blanc. This is the ripest white wine I encountered from this vintage, at a heady 14.6 percent alcohol. The nose is deep, pretty and very suave in its mélange of grapefruit, fresh fig, citrus peel, cut grass, complex soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impressively complex on the finish, with a very good core, but a finish that shows some of its heady octane as uncovered alcohol. The heat on the backend is pretty minor and I expect many people will not even notice it, but it suggests strongly that drinking this tasty and complex wine in its youth will be obligatory. I wonder what was the alcohol level on the brilliant 1964 Laville Haut Brion I drank a short time ago- 11.5 percent? But, those days are gone forever- I should just let them go... The 2011 La Mission Blanc is very good juice for early drinking. 2012-2020. **92.**

### **2010 Château La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc**

The 2010 La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc is a touch cooler than the 2010 Haut-Brion Blanc, as it only tips the scales at 14.2 percent alcohol. There is much more sémillon in the blend of this wine than in the Haut-Brion blanc (eighty-one percent versus forty-six percent), and for whatever reason, it seems to hide its high alcohol a bit better than the Haut-Brion Blanc. The bouquet is deep and complex, as it offers up a ripe blend of pink grapefruit, fresh figs, plenty of petrol, stony soil tones, citrus peel, a bit of cut grass and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a spike of hard acids running down the spine, fine focus and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Quite good and probably my favorite white in the Dillon stable this year. 2014-2030+. **91+.**

### **2009 Château La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc**

Laville Haut-Brion's name has been changed back to La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc with the 2009 vintage, which was how the wine was sold back in the 1930s. Again, it seems to me that the Laville name had enough history behind it now to keep it in use, but perhaps a La Mission Blanc will be easier for new clients in the Far East to keep track off down the road. In any event,

the 2009 is a beautiful example of the vintage that offers up one of the classiest bouquets of any of the white wines this year, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of grapefruit, lime peel, beeswax, petrol, very complex minerality and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish and shows good acidity for the vintage, with a solid core and lovely delineation and focus on the long and vibrant finish. A most impressive 2009 white. 2014-2030+. **89-91+**.

#### **1996 Château Laville Haut-Brion**

This particular bottle of the 1996 Laville seemed to be suffering from moderate premature oxidation when I tasted it, as the wine was showing dramatically more evolution on both the nose and palate than what I would expect would be correct for its age. The nose is a very mature and deep-pitched blend of orange rind, new leather, toasted coconut, *crème brûlée*, and petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and completely mature, with good acids and solid focus, but an old and gently fraying finish. This tastes as if it were thirty or forty years old, rather than thirteen! This particular bottle was still drinking very well (if one can forget that it should still be a fairly young wine, based on its true age), but should probably be drunk up. As always with issues of premox, other bottles will now show differently. **89**.

#### **1994 Château Laville Haut-Brion**

This note dates back to the end of 2006, and so, given the vagaries of premature oxidation that affect white Bordeaux just as much as white Burgundy, its utility today is probably not particularly great, but I include the note to show how good the wine was a bit more than eight years ago. At that time, the wine offered up a lovely nose of apple, honeycomb, petrol, lovely notes of beeswax, candied grapefruit, vanillin oak and a stylish base of soil tones. On the palate the wine was deep, full-bodied and wide open and ready for primetime drinking, with a fine girdle of acidity, lovely focus and grip and a long, tangy finish. At the time, I would have wanted to drink this wine from 2006-2020+, but with premox, it may already be in decline. **93?**

#### **1988 Château Laville Haut-Brion**

The 1988 vintage of Laville is fully into its apogee of peak drinkability and is a superb glass of white Graves today and has years and years of life still ahead of it. The deep, complex and absolutely beautiful nose soars from the glass in a blend of toasted coconut, apple, fresh fig, gentle notes of petrol, beautifully complex soil tones and a topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and flawlessly focused, with a rock solid core, great purity and complexity, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the *à point* finish. Back in the late 1980s, the estate used a lot less new oak for this bottling than is the case today, and perhaps it was the more interesting wine for its lower percentage of new wood. Lovely juice in the prime of life. 2012-2030+. **93**.

#### **1985 Château Laville Haut-Brion**

The 1985 Laville Haut-Brion seems to be a surprisingly lackluster vintage for this wine (which is so good at other top properties' whites in the Graves), but perhaps I was just unlucky with a less than perfect bottle of this wine (though, I do note that the bottle showed absolutely no outward signs of mishandling). The bouquet is an odd and quite tropical blend of papaya, apple, salty soil tones, butter, stewy grassiness and orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and four-square, with crisp acids and sound balance, but modest complexity and solid length on the completely anonymous finish. Not special- or at least that was the case with this particular bottle. I would love to retaste the '85 Laville Haut-Brion and see if I just had an unrepresentative example, which would be my guess, as this vintage of Laville has a fine reputation amongst tasters whose palates I trust. 2013-2025. **87+?**

### **1979 Château Laville Haut-Brion**

The 1979 Laville Haut-Brion is an absolutely classic vintage for this great wine. The wine is totally *à point* at the present time, offering up a glorious bouquet of apple, fig, fresh-cut grass, petrol, citrus peel and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very elegant, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and acidity, superb grip and a very long, wide open and vibrant finish. I am sure this wine has been fully mature for many years- though it probably took a good fifteen to start to really blossom- and shows no signs of slowing down any time soon. A beautiful and fully mature vintage of Laville. 2011-2030. **93.**

### **1976 Château Laville Haut-Brion**

The 1976 Laville Haut-Brion is now quite tertiary in its aromatic and flavor profile, with an almost chenin blanc-like component, but it remains a lovely drink of breed and complexity. The fine and relatively deep-pitched bouquet offers up scents of lemon, honey, orange peel, lanolin, a touch of chalky soils and beeswax. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and a touch honeyed on the attack, but also thoroughly dry, with a good core, lovely focus and balance, modest acids and lovely length and grip on the still quite sound and pure finish. At this point in a dry white wine's evolution, one might expect a bit of structural fraying on the backend, but the '76 Laville remains perfectly sound and still has several more years of life ahead of it at its plateau, before it will begin its gentle slide down the far side. A really lovely vintage of this classic wine. 2010-2020+. **90.**

### **1970 Château Laville Haut-Brion**

The 1970 Laville Haut-Brion has been fully mature for decades, but continues to drink very well and shows no signs of imminent decline. The deep and tertiary bouquet offers up a lovely blend of baked peaches, fresh apricot, petrol, orange peel, beeswax a lovely base of soil and a dollop of honey in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with mature flavors giving way to fine sense of liveliness on the backend. The wine is complex, shows fine mid-palate depth and sufficient framing acids to keep it cruising along for at least another handful of years, and perhaps longer. A lovely old wine. 2012-2020+. **88.**

### **1964 Château Laville Haut-Brion**

The 1964 vintage produced a great, great bottle of Laville and the wine was still drinking with stunning purity and vibrant complexity at age fifty. I have been fortunate to taste this wine on several occasions over the years, but it had probably been a good decade since I crossed paths with a completely pristine bottle, until the last two most recent examples. I cannot overstate just how profound this wine is, as it soars from the glass in a hauntingly pure and exuberant mélange of lemon, lanolin, fresh coconut, paraffin, chalky soil tones, just a touch of petrol and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very intensely flavored, with a bottomless core of fruit, stunning soil inflection, laser-like focus and brilliant complexity on the still very, very long, zesty and impeccably balanced finish. This is pure magic and it pains me to think of the recent wines made here at such ridiculously high octane levels, as they will never have the opportunity to age with the grace and unrivaled brilliance of the 1964. Amazingly, this wine still has decades and decades of life still ahead of it and is clearly one of the greatest white wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Bordeaux! 2014-2040. **98.**

### **1960 Château Laville Haut-Brion**

The 1960 Laville Haut-Brion has certainly been sliding down the far side of its plateau of maturity for a while already, but even in decline, the wine retains a nice sense of structure and no signs of imminent oxidation. The very old and tertiary nose offers up a complex blend of apricot, orange peel, petrol, chalky soil tones and new leather. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied,

soft, but still well-balanced and nicely focused, with a solid core, lovely, old white wine complexity and sneaky length on the pure and still quite fresh palate. I would guess that this wine was at its peak thirty-five years ago, but even at this advanced age, there is certainly still some pleasure to be had here. 2012-2020? **85.**



### ***Château La Tour Haut-Brion***

As I noted in the introduction, Monsieur Victor Coustau, the wine merchant based in the city of Bordeaux who owned La Mission Haut-Brion from 1903 up to the Woltners' purchase of that estate in 1919, had already owned the small, four hectare property of La Tour Haut-Brion for a decade when he first bought La Mission. His ownership of the two properties from 1903 was the first formal linking of La Tour Haut-Brion and La Mission Haut-Brion together under one owner, but according to David Peppercorn, the Coustau family did not get around to selling La Tour Haut-Brion to the Woltner family until 1933 and ended up holding on to this estate for fully forty years. Victor Cousteau passed away in 1924, but he was survived by his wife, and *Veuve* Coustau asked the Woltner brothers if they would oversee the vineyards and vinify the wines after her husband's passing. Thus, from 1924 until 1933, the wine remained in the hands of the Coustau family, but was produced by the Woltners. There is some uncertainty in the literature that I have reviewed as to whether the change of ownership took place in 1933 (as reported by David Peppercorn) or 1935, when the *Veuve* Coustau passed away (which is reported elsewhere to have been ceded to the Woltner family in Madame Coustau's will). However, whether La

Tour Haut-Brion officially came under the Woltner ownership umbrella in 1933 or 1935, the history of vine-growing on this property dates far further back than the Coustauss' ownership of the estate, with the first records of vineyards here dating to the early sixteenth century, when the important wine-producing family of the Rostaings owned the property (they also owned what would become La Mission in this epoch). As the La Mission Haut-Brion website recounts, in its earliest incarnation, La Tour Haut-Brion was known as La Tour de Rostaing, and it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that it became officially known as La Tour Haut-Brion.

Again, relying on David Peppercorn, who seems to have paid more attention to this lovely property's wines than any other commentator that I have in my library, he notes that the practice to use La Tour Haut-Brion as the effective second wine of La Mission Haut-Brion only commenced after Henri Woltner passed away in 1974, and prior to this, the wine was always treated as a separate property and the grapes here were vinified and raised separately in the cellars of La Mission Haut-Brion from 1933 through the 1973 vintage. After this time, when the management of the two estates fell under the supervision of Francis Dewarvin, the two wines became distinguished by a barrel selection process, with the finest barrels going into La Mission and those not chosen for La Mission becoming La Tour Haut-Brion. There is no information on how this selection was undertaken by Monsieur Dewarvin, and it remains possible that the slightly less refined *terroir* of La Tour Haut-Brion may have continued to be produced on its own, with barrels not selected for the *grand vin* of La Mission simply added to the La Tour Haut-Brion production prior to bottling. In any case, during the period of the Woltner family's proprietorship of La Tour Haut-Brion, it was always raised slightly differently in the cellars than the wine of La Mission, with more press wine included in the *assemblage* for more structure and the wine always proving to be even a bit sturdier than La Mission in its extended period of youthful reticence. From the 1930s through to the sale of La Tour Haut-Brion to the Dillon family in 1983, La Tour Haut-Brion was always the slower to evolve wine in comparison to La Mission, with a more rustic personality early on, but great potential for longevity and the same enviable track record for excelling in off vintages as its more famous stable-mate. When Jean-Bernard Delmas took over the technical direction of La Tour Haut-Brion after the sale to Estates Clarence Dillon, the wine became once again a distinct wine produced from its own four hectares of vineyards, rather than including any casks from La Mission, with Monsieur Delmas' intention to make the wine less sturdy and forbiddingly tannic in its youth than was the case from 1933 to 1983. The only vintage I have tasted of La Tour Haut-Brion after the November 1983 sale, was the very fine 1985, and given the very svelte structural profile of the 1985 vintage, it is hard to say whether or not the old tannic style of La Tour Haut-Brion was completely abandoned, but certainly, the exemplary quality of this property was studiously maintained in this early vintages under the Dillon family's ownership.

During the long period that La Tour Haut-Brion was produced by the Woltner family, the wine was often very, very close in quality to La Mission Haut-Brion, though quite different in personality. The wine was never as complete and elegant in its period of maturity as La Mission (this of course being a relative term, as La Mission has never been short on depth, muscle or broad shoulders), and La Tour Haut-Brion can sometimes remain just a bit marked by its sturdy structure even when it is fully mature, which has never been the case with La Mission. The wine always shared with La Mission a distinctly black fruity personality, with plenty of smoky, tobaccoey Graves personality, dark soil tones and some of that medicinal Graves overtones in

evidence in its younger guise. It was one of the top values to be found in Bordeaux for those looking for an extremely long-lived wine that blossomed marvelously with long cellaring, and as the notes below will attest, I have had some absolutely marvelous bottles of La Tour Haut-Brion over the years. For many years during the Woltner era, the wine was graced with a lively, metallic copper label that was very distinctive and quite aesthetically pleasing, but this was changed to a cream-colored label that mirrored the style of La Mission Haut-Brion's label after the Dillon family purchased the property in 1983. During the decade of the 1980s, the Dillon ownership group planted a bit more land at La Tour Haut-Brion, bringing up the cultivated surface to five hectares, and as was the case at La Mission, this increased the percentage of merlot (at the expense of cabernet sauvignon) planted in the vineyards at La Tour Haut-Brion. In 2005, Estates Clarence Dillon decided to discontinue the production of La Tour Haut-Brion completely, rolling the vineyards formally into those of La Mission, which according to their website, are now earmarked primarily for the production of the second wine here, La Chapelle de la Mission. Thus, the 2005 La Tour Haut-Brion is the final chapter of the vinous book that stretched back more than four centuries at the property and produced some truly outstanding wines over the course of the twentieth century.

### **1985 Château La Tour Haut-Brion**

The 1985 La Tour Haut-Brion is a superb example of the vintage, and the only thing I can fault this outstanding wine for is the sad decision to change its label from its completely distinctive copper color to the more mundane, cream-colored label that graces the 1985. The wine offers up a simply stunning and classic bouquet of dark berries, cassis, new leather, cigar wrapper, dark soil, smoke and a bit of charred earth in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very refined for La Tour Haut-Brion, with a superb core of fruit, melting tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and soil-driven finish. Great juice. 2014-2035. **93.**

### **1981 Château La Tour Haut-Brion**

The 1981 La Tour Haut-Brion is still a fairly young example of the vintage and really needs some extended aeration time to fully blossom, but blossom it most assuredly does when given enough time in decanter! The wine starts out a touch bretty, which coupled with the signature Graves tones of iodine and singed cigar can be a bit off-putting to the uninitiated, but with a couple of hours in decanter the wine starts to really put its best foot forward and is a superb example of the vintage. The bouquet eventually is deep, pure and complex, as it offers up scents of very sweet cassis, saddle leather, charred wood, singed tobacco, gravelly soil tones, a bit of bell pepper, cigar smoke and incipient notes of black truffles. On the palate the wine is fullish, very soil-driven and complex, with a sweet core of black fruit, melted tannins and outstanding length and grip on the long and classic finish. La Tour Haut-Brion was always famous for using more press wine, and in 1981, this certainly has given the wine impressive structure for the vintage. A lovely wine. 2014-2035+. **91.**

### **1979 Château La Tour Haut-Brion**

The 1979 La Tour Haut-Brion is a very tasty example of the vintage, but at the same time a poster child for why acidity is such an important component for allowing red wines to age gracefully. Aromatically and flavor-wise, this is a very classy and complex wine, but its low acids leave a slightly flat impression on the palate that takes away a fair bit from the overall quality, particularly on the finish. The bouquet is deep and excellent, offering up the classic La Tour Haut-Brion earthy blend of cassis, blackberries, cigar ash, black truffles, soggy earth and



smoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with excellent soil detail, fine focus and length, and a long, but slightly flat finish. The tannins here are just about gone, but the balance will carry the wine for many years to come. With better acidity this would be quite a bit livelier and stunning, rather than just very good. 2006-2020. **89.**

#### **1978 Château La Tour Haut-Brion**

The 1978 La Tour Haut-Brion may well be one of my favorite wines from this vintage! This most recent bottles was the finest I have tasted to date and may well indicate that this notoriously slow to unfold wine is finally reaching its apogee of peak maturity at age thirty-five! The utterly brilliant and transparent nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of cassis, dark berries, a touch of paraffin, cigar smoke, wonderfully complex, gravelly soil tones, expensive leather, a bit of nutskin and a topnote of chipotle peppers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely signature of soil, superb mid-palate depth, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very complex finish. A terrific vintage for La Tour Haut-Brion. 2013-2040. **94+.**

#### **1975 Château La Tour Haut-Brion**

The 1975 La Tour Haut-Brion took a good half an hour in decanter to start to blossom, but eventually came around to offer up a truly outstanding wine on both the nose and palate. Initially, this wine is a bit leathery and horsey (from a touch of brett?), but with air, it cleans up nicely to offer up scents of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, lovely underlying minerality, singed cigar and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively transparent, with a rock solid core of fruit, some old fashioned, chewy tannins still in evidence and outstanding complexity, length and grip on the focused finish. This does not possess the mid-palate density of the '75 La Mission, but (at least today) this is the more transparent wine. A superb vintage of La Tour Haut-Brion. 2010-2030+. **94.**

#### **1971 Château La Tour Haut-Brion**

The 1971 La Tour Haut-Brion is another superb wine that closely tracks the quality of its big brother La Mission in this vintage. The deep, complex and fully mature nose offers up a tertiary blend of cassis, tarry tones, cigar ash, chipotle peppers, charred Graves soil tones and a topnote of smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a fine core of fruit, still a bit of remaining tannin and lovely focus and grip on the very long, soil-driven and chewy finish. This is an old-fashioned vintage of La Tour Haut-Brion that should continue to drink well for at least another couple of decades and may even outlive the '71 La Mission Haut-Brion! 2011-20235. **93+.**

#### **1966 Château La Tour Haut-Brion**

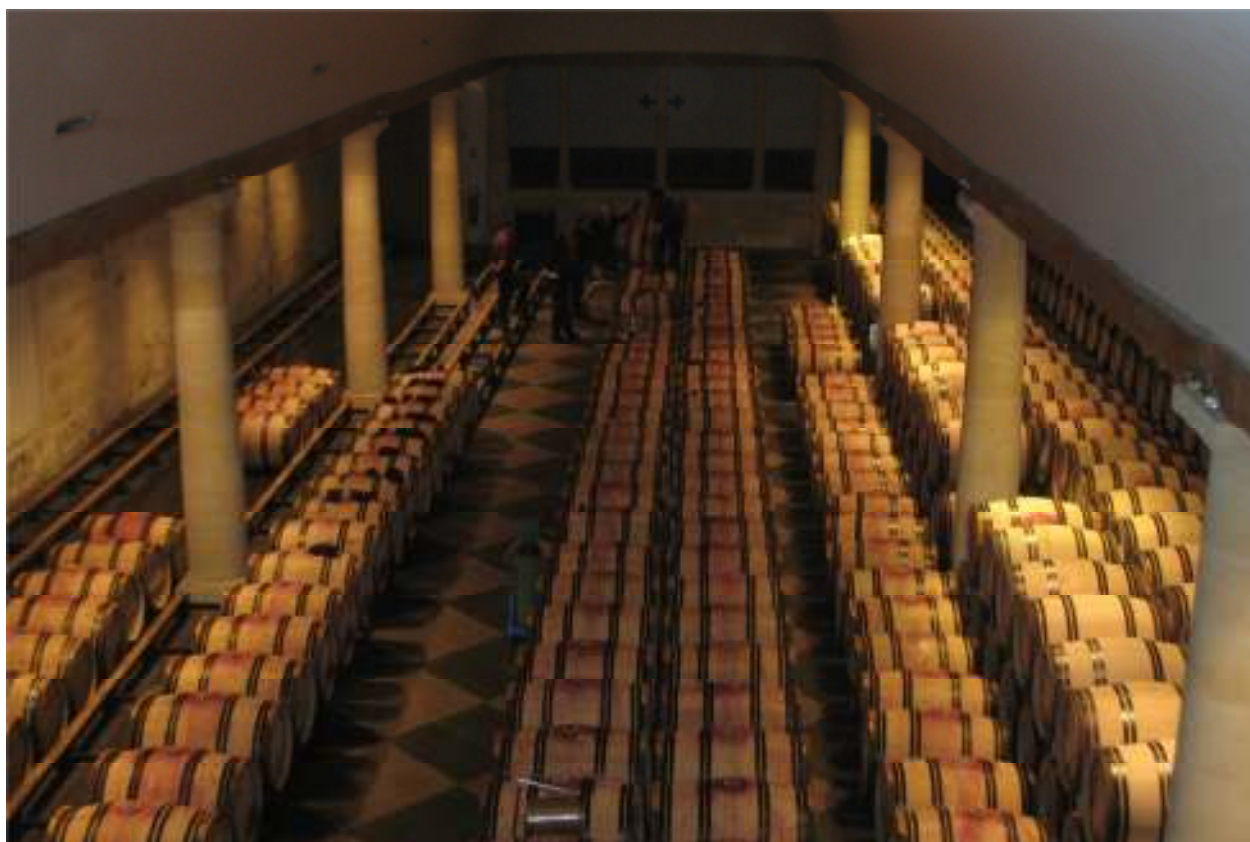
1966 is another vintage where the La Tour Haut-Brion gives the La Mission a very serious run for its money! The bouquet on the '66 La Tour Haut-Brion offers up a deep, refined and utterly classic aromatic mélange of dark berries, singed tobacco, new leather, a gentle touch of chipotle, gravel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with more a personality of “intensity of flavor” rather than overt concentration, but with excellent complexity, great focus and outstanding length and grip on the very pure finish. The tannins here are just about fully departed, but the wine retains such lovely balance that I see no reason that it will not continue on drinking at a very high level for at least another decade or two, even without any remaining tannin. A beautiful wine. 2010-2025+. **93.**

### **1957 Château La Tour Haut-Brion (bottled by a German *négociant*)**

While 1957 is not a particularly good vintage, in this era La Mission and La Tour Haut-Brion were renowned for consistently producing some of the best wines on the Left Bank in so-called “off” vintages. I would guess that this trend extended to La Tour Haut-Brion in 1957, but this wine was probably at its best three decades ago and when I crossed paths with this bottle, it was sliding into decline and really more of academic interest. The nose is still quite deep, offering up a roasted blend of signed tobacco, iron soil tones, cigar ash, dark berries, quite a bit of bell pepper, gravel and candle wax. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and rather rigid, with fairly modest fruit, but a fine base of soil tones and still an impressively present structure of old-fashioned tannins and sneaky length and grip. Not a great wine today, but it was probably lovely in its day and still shows a fair bit of life. 2011-2025+? **84.**

### **1949 Château La Tour Haut-Brion**

The 1949 La Tour Haut-Brion is a superb bottle of wine. The deep, complex and beautifully tertiary nose offers up a complex mélange of dark berries, cassis, singed tobacco, black truffles, herb tones, game and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very long, with great complexity, a lovely kernel of fruit remaining at the core, melting tannins and superb length and grip on the very focused and complex finish. Good juice that I have not tasted now in several years, and perhaps that last bottle I tried back in 2006 was not as pristine as it could have been and my impressions may be of a wine that is a bit further along its evolutionary path than a perfect example might be at this point in its evolution, given how long-lived La Tour Haut-Brion typically is and how well so many other 1949s are still drinking today. 2006-2020. **90+?**



*Looking down on the elegant barrel aging cellar at La Mission Haut-Brion.*

### ***La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion***

La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion was first produced in the 1991 vintage and is truly a “second wine” of La Mission. It is produced from the younger vines on the combined properties of the former La Tour Haut-Brion (since its final vintage of 2005) and La Mission Haut-Brion, and today is raised in twenty to twenty-five percent new oak each year, rather than the eighty percent now customary with the *grand vin* of La Mission. I have only had the pleasure to taste the last four of the last five vintages of the wine, which were produced under aegis of the stylistic shifting at La Mission, and I have found the vintages of 2012, 2011, 2010 and 2009 of La Chapelle to be rather uninspiring and a poor trade-off for the loss of La Tour Haut-Brion. Perhaps the vintages from 1991 to 2008 were better, but I have not had the opportunity to taste them.

### **2012 La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion**

It is funny that the 2012 La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion is so much lower in octane than its *grand vin* this year, but it is fully three-quarters of a percent lower in alcohol (14.2 versus 14.95 percent) and it may turn out to be the superior wine over the long haul. I say that with some reservation, as this wine is also over-oaked and will need to be able to carry its heavy lumber to have a chance of coming out well with bottle age, and this is by no means a certainty at this point in time. The nose is very good on the wine, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, a nice base of soil and boatloads of spicy, aggressive new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex on the attack, a sound core, but with a rigid and utterly charmless structural harness and a totally astringent finish of uncovered oak tannins on the backend. Can this wine really absorb all of this new wood? 2019-2030+? **80-86?**

### **2011 La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion**

The second wine of La Mission this year tips the scales at 13.7 percent, which is pretty heady for the Graves region in 2011 and suggests that there was plenty of unsatisfactory merlot that had shut down during the darkest days of hydric stress relegated to the second wine. The nose is the best part of this wine at the present time, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, espresso, smoke, dark soil tones and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused on the attack, with substantial, tough, fairly coarse tannins, pretty good mid-palate depth, and some overt heat poking out on the moderately long finish. Obviously another tough year for the “Twin Towers” in Pessac. 2020-2040. **85.**

### **2010 La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion**

The second wine at La Mission weighs in at a full 14.8 percent alcohol in the 2010 vintage, and also sports plenty of acidity and tannin to go along with its high octane. The bouquet is deep, very ripe and impressively pure for such an alcoholic wine, as it offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, dark chocolate, cigar wrapper, soil tones, new oak and a bit of tariness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, powerfully built and quite seamless on the attack, with bracing acids, plenty of ripe tannins and good length and grip on the slightly hot finish. Perhaps the malo was late to finish here, and that is the reason this wine seems so disjointed on the finish at the present time. But one does have to ask why the last couple of vintages at La Mission have had to be so high in alcohol. 2020-2045+? **86+?**

### **2009 La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion**

The second wine of La Mission Haut-Brion is excellent in 2009. The bouquet is deep, classic and quite impressive, as it jumps from the glass in a blaze of cassis, blackberries, cigar

ash, lovely soil tones, espresso and just a touch of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with ripe tannins, a fine core and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex and quite stylish finish. A superb second wine. 2017-2035+. **87-89+**.

### ***Château La Mission Haut-Brion***

#### **2012 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

I am not really sure what there is to say about a 2012 claret that tips the scales at 14.95 percent alcohol. The blend on the La Mission this year is sixty-two percent merlot and thirty-eight percent cabernet sauvignon and the wine was raised in seventy-five percent new oak. The very ripe and simple nose offers up scents of boysenberry, black cherries, cigar wrapper, gravel and tons of aggressive, spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and reasonably polished on the attack, with a solid core and a totally dry and astringent finish. The wine certainly has enough stuffing to absorb the wood eventually, but there will still be a heavy price to pay in terms of textural elegance and complexity from such a heavy load of lumber. There is decent length here and the acids are also pretty good, so the wine at least avoids the heavy-handed and flat impression of the least successful wines of the vintage, but this is supposed to be La Mission Haut-Brion, not some third division St. Émilion trying to get noticed by hiring one of the ham-fisted consultants to pick too late and over-oak the wine to try and garner some attention in the least sophisticated claret reviewing circles! What a disappointing result in what should have been a great vintage for La Mission. 2020-2040. **85**.

#### **2011 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The 2011 La Mission was not showing well during my visit to the estate, but the team at the château seemed perfectly content with the sample and I have to assume that this really is the wine in 2011. At least the 2011 does not tip the scales at the celestial 15.1 percent of the 2010 La Mission, but the wine really seems to have been eviscerated already at this early stage by too much spicy new wood. The bouquet is very much dominated by its new wood (Taransaud again clearly part of the oak regimen here), with the spicy wood scents covering up notes of black cherries, cassis and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite classy on the attack, with reasonable mid-palate depth, but a very dry, astringent backend from the combination of skin and wood tannins. Honestly, if this sample is really the wine, I cannot imagine this wine not drying out before it blossoms- or at least always being burdened by some dry-edged tannins. What is going on here? 2020-2050. **82-88**.

#### **2010 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The 2010 La Mission Haut-Brion is the most mammoth of all the wines in the Dillon stable in 2010, as it tips the scales at an unprecedented 15.1 percent in alcohol. The nose is very, very deep, very ripe and amazingly, also quite compelling, as it offers up scents of black cherries, sweet cassis, bitter chocolate, soil tones, cigar smoke, gravel and a very well-integrated and generous base of new oak. I much prefer the wood integration on the 2010 La Mission to the 2009 at the same stage a year ago. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, powerful and sharply acidic, with a rock solid core of pure fruit, very hard tannins, excellent focus and great length and grip on the tensile finish. The acids today are quite coarse and one hopes that they will eventually be tamed. They tend to really sharpen the expression of the fruit, but they are not currently integrated into the body of the wine and cause a fair bit of discordance on the finish at the present time. The 2010 La Mission, despite its higher alcohol content than the 2010 Haut-Brion, shows less signs of overripeness on the backend than its First Growth stable-mate. It too is

a very forcefully-styled and bruising young wine at the present time, and I have a hard time imagining its ultimate shape. Perhaps it will turn out as well as the 1975 La Mission, but it may also always be a wine that never fully pulls its currently disparate elements into a cohesive and compelling whole. There is a lot of sound in the fury currently in the glass, but not much enlightenment. 2025-2075? **83-92+?**

#### **2009 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

Given how superb the second wine is this year, I really have to wonder how the La Mission is going to evolve, as the *grand vin* was showing quite aggressively oaky on the day that I tasted it at Château Haut-Brion. It is certainly going to be a rather unique vintage of La Mission in any case, as the wine measures a full 14.7 percent alcohol and is a big-boned, deep and powerful wine that manages to avoid any signs of overripeness, but packs an awful lot of alcohol and tannin. The nose is deep and very complex for such a young La Mission, as it offers up scents of blackberries, cassis, espresso, singed tobacco, plenty of gravelly soil tones and a huge dollop of aggressively spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a rock solid core of fruit, impressive complexity, but a finish that today is extremely dry and marked by its spicy oak. There are already substantial tannins here from the skins, and with the added backbone of wood tannins from the spicy (Taransaud?) new wood, one really has to wonder where this wine is headed in the long run. It is certainly too tannic to entertain drinking without at least fifteen or twenty years of bottle age, but will it ever fully shed its rather mammoth cloud of tannins? Based on the sample I tasted, I cannot really answer the question of whether or not this wine will ever be able to resolve completely. Rather a puzzling young vintage of La Mission ????

#### **1995 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

It had been fifteen years since I last tasted the 1995 La Mission, but a friend generously offered to pop a bottle for me when I told him that I was working on this article. The wine is still young (not surprisingly), but is just brimming with promise and really does start to blossom a bit with some extended aeration. The bouquet is deep and utterly classic in its constellation of dark berries, singed tobacco, complex, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf, smoke, a touch of mint and a very discreet base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, great focus and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very pure and classy finish. All this excellent vintage of La Mission needs is a bit more time in the cellar to soften up a bit more. 2020-2075+. **94.**

#### **1990 Château La Mission Haut-Brion (served from magnum)**

The 1990 La Mission is a very top example of this vintage, and out of magnum it is just beginning to blossom. The deep, complex and classy nose offers up a very ripe blend of cassis, spit-roasted game, saddle leather, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with just a touch of La Mission's youthful medicinal tones still in evidence. The wine is rock solid at the core, modestly tannic and beautifully balanced, with outstanding focus, length and grip. The 1990 vintage in general has not aged anywhere as well as I had initially anticipated, but this is one 1990 that does not disappoint. 2012-2065+. **94+.**

#### **1989 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The striking difference in purity between the top wines of 1989 and their counterparts in 1990 is very readily apparent in the magical 1989 La Mission Haut-Brion, which is a significant step from the very fine 1990 paired up with it at this tasting. The brilliant and vibrant nose soars from the glass in a sappy blend of black cherries, blackberries, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones,

smoke and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, stunning soil inflection, ripe tannins and stunning purity on the beautifully focused and endless finish. This is one of the greatest young vintages of La Mission I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2020-2100. **97+**.

### **1988 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The 1988 Château La Mission Haut-Brion is a very strong example of the vintage, with the '88 tendency to a slight leanness nicely complemented by the property's inherently broad shoulders. The deep and mature nose wafts from the glass in a very complex constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, still a touch of medicinal Graves tones, summer truffles, a fine combination of Cuban cigar ash and wrapper, gentle meatiness, a complex base of gravelly soil notes, a bit of smoky new oak and just a hint of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, still just a bit of backend tannin, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is one of the top 1988s that I have had a pleasure to taste and a very fine La Mission, even if it will always be just a touch sinewy by the rather robust standards of this outstanding estate. It is not quite as sweet in its fruit component (yet?) as the 1983 or 1981, but it may well get there, and if it does so, my score will be a tad conservative. 2015-2040+. **93+**.

### **1985 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The 1985 vintage of La Mission is simply stellar, and though the wine is still on the youthful side, it has enormous potential. The bouquet on this excellent wine is still a tad primary, but offers up great purity and nascent complexity in its mix of cassis, sweet dark berries, a touch of menthol, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, a deft touch of new wood and a bit of upper register mintiness, that defines La Mission in 1985. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows stunning depth at the core, with beautiful balance and focus, modest tannins and great length and grip on the impeccable finish. This will be an extremely velvety and seductive vintage of La Mission at its apogee, but it is still a bit on the young side for primetime drinking and I would keep it in the cellar for several more years before starting to drink it in earnest. It is a great and very classic vintage for this great property. 2025-2075. **95**.

### **1983 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The 1983 vintage of La Mission Haut-Brion is a very lovely wine that was quite structured in its youth, but as it reaches thirty years of age, it has blossomed into a superb and utterly classic example of this fine year. The superb bouquet offers up a very complex blend of cassis, black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, new leather, a nice touch of meatiness, a bit of medicinal La Mission overtones, incipient notes of black truffles, cigar smoke and chipotle pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and beautifully balanced, with its full-bodied format showing off a beautiful core of fruit, a superb signature of soil, still a fair bit of moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long and well-balanced finish. A fine, fine vintage for La Mission that still could do with a few more years in the cellar to really reach its apogee. 2020-2060+. **94**.

### **1981 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

I drank quite a bit of '81 La Mission in the decade of the 1990s, as the wine was really lovely at that point in time. I had not seen a bottle in a long, long time, but this most recent example was outstanding, offering up a deep and very classy nose of cassis, tobacco smoke, a touch of eucalyptus, dark soil tones, a bit of La Mission's medicinal nuances and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with lovely focus and



balance, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the *à point* and very complex finish. A lovely vintage of La Mission for current drinking and one of the top wines of the vintage. 2014-2035. **93.**

#### **1979 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The 1979 La Mission is a very good bottle of wine, but it seems to me that proprietors pushed the wine a bit further than the vintage was happily willing to go (much like the '79 Las Cases), with the result that much of the inherent elegance that is the strength of this vintage did not find its way into this wine. Consequently (again like Las Cases), the aromatics are the best part. The nose is complex and stylish, offering up notes of blackberry fruit, woodsmoke, incipient notes of black truffle, herbs, tobacco leaf and La Mission soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish and suave and polished on the attack, and with solid mid-palate depth, but lacking a bit of elegance on the finish. The tannins poke through a bit on the backend, and the closing notes of cigar ash and singed earth are not quite as attractive as the aromatic elements. Nonetheless, this is still a good, solid, middle tier La Mission that is at least true to the house style of the château. Normally the La Tour Haut-Brion is the more rustic of these two wines, but there is not a whole lot to choose in terms of polish between the two in 1979. 2006-2020. **89+?**

#### **1975 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

I have had the pleasure to taste the powerful 1975 La Mission on several occasions, and while I have always been impressed with the quality of the wine, I am not quite as smitten with this vintage as several other commentators. The deep and classic La Mission bouquet soars from the glass in a slightly horsey blend of cassis, dark berries, saddle leather, plenty of chipotle pepper, tobacco, herbs, plenty of dark soil tones and a topnote of cigar box. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, plenty of tannins still waiting to be resolved and outstanding length and grip on the very powerful finish. While this wine is already drinkable, it seems to me that it remains a bit primary on both the nose and palate and will continue to improve if allowed to stay in the cellar another five to ten years. There is certainly no rush to drink it, as it is a very structured, old-fashioned style of La Mission that should last for decades to come. 2015-2065. **94+.**

#### **1971 Château La Mission Haut-Brion (served from magnum)**

I have always been a fan of the utterly suave 1971 La Mission, which out of regular bottle has been velvety and fully mature for a couple of decades. However, out of magnum, this wine is just arriving at its absolute apogee, with superb grip and structure to go along with all of the aromatic and flavor complexity of this excellent vintage. The deep, pure and vibrantly complex nose soars from the glass in a beautiful blend of cassis, black truffles a touch of chipotle pepper, tobacco smoke, new leather, a fine base of gravelly soil and still a vestige of the medicinal tones of youthful La Mission. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly pure, with a rock solid core, superb balance and outstanding length and grip on the tangy, still modestly tannic and beautifully complex finish. The '71 La Mission in magnum is at a magnificent place in its evolution, with a wide open and bottomless personality and stunning backend energy. 2015-2040. **94.**

#### **1970 Château La Mission Haut-Brion (With Volatile Acidity)**

As I noted in the introduction, I have had more than my fair share of bottles of the 1970 La Mission with a hefty amount of volatile acidity, and as I suspect that there were distinct bottling runs back in the Woltner era, I have included my recent notes on a bottle with VA and a bottle without, as I assume there are both out there. Here, the VA is quite prominent when the wine is first decanted, but eases off a bit to reveal notes of cassis, dark berries, saddle leather,

tobacco leaf, gravel and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very long, with lovely focus, melted tannins and a balanced and classy finish. If one's threshold for volatile acidity is pretty high, even the VA examples of the 1970 La Mission can be quite enjoyable. 2013-2035. **89.**

**1970 Château La Mission Haut-Brion (Without Volatile Acidity)**

The 1970 La Mission is fully mature and drinking beautifully today. The nose offers up a complex blend of saddle leather, black fruit (that became more raspberry-like as it got air), singed cigar tobacco, black truffles, earth and gamey tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and resolved, with a certain sturdy rusticity to it that has been typical of the '70 La Mission since day one, but with excellent focus and depth, a sweet core of black fruit, and fine length on the finish. Structurally this wine is wide open and ready to go, with no rough edges. I prefer the slightly more gentle and floral 1971 La Mission to the 1970, but that is not to take anything away from this fine bottle of mature claret. 2006-2025. **91.**



**1967 Château La Mission Haut-Brion (Nicolas)**

The 1967 La Mission Haut-Brion bottled by Nicolas is really a very nice example of the vintage, as it offers up a very complex and stylish nose of cherries, saddle leather, singed tobacco, gravelly soil tones and chipotle peppers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and intensely flavored, with lovely complexity, a modicum of remaining structure, but lovely intensity of flavor and very good balance on the wide open and velvety finish. Even though there

is no remaining tannin here, the wine is so beautifully balanced that it may well just continue cruising along like this for another couple of decades! 2010-2030? **89.**

#### **1966 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

This particular bottle of the 1966 La Mission was not marked by volatile acidity, as had been the case with the last bottle I tried of this wine and which I reported on back in the article on the '66 clarets several years ago. Consequently, it was a step up in quality and really proved to be a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a complex and very classic nose of cassis, chipotle pepper, dark berries, singed cigars, herb tones, a beautiful base of dark, La Mission soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with tangy acids, a fine core of fruit, melting tannins and great length and balance on the black fruity, soil-driven and ever so slightly, horsey finish. A lovely and fully mature vintage of La Mission. 2010-2030. **93.**

#### **1964 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The 1964 La Mission is a beautiful example of the vintage that has now been fully mature for decades, but continues to drink at a very high level. The deep, complex and beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic blend of cassis, medicinal black cherries, singed tobacco, a lovely base of soil, a bit of roasted game and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and absolutely *à point*, with beautiful focus and balance, a lovely core of velvety fruit and lovely length and grip on the resolved and vibrant finish. A beautiful '64. 2009-2025+. **94.**

#### **1959 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The 1959 La Mission is one of the greatest vintages of this wine that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. This most recent bottle, with a mid-shoulder fill, was still showing beautifully at age fifty-one, offering up a sumptuous and pure bouquet of sweet cassis, roasted plums, cigar ash, a beautiful base of dark, gravelly soil tones, black truffles, cigar smoke, leather and a refined base of meatiness. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and a beautiful synthesis of sweet fruit and classic La Mission soil tones, with melting tannins, a plump core and excellent length and grip on the complex and classic finish. With the lower fill level, I would estimate that this example was probably ninety percent of a bottle with more perfect ullage, but still provided plenty of enjoyment to drink. 2010-2040. **92** (with pristine bottles significantly higher and probably pushing the three digit threshold).

#### **1955 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The 1955 vintage of La Mission Haut-Brion is an absolutely brilliant bottle and I wish I had a box of this great wine in my cellar to help mark important landmarks in life's unquenchable thirst for forward motion. The utterly brilliant nose soars from the glass in a complex and classic mélange of cassis, dark berries, singed cigar tobacco, a touch of mint, gloriously complex, dark soil tones, a touch of petroleum jelly, hints of lead pencil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerfully built, with an old-fashioned La Mission personality, ripe, but still present tannins, broad shoulders and outstanding complexity and focus on the simply stunning finish. A great, great La Mission that rivals the most magical vintages of this wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2006-2045. **97.**

## IN THE BOTTLE RED BURGUNDY VINTAGE REPORT



While the days are now gone when I drank red Burgundy four to five evenings a week, as these days I have such a volume of samples that need attention on any given evening that I do not get to tramp down to the cellar to pull a bottle with the same leisure which I once enjoyed. However, I do still get a chance to drink more than my fair share of red Burgundy and happily take notes on each bottle that I open or am served. For the last couple of years, these notes have just been languishing in the files without a home, and as I put together this issue's report on Château La Mission Haut-Brion and culled through my tasting books (checking for recent La Mission notes), I realized that it would probably make sense to put together these red Burgundy tasting notes as a snapshot of how these vintages are currently drinking (or not) at the present time. Several of the most recent top vintages of red Burgundy, with the 2005 vintage serving as "exhibit A", are still quite closed and be opening bottles now is a complete waste of wine, while others, like 2007 and 2008, are really drinking surprisingly well in their relative youth and are a far better prospect if one is down in the cellar and just hankering to open a bottle of young red Burgundy. So think of this as a living, breathing and drinking red Burgundy vintage chart, compiled over the last two years or so; in each vintage section I have given a brief description of the vintage's style and where it is on its evolutionary arc. In true vintage chart tradition, I have also given a ranking to each vintage for red Burgundy, using the old American grade school

system of A through F. Within each vintage grouping, the wines are once again simply listed geographically from north to south, starting in Marsannay and working south to Santenay and Maranges, with any recent bottle tasted from the vintage listed and my impressions of the wine at its current moment of drinking. Premier crus are listed after village wines and before grand crus in each vintage section. Within the subsets of premier crus, I have generally listed them in a personal hierarchy, with the premier crus in each village that I deem the finest coming after those that I do not rank quite as highly, and the same can be said for the grand crus within each village section of each vintage grouping. If I have tasted multiple examples of a certain vineyard in the same vintage, for example, Ruchottes-Chambertin, the wines are listed in alphabetical order by producer.

I have started with the beautiful 2010 vintage as the starting point for this report, and then simply worked backwards from that point through other adolescent vintages to those that are fully mature and really ready to drink. As I have recently written full articles on the 2007, 1998 and 1996 red Burgundy vintages, the notes that follow here are either new additions that I have tasted since those articles were written, or an occasional note I have found from the time of those pieces that I overlooked when putting the articles together. I have made the vintage descriptions of those three vintages shorter, as they were written up in depth in the recent past. I have only gone back as far as the 1969 vintage, as the report is long enough with the spread from 2010 to 1969, and the handful of notes I have on red Burgundies older than 1969 will be saved for a feature on truly venerable old Burgs sometime in the future. I have also only included a few of my notes on recently tasted wines from Corton, as I want to do a full length feature on the red wines from this seriously underrated grand cru in the not too distant future and want to have plenty of notes already in the files with which to get started on that project. I did include a few, simply to remind folks just how good red Corton can be, but most have been held back for the big feature that I will get to later this year or early next year. I have also not included any notes from the superb Nuits St. Georges producer of Domaine Henri Gouges, as I will have a proper estate feature on this superb family of *vignerons* in an upcoming issue. As the first vintage that I really sold of red Burgundy in my wine merchant days was 1985, for vintages older than this, I have relied on Clive Coates reports on the growing conditions of the respective vintages that can be found in his fine tome on the region, *Côte d'Or*. I hope the article will be useful for those wondering how certain vintages are now drinking, and hopefully there is a decent spread of notes in each vintage section to give a good idea on how village, premier crus and grand crus will be showing in each year.

### ***The 2010 Vintage-    Ranking: A+***

*This remains one of the most beautiful and promising young vintages of red Burgundy that I have had the pleasure to taste, but the wine are still puppies and it makes no sense to be opening them four or five years out from the vintage. They will be legends in the fullness of time, but I would not want to start drinking village wines from 2010 until they are fully eight to ten years of age, premier crus from age twelve onwards and grand crus from age fifteen forwards. They will be accessible sooner across the board, as this is one of the most beautifully balanced vintages of young red Burgundy I have ever tasted, but given the short crop and the magical potential, what is the point of drinking these wines in their youthful stages, when there are so many other vintages around that make much more sense to be opening today, while these 2010s get the rest that they need to reach their absolute pinnacles? Drink 2007, 2008 or 2009s now, if*

*you are really in the mood for a young bottle of red Burgundy, and let these puppies snooze comfortably in a cool corner of the cellar for many more years to come! As the dearth of notes in this article on 2010s out of bottle hopefully demonstrates, I am taking my own advice and not opening any of these wines any time soon, as imagine how bad folks would feel today that drank up their 1978 Joseph Drouhin wines back in 1985?*

**2010 Morey St. Denis “Monts Luisants”- Maison Ilan**

Ray Walker really made lovely 2010s and I do miss the days when journalists were allowed into the cellars to taste here, as I have lost track of what is going on in recent times. In any event, this bottle of 2010 Monts Luisants is really very lovely, though was still a bit too young for primetime drinking when I had it a year ago. The bouquet is deep and pure, offering up a youthfully complex nose of cherries, blood orange, beetroot, a lovely base of soil tones, incipient notes of gamebird and a topnote of thyme and tarragon. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a sappy core of fruit, fine soil inflection, suave tannins and a very long, vibrant finish. A very classy Morey premier cru from this great vintage. 2017-2040. **93.**

**2010 Pernand-Vergelesses “Île de Vergelesses”- Domaine Chandon de Briailles**

The 2010 Île de Vergelesses from Chandon de Briailles is going to be a marvelous wine, but it needs at least another five years in the cellar to really start to blossom. The deep, pure and very, very promising bouquet offers up scents of red and black cherries, incipient notes of forest floor, coffee bean, *pigeon*, a lovely base of stony soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, velvety tannins and a very long, primary and tangy finish. This is going to be a terrific wine in due course, but it needs some more time in the cellar! 2020-2050+. **93+.**

**2010 Savigny-lès-Beaune “Clos des Godeaux”- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The new Savigny *villages* bottling of Clos des Godeaux from Joseph Drouhin is a lovely wine and one of their top values in their outstanding range of wines. As readers may recall, the Clos des Godeaux is located up above the great premier cru of les Lavières and the Drouhins have only been producing this wine for a few vintages so far. The 2010 is still young and a bit marked by its stems, but shows excellent promise in its aromatic constellation of cherries, strawberries, coffee, orange peel, lovely soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a fine core, lovely soil inflection, nascent complexity and a long, modestly tannic and still quite primary finish. This wine still needs time to fully blossom, but it will be quite a lovely bottle once it is ready to go. 2018-2040. **90+.**

***The 2009 Vintage- Ranking: B-***

*I liked the 2009 vintage a bit better out of cask than I have out of bottle, as several wines that I thought did a very nice job of managing the ripeness of the vintage when I tasted them in barrel, seemed decidedly more prune and overripe in profile when I revisited them out of bottle. However, this may just be a passing phase and the better wines of the vintage may rally with some bottle age. The late Patrick Bize described the 2009 reds as “a tourist’s vintage” and this seems like a pretty reasonable description of the wines, as I understood him to mean that this is a good, solid vintage that delivers plenty of pinot noir fruit in a fleshy format that is perfect for folks relatively new to the Burgundy region, but which is a bit too obvious and lacking in terroir for those with more experience with wines from the Côte d’Or. It is not one of my favorite vintages in this decade with so many truly great years, but there are some okay 2009 wines out*



*there. The biggest problem with the 2009s was that merchants, either out of unfamiliarity with the region's wines or out of pure greed, hyped the vintage scandalously (and quite inaccurately), looking for another windfall of currency like they experienced with the truly great 2005s, and for those who bought these overly-praised wines at exceedingly high prices, they were ripped off. No doubt the vintage will continue to be vociferously praised by the most mercenary of those merchants, but it really is one of the least interesting red wine vintages of the last decade in Burgundy. But, high tariffs aside for the moment, the 2009 vintage did produce some pretty solid and fleshy wines, with the percentage that did not stray over the line into overripeness likely to age quite well and perhaps offer up more terroir at some point in their evolutions than they currently show today. As one seasoned Burgundy lover who I am friends with commented, "the 2009 red Burgundies are the second coming of the 1990s," and this seems like a pretty good comparison at the present time. However, as the notes below on the 1990 red Burgundies will show, (as many of the wines are better today than they were a decade ago and may well be starting to bounce back a bit), there is always a bit of hope for better things down the road from the 2009s, as no vintage in Burgundy on its evolutionary march takes the straight road from point A to point B, as they always seem to prefer the back roads to the main thoroughfares. So we will see what time holds in stock for this vintage of red Burgundy, which had the misfortune to start out life overly praised and may end up disappointing a lot of Burgundy collectors who got stuck with very high-priced bottles of very ripe wines.*

#### **2009 Bourgogne "Perrières" Rouge- Domaine Simon Bize et Fils**

Patrick Bize always made excellent examples of Bourgogne from his parcel of Perrières, with both the white and red first class and very ageworthy. The 2009 Perrières rouge is quite a ripe rendition of this bottling, but very well made and tasty, as it offers up a fine nose of red and black cherries, a touch of venison, woodsmoke, stony soil tones and a bit of Savigny spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in personality for a Bourgogne, with fine focus and core and a bit of chewy tannin perking up the impressively long finish. Quite drinkable today, but also with some potential for aging as well. 2012-2025+. **88.**

#### **2009 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet**

The 2009 Chapelle from the Rossignol brothers is a very, very strong example of the vintage, with a sense of purity that is quite rare in general in this vintage. The fine nose wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex mélange of plums, black cherries, cocoa powder, violets, a bit of fresh thyme and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a really lovely base of soil tones, a fine core, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. One of the top 2009 reds I have had out of bottle. 2019-2045+. **94.**

#### **2009 Chambolle-Musigny- Domaine Michel Gros**

The 2009 Chambolle AC from Michel Gros is very ripe and a bit hot on the backend of the palate. The bouquet is a buxom blend of red and black cherries, cocoa, a bit of venison, soil and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and a bit lacking in precision from its alcohol level, with a good core, very little tannin and solid length and grip on the slightly heady finish. At a lower octane, this might have been a bit more interesting. 2013-2025. **86.**

#### **2009 Vosne-Romanée- Domaine Michel Gros**

The 2009 Vosne AC from Michel Gros is another quite ripe example of the vintage, but in contrast to the Chambolle villages, the alcohol level here does not seem quite as elevated. The

nose is a jammy blend of black raspberries, plums, dark chocolate, soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plump on the attack, with a good core, but modest structural integrity. The finish is fairly long, quite jammy and gently tannic. This is okay, but I would have loved to have seen it picked just a touch earlier. 2013-2025+. **87.**

**2009 Vosne-Romanée “aux Brûlées”- Domaine Michel Gros**

The 2009 Vosne-Romanée “aux Brûlées” from Domaine Michel Gros is another very ripe example of the vintage, with the fruit tones taking on a slightly “stewed” character from its ripeness level. The Gros family parcel in Brûlées is planted with one-third each of fifty, thirty and ten year-old vines, so the blend should offer a nice combination of younger vines’ vibrant fruit and deeper expressions of *terroir* from the older parcel. The wine is okay on the nose, offering up a robust blend of black raspberries, black cherries, venison, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, herbs and a bit of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, a bit blurry from its octane, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, jammy and straightforward finish. Not a particularly special example of this great *terroir*. 2015-2030+. **86+.**

**2009 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas”- Domaine Michel Gros**

The 2009 Clos des Réas is the freshest of these 2009s from Monsieur Gros, but it too is a bit overripe in personality and shows a bit of backend alcohol, which takes away from the focus of the wine on the palate. The nose is quite ripe and jammy, wafting from the glass in a mélange of cherries, crushed raspberries, chocolate, herb tones, a nice base of soil, woodsmoke and a judicious framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and showing some signs of *sur maturité*, with a good core and some heat muddying the fairly long and gently tannic finish. I love this *terroir*, but the 2009 vintage is obviously not the best year for showing it off to advantage. 2013-2025. **87.**

**2009 Echézeaux- Domaine Liger-Belair**

The 2009 Echézeaux from Domaine Liger-Belair is a pretty good example of this vintage, as it has managed to maintain a pretty good level of freshness to its fruit component. The bouquet is quite fruit-driven in profile, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, raspberries, woodsmoke, venison, a very nice base of soil tones and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and very sappy at the core, with velvety tannins, lovely focus and balance and a long, sumptuous and slightly woody finish. This is a very strong example of the 2009 vintage, as there are absolutely no signs of *sur maturité* and the wine has a nice lightness of step for this year. 2018-2040+. **92.**

**2009 Corton- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

The first vintage of DRC’s Corton, made from a blend of three finest *terroirs* on the hill of Corton (Bressandes, Renardes and Clos du Roi) has turned out very well, particularly in the context of the very ripe profile of the ’09 vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite plummy for young Corton, offering up scents of plums, black cherries, a hint of red currant, cocoa, venison, a nice base of minerality and a suave base of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a sappy core, a fair bit of ripe tannin and impressive lightness of step on the long and beautifully balanced finish. A really fine first effort for the domaine on the hill. 2022-2075. **93+.**

**2009 Chorey-lès-Beaune- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The Chorey-lès-Beaune bottling from Joseph Drouhin is one of the finest red Burgundy values to be found in the entire Côte d’Or, and the 2009 version has turned out very well indeed. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a ripe, but vibrant blend of red and black cherries, a touch



of cocoa, woodsmoke, roses, a nice base of soil and a bit of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, just a touch of tannin and lovely focus and grip on the long and fairly complex finish. For the price, this is really an awful lot of Burgundy, and the wine ages very well, as the 1999 is still going strong in my cellar! 2013-2030+. **88+**.



### **2009 Pommard- Château de Pommard**

The 2009 Château de Pommard *Grand Vin* is a ripe and meaty example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a youthfully *sauvage* blend of red and black cherries, roasted venison, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, coffee and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and sappy at the core, with fine focus and balance, suave tannins and very good length and grip on the buxom and still fairly youthful finish. I last tasted this in the spring of 2012 and at that time it was in need of at least another three to five years in the cellar to really start to drink well. It is a big-boned vintage for this very fine bottling, and probably not as elegant or complex as the 2008, but it is a good result for the year. 2017-2035+. **90**.

### **2009 Volnay “Champan”- Domaine Joseph Voillot (375 ml.)**

I have never had the pleasure to visit Domaine Voillot and taste *sur place*, but I have quite enjoyed their wines that I have had the pleasure to taste from time to time. The 2009 Champan in half bottle was found on the wine list of the lovely Volnay restaurant of *Cellier Volnaysien*, and the wine was really quite fine and complex in its aromatic blend of cherries,

strawberries, a bit of venison, coffee, mustard seed, incipient notes of *sous bois* and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively transparent for the vintage, with a good core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and very well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2016-2030+. **91.**

***The 2008 Vintage- Ranking: A-***

*The 2008 vintage is a lovely year for red Burgundy and the wines have, surprisingly to me, not really closed down since their bottling and are drinking very well at the present time. Given the higher acidity of the 2008s, vis à vis the 2007s, I would have expected this vintage to close down for a while behind its tangy acids, and though that may yet happen down the road, it has not yet. Consequently, this is a very good vintage for current drinking, if one is hankering for a younger bottle of red Burgundy that is long on soil signature and great purity of vibrant fruit. This is a cool vintage in Burgundy that was saved by perfect weather in September, with a friendly north wind which allowed sugars to rise, rot to stay away and the grapes to concentrate a bit through dehydration, as well as through photosynthesis. Without the great September, this would have been a very poor year, as sugars were lagging, grapes were still green far into the season, and rain had made the battle against rot and mildew a constant struggle for vignerons. But, a superb fin de saison made the vintage and the wines have turned out beautifully, with great purity and bounce to the fruit, great soil signatures and vibrant, tangy personalities that are quintessentially Burgundian. The wines have sufficient tannins to age very well over at least the mid-term, but it is their acids that seem likely to carry them the furthest, and this looks likely to be a rare vintage of red Burgundy that delights in throughout its lifetime. It is one of my favorites stylistically of the last decade, though not in the same league with 2010 or 2005, and probably not quite as good as 2001 either. But this is still a very good vintage for red Burgundy.*

**2008 Marsannay “Champs Solomon”- Domaine Bart**

The 2008 Champs Solomon from Domaine Bart is still on the young side and is showing a rather rustic adolescent side at the present time. As I often find this one of the most elegant *lieux à dits* in Marsannay, I am assuming that this is just a stage of the wine. The bouquet is deep, young and nascently complex, as it delivers scents of red and black cherries, grilled meat, leather, coffee, fresh herb tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tight, with a good core, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the tangy and still quite closed down finish. This still needs another year or two to blossom, but given the fine track record of this bottling *chez* Bart, I am sure this will be very tasty in due time. 2016-2035. **86-89+?**

**2008 Gevrey-Chambertin “la Justice”- Domaine Alain Burguet et Fils**

The la Justice bottling from Domaine Burguet was discontinued after this vintage, as the plethora of small cuvées of Gevrey *villages* produced here in the early years of this decade made it difficult for the domaine’s importers to distribute. The production from this fine *lieu à dit* now goes into the Cuvée Symphonie bottling of Gevrey-Chambertin. The 2008 la Justice is a lovely wine that is still a year or two away from really starting to blossom, but offers up a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, grilled meat, coffee bean, a fine base of dark soil tones and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very soil-driven in personality in this vintage, with a fine core, moderate tannins and a long, youthful and tangy finish. 2016-2035. **89+.**

**2008 Morey St. Denis “Clos Sorbés” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Philippe Jouan**

Ray Walker of Maison Ilan in Nuits St. Georges generously gave me this bottle to try, as I was unfamiliar with the estate’s wines and did not know that Monsieur Jouan was a good friend of Jacky Truchot and made wines very much in the same style. His son has now taken over the estate, and despite a few attempts to visit, I have not yet had an opportunity to taste here *sur place*, but I was very impressed with the quality of the family’s 2008 Clos Sorbés. The bouquet is bright and red fruity, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, beetroot, coffee, a bit of mustard seed, a superb base of soil and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and tangy, with a lovely core, fine transparency, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and complex finish. Fine juice. 2016-2040. **92+**.

**2008 Chambolle-Musigny “Veroilles”- Domaine Ghislaine Barthod**

The 2008 Veroilles from Madame Barthod is a superb wine, wafting from the glass in a bright and transparent blend of cherries, orange zest, fresh herb tones, rose petals, just a touch of vanillin oak and an outstanding base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and tangy, with a fine core, excellent transparency, modest tannins and a long, focused and blossoming finish. While this wine will certainly be better with a few more years’ worth of bottle age, it is one of those 2008s that has not shut down and is already offering up a lot of pleasure in the glass. 2014-2035+. **91+**.

**2008 Chambolle-Musigny “Premier Cru”- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 2008 Chambolle Premier Cru from Joseph Drouhin was still pretty hunkered down behind its structural elements when I last tasted it in the spring of 2013, with tangy acids and moderate tannins conspiring to keep the fruit component under wraps. The bouquet is very pretty and still quite youthful, wafting from the glass in a mix of strawberries, cherries, mustard seed, chalky soil tones, a touch of cedar and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and tangy, with lovely soil signature, well-integrated tannins and a long, tightly-knit and snappy finish. It is still too early for primetime drinking of this 2008, which has closed down more than some examples of the vintage. 2018-2040. **89-91+?**

**2008 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas”- Domaine Michel Gros**

I had high initial hopes for the 2008 vintage of Michel Gros’ Clos des Réas, as the wine shows far better purity on the nose than the 2009 that preceded it in this tasting, but the wine still showed a surprising “soupiness” and lack of precision in this tangy vintage. The nose is quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, strawberries, Vosne spice tones, a touch of incipient *sous bois*, bacon fat and toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and complex, with moderate tannins, tangy acids and solid length and grip on the rather chunky finish. The wine lacks a bit of focus, which I find hard to understand in this vintage. I was honestly expecting quite a bit more from the combination of 2008 and the Clos des Réas. 2015-2035. **88**.

**2008 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”- Domaine Liger-Belair**

The 2008 Suchots from Louis-Michel Liger-Belair is a very lovely example of the vintage that is approaching a nice window of drinkability, though the wine will age long and gracefully and really deserves a bit longer in the cellar. The bouquet is a complex and pure blend of black raspberries, black cherries, duck, lovely minerality, espresso, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully transparent, with a good core of black fruit, fine purity and focus, tangy acids and a long, modestly tannic and complex finish. A lovely example of the vintage. 2016-2035+. **93**.

### **2008 Vosne-Romanée “les Beaumonts”- Domaine Emmanuel Rouget**

The 2008 Beaumonts from Monsieur Rouget is a pretty example of the vintage, but it lacks mid-palate stuffing and is not in the top division of Vosne premier crus in this vintage. The bright and transparent nose wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, cranberries, coffee, a nice base of soil, a touch of rose petal and plenty of new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and emphatically not deep, with a fair bit of tannin, good acids and fine length and grip on the soil-driven and high-toned finish. Perhaps this will put on weight in the mid-palate with bottle age, but today, it seems likely to be second division juice. 2015-2030+? **88.**

### **2008 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Lavières”- Domaine Camus-Bruchon**

The 2008 les Lavières from Guillaume Camus is a beautiful example of the vintage and really quite close to full blossoming. The pretty and delicate nose wafts from the glass in a blend of strawberries, cherries, roses, chalky soil tones, a touch of coffee and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and beautifully transparent, with superb focus and grip, lovely intensity of flavor at the core, moderate, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a beautiful example of Savigny’s most elegant premier cru *terroir*. 2016-2040. **92+.**

### **2008 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Narbantons”- Domaine Camus-Bruchon**

Not surprisingly, the 2008 Camus-Bruchon Narbantons is a bit more backward than the les Lavières at the present time, but this wine also shares the refinement of the vintage. The deep and pure bouquet offers up scents of cherries, quince, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, a bit of gamebird, coffee, a lovely base of stony soil tones and a topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows a nice sense of reserve *vis à vis* the more flattering les Lavières, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, bright acids and fine length and grip on the still slightly adolescent finish. Give this a few more years than the les Lavières before starting to drink it in earnest. 2018-2040+. **92+.**

### **2008 Beaune “Epenottes”- Maison Pierre Bourée**

The 2008 Epenottes from Pierre Bourée is a very good example of this consistently fine bottling from the domaine’s own vines. I had the pleasure to taste both the 2007 and 2008 examples this past spring in Burgundy, with the ’07 the better drink at the present time, but with both vintages showing fine quality. The 2008 Epenottes offers up a blossoming nose of red and black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of mustard seed and a fine base of gently autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a pure core, lovely transparency, tangy acids, moderate tannins and a very long, vibrant and classy finish. Whereas the 2007 (see below) is already into its plateau of maturity, I would opt for tucking the 2008 away in the cellar for just a few more years and let it catch up in secondary layers of complexity with the very pretty 2007. They are both excellent wines and superb values. 2018-2040. **90+.**

### **2008 Beaune “Premier Cru”- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The Beaune “Premier Cru” bottling from Maison Drouhin is not a wine I cross paths with very often, but based on this really superb 2008 example, it must be one of the really good values out there in each vintage. The bouquet on the ’08 is quite deep and vibrant, offering up a maturing blend of cherries, black truffles, gamebird, fresh herb tones, coffee and gently autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and wide open at the present time, with a good core, still a touch of backend tannin and a long, tangy and impressively complex finish. A lovely bottle. 2014-2030. **90.**

### **2008 Pommard- Château de Pommard**

The 2008 Château de Pommard is one of my favorite recent vintages for this resurgent property, as the wine offers up a very refined aromatic constellation of cherries, plums, woodsmoke, coffee, fresh herb tones, a lovely signature of soil and a deft framing of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core, excellent transparency, fine-grained tannins and a very long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. A superb vintage for this lovely wine, which really drinks an awful lot like the fine premier cru just above it of Epenots in vintages such as 2008. 2015-2040+. **92.**

### **2008 Pommard “les Arvelets”- Domaine Camus-Bruchon**

The 2008 les Arvelets from Domaine Camus-Bruchon is a stellar example of the vintage, but it will need some time to really blossom and start to drink with true generosity. The brilliant nose delivers a constellation of sweet cherries and quince, coffee, a stunningly complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, roses and exotic topnotes of dried eucalyptus and fresh mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent, with a rock solid core, fine-grained tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, bouncy and soil-driven finish. This will be a superb bottle of Pommard with a bit of bottle age. 2019-2045+. **94.**

### **2008 Pommard “les Croixes Noires”- Domaine Louis Boillot**

This may well be the very finest, unknown wine in the Côte de Beaune, as Louis Boillot makes an absolutely gorgeous wine from this tiny premier cru vineyard in the heart of Pommard. The 2008 is stunning, albeit still quite young, as it soars from the glass in a deep and very pure blend of cherries, red plums, coffee, a touch of orange peel, incipient notes of *sous bois*, gamebirds and a beautifully complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core of fruit, stellar transparency, tangy acids and a very long, moderately tannic and still very primary finish. This will be a supremely elegant and complex example of Pommard at its apogee, but that is still several years in the future. 2020-2055+. **94.**

### **2008 Pommard “Epenots”- Maison Louis Jadot**

The 2008 Epenots from Louis Jadot is a lovely example of the vintage, but it is one 2008 that is still on the young side and needs more time before it starts to offer up a bit of generosity on the palate. The bouquet is pure and first rate, as it wafts from the glass in a deep and sappy blend of dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, a fine base of soil and a touch of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a fine core, a bit of chewy tannin on the backend (some from the oak) and fine length and grip on the poised, focused and youthful finish. A fine bottle in the making, but give it a few years in the cellar to blossom. 2019-2050. **91+.**

### **2008 Auxey-Duresses- Domaine Coche-Dury**

Readers will recall that this is one of my favorite, sleeper bottlings of red wine to be found in the Côte de Beaune. I have not been able to get an appointment to visit here for a while, as Jean-François Coche's son, Rafael, has taken over the day to day management of the estate. I was very pleased to cross paths with the 2008 Auxey *rouge* on a wine list in Burgundy last year, as I love the vintage and had loved the bottling, but the wine was really surprisingly disappointing. The wine was very fruit-driven in personality (hardly typical in the very transparent 2008 vintage), offering up scents of sappy black cherries, chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very forced stylistically, with low acids, modest tannins and a long, jammy and simple finish. This is a wine remarkable for its lack of complexity and I really wonder what happened here this year with this wine. 2013-2020+. **82.**



### 2008 Auxey-Duresses “les Duresses”- Domaine Gilles Lafouge

The 2008 les Duresses from Gilles Lafouge is a beautiful example of the vintage and one of the finest values to be found in this high class vintage. The pure, complex and vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of cherries, quince, orange zest, incipient notes of *sous bois*, coffee and a nice touch of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and intensely flavored, with lovely mid-palate depth, tangy acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex and bouncy finish. A lovely wine that is still a year or two away from really blossoming and which should prove to be quite a long-lived and classy example of the vintage. 2017-2040+. **92+**.



*A “full service” Louis Boillot lending a hand to a truck driver making a pickup in the tight quarters of Chambolle.*

### **The 2007 Vintage-      Ranking: B+**

*As I just finished up a piece on the lovely and underrated 2007 red Burgundies, I do not have too many additional notes to add to that feature, but I reiterate that this is a lovely vintage for current drinking, with the wines also showing the potential to age for at least the medium-term as well. I happily drink this vintage at the village and premier cru level whenever I come across it (which is still fairly often on the restaurant wine lists in Burgundy when I am there); the grand crus deserve a bit more time, as they are going to be very, very lovely wines with another four to ten years in the cellar. This is not a powerful vintage by any stretch of the imagination, but the wines have plenty of personality and charm and seem likely to age quite well on their*

*lovely balances for many years to come, but they are really very delicious right now and I cannot see any reason not to enjoy them in this fine moment of their evolutions, other than the most serious grand crus, which are still climbing in quality.*

**2007 Mazoyrès-Chambertin- Domaine Taupenot-Merme**

The 2007 Mazoyrès-Chambertin from Romain Taupenot is a superb example of this lovely vintage, offering up a blossoming nose of dark berries, black cherries, hung game, a touch of balsam bough, woodsmoke, a discreet base of vanillin oak and an excellent base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, modest tannins and lovely focus and grip on the wide open, pure and beautifully balanced finish. A lovely bottle that is still a few years away from primetime drinking, but is already quite accessible. 2017-2040. **94.**

**2007 Nuits St. Georges “Chaignots”- Domaine Robert Chevillon**

Monsieur Chevillon’s 2007 Chaignots is drinking very well today, though it is still a young wine and will be even better with a few more years’ worth of cellaring. The deep, pure and complex nose offers up a fine blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, gamebirds, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with fine complexity, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. Fine juice, which I did indeed drink off a restaurant list in Nuits last year. 2014-2040. **90+.**

**2007 Beaune “Epenottes”- Maison Pierre Bourée**

The 2007 Epenottes from Pierre Bourée is a fine example of the vintage and a wine that is drinking very well indeed at the present time. The lovely bouquet offers up a complex blend of cherries, red plums, a superb base of soil, a bit of fresh herb tones, gamebirds and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, a touch of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the classy finish. A lovely bottle of Beaune premier cru. 2014-2030. **90.**

***The 2006 Vintage- Ranking: B+***

*The 2006 vintage produced a very strong set of red Burgundies in general and this remains one of the great sleeper vintages out there from the last decade in the Côte d’Or. The primary problem for this vintage in the market was it following hard on the heels of the utterly brilliant, and heavily-hyped 2005s. With the brazenly high price levels of the 2005s, Burgundy dipped its first toe in the water of the “boom and bust” vintage phenomenon that has plagued Bordeaux for quite some time, and after the rapacious prices of the 2005s, many merchants found it all but impossible to sell the very good 2006 vintage. There was of course the customary pressure from the merchants to “buy or lose your place in line”, but a number of the new, well-heeled shoppers who chased the 2005s so hard seemed content to pass this vintage by and take their chances with the next great vintage, whenever that was bound to come along. Consequently, this very, very good vintage has remained in the shadows, but it is very much worth looking for still, as the wines are really excellent, particularly in Nuits St. Georges and Savigny-lès-Beaune, two of my favorite communes for relative value these days. 2006 is a top flight vintage for reds, with lovely expressions of underlying terroir, excellent purity and very good structures for at least mid-term aging. It will be a vintage that delights at full maturity, which is still several years down the road, and it merits attention if one can still find well-stored examples of the vintage in the market.*

**2006 Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos de la Justices”- Maison Pierre Bourée**

I was a bit surprised with how grumpy the 2006 Clos de la Justices from Pierre Bourée was showing, as it is currently a bit bound up in both its tannins and pretty high acids and was not really in a good place for current drinking. The bouquet is quite attractive and the best part of the wine today, as it offers up scents of plums, black cherries, a touch of grilled meat, raw cocoa, incipient forest floor and a topnote of mustard seed. All very proper. However, this wine is distinctly cranky on the palate, with its full-bodied and youthful personality currently quite masked behind acids and firm-edged tannins. The wine has a good core, fine soil signature and good length, but it is not close to ready and needs some time in the cellar to blossom. Today, I am not entirely sure if it will bloom or dry out with extended bottle age, but this cuvée has such a good track record that it would be hard to bet against it. However, keep it buried in the cellar for at least another five or six years! 2018-2040? **83-89+?**

**2006 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier**

The 2006 Amoureuses from Monsieur Mugnier is really a lovely example of the vintage, but the wine is only starting to stir and its best years are still ahead of it at the present time. The deep, complex and quite black fruity bouquet delivers a classy constellation of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, a touch of laurel, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a topnote of coffee. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with excellent mid-palate depth, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. This wine is just starting to show the first vestiges of its secondary layers of complexity and I would be tempted to let it hibernate in the cellar for at least another five years and really let it blossom fully. It will be excellent. 2020-2060. **94.**

**2006 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg (served from magnum)**

Out of magnum, the 2006 Mugneret Clos Vougeot is still a bit on the young side, but the wine is not particularly closed on either the nose nor the palate and it is really not very hard to drink this wine today! The outstanding bouquet offers up a classic constellation of red and black cherries, gamebirds, cocoa, a superb base of soil tones, vinesmoke, a bit of fresh thyme and a stylish base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with outstanding mid-palate depth, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a very long, focused and still fairly primary finish. Despite the fine structure here, the wine is so beautifully balanced and harmonious that it is approachable, despite the fact that it is still probably six to eight years away from really blossoming and more like fifteen away from reaching its true apogee of peak drinkability. This is a very serious vintage of this great Clos Vougeot and fully underscores just how good this vintage will be down the road, despite the market's rather lackluster appreciation for the quality of the top 2006s. 2022-2060+. **94+.**

**2006 Vosne-Romanée “Malconsorts”- Domaine de Montille**

The 2006 “regular bottling” of Vosne-Romanée “Malconsorts” from Domaine de Montille is quite good, wafting from the glass in a pretty nose of cherries, pomegranate, chocolate, nutmeg, a sound base of soil and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and red fruity in personality, with a sound core, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. Today, this is a bit simple by the high standards of Malconsorts, but it is still young, and greater complexity should arrive with further bottle age. A good solid wine, but not first division Malconsorts. 2016-2035. **90+.**



### **2006 Vosne-Romanée “Malconsorts” Cuvée Christiane- Domaine de Montille**

The Cuvée Christiane from Etienne de Montille is the special bottling of Malconsorts he produces from the small, most northerly section of the vineyard that actually just out into neighboring La Tâche, in the section that used to be known as La Tâche Joly de Bévy. His other bottling of Malconsorts comes from two different parcels in the vineyard, with a small slice further up the slope and the larger piece in the center of this lower section of the vineyard. The 2006 Cuvée Christiane is deeper and more primary than the straight Malconsorts (the two wines were tasted side by side) and wafts from the glass in a very promising nose of red and black cherries, a touch of sweet beetroot, lovely soil tones, a bit of youthful stems and plenty of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely reserved, with a fine core, modest tannins and a long, tangy and still very primary and monolithic finish. This will need decidedly more time than the regular bottling to blossom, but it will be the superior wine. 2020-2050+. **93.**

### **2006 La Romanée- Domaine Liger-Belair**

I have always liked the 2006 vintage of La Romanée from Louis-Michel Liger-Belair and the wine is aging very gracefully. The bouquet is deep, pure and simply beautiful in its mélange of raspberries, cherries, exotic spice tones, coffee, lovely minerality, woodsmoke and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and potentially velvety, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, suave tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, balanced and complex finish. This should be quite approachable in a few more years, but I would want to hold onto this wine for another decade of cellaring and really let the fireworks of complexity begin! 2020-2055+. **94+.**

### **2006 Nuits St. Georges “aux Murgers”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 2006 Murgers from Jean-Nicolas Méo is a lovely example of the vintage, but the wine was still a tad on the young side when I last tried it a couple of years ago. The bouquet is deep and classy, offering up notes of black cherries, dark berries, a fine base of dark soil tones, espresso, chocolate and a fine base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a good core, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and still pretty youthful finish. Though it has been a few years, I would suspect that this wine is still a tad too young and will want to see its twelfth birthday before it really starts to sing. 2018-2040+. **91+.**

### **2006 Côte de Beaune- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The Côte de Beaune *rouge* bottling from Maison Drouhin always receives the young vines from the Beaune premier crus in the family's vineyard patrimony, so this can be another one of Burgundy's great bargains. The 2006 is excellent and just starting to develop some secondary layers of complexity in its aromatic blend of roasted cherries, coffee, the first vestiges of forest floor, gamebirds, woodsmoke and a lovely topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely transparent, with a good, solid core, a bit of remaining tannin and a long, well-balanced and tangy finish. This is really very tasty for its level. 2014-2025. **88.**

### **2006 Volnay “Clos des Ducs”- Domaine Marquis d'Angerville**

The 2006 Clos des Ducs is a bit more modern in style than the wines produced here prior to Jacques d'Angerville passing away, but it is a very well-made wine just the same. The wine offers up a complex and classy nose of cherries, pomegranate, coffee, woodsmoke, incipient notes of gamebird, soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthfully structured, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, fairly chewy finish that shows just a touch of unexpected wood tannins poking through. These

days, the domaine rotates its barrels on a ten year rotation, so the same ten percent new oak as was used back in Jacques d'Angerville's day is now augmented by a lot of one, two and three year-old wood that would have been forty years of age back in the old days here. So the wines show more oak influence as a result, but they are still quite well made in their new idiom. 2018-2040? **89-92** (depending on how seamless is the wood integration over time).

***The 2005 Vintage- Ranking: A+***

*2005 is one of the greatest young red Burgundy vintages that I have ever had the pleasure to taste, but these deep and powerful wines are today very much bound up in their structural elements and this is one of the most closed, recalcitrant vintages to be tasting today. The vintage has enormous potential and will be very long-lived, and it is infanticide to be opening bottles today. Let these great wines sleep for at least the next decade and allow them to truly come into their own. My impression is that the temptation to open 2005s is not quite the same as the temptation to open 2010 reds today, as the former vintage is very much bound up in its structural elements and really not all that pleasurable to drink today, whereas the more suave and elegant young 2010s are more difficult to resist in their puppy fat fruit period of evolution. Whether 2005 or 2010 will ultimately prove to be the greater of the two superb years is a question that time will have to settle, but I suspect that twenty-five years down the road, the two vintages will be considered qualitatively equivalent and just differently styled. Both are legends in the making, with the 2005s likely to be the longer-lived vintage, as the year's combination of ripe, substantial tannins and very tangy acids seems to be a recipe for enormous longevity in the bottle.*

**2005 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The Clos Vougeot is the most forward and accessible grand cru in the superb Méo-Camuzet lineup, so this wine is only a few years away from accessibility, but I would be very strongly inclined to let it sleep in the cellar for several more years before starting to open it with regularity. The deep, pure and youthfully complex nose wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, a lovely base of soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and beautifully soil-driven in this vintage, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and balance on the very, very long, pure and classy finish. The longer one waits (within reason), the more complexity will be here on both the nose and palate, but this is not going to be an easy wine to keep one's hands off of in the cellar, as it is only a few years away from offering up really lovely, more primary drinking. 2017-2060. **93.**

**2005 Vosne-Romanée "Clos des Réas"- Domaine Michel Gros**

The 2005 Vosne-Romanée "Clos des Réas" from Domaine Michel Gros is surprisingly ripe in personality and seems a bit blunt stylistically at this time, but it is still early days for this wine and perhaps more refinement will arrive with some bottle age. The bouquet is deep and ripe, offering up scents of red and black cherries, meaty tones, black raspberries, damp soil tones and a fair bit of new, slightly resinous new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in personality, with a jammy core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the closed finish. The fruit tones here are borderline overripe, and this seems really quite strange to me, as this does not fit the profile of the 2005 vintage at all. This was obviously picked very late, but why? If it freshens up with bottle age, my score will seem

conservative, but it may well always stay overripe in personality, and if so, it will be lucky to garner even an 86 point score. 2020-2060. **86+?**

### **2005 Nuits St. Georges “aux Thorey”- Dujac Fils et Père**

2005 was the only vintage that Domaine Dujac produced a wine from the premier cru vineyard of aux Thorey, which lies just south on the slope from Chaignots on the Vosne side of town. The vines were purchased as part of the Thomas-Moillard sale, but after the 2005 vintage, the Seysses family sold off the parcel again, as at the time it seemed to daunting to add yet another village to their vine-tending responsibilities. Jeremy Seysses commented a few years after letting the parcel go “that if we had it to do over again, we would probably have kept the wines here, as it was a good plot of vines and the 2005 is really turning out quite well.” As the family had plans to sell the parcel after the '05 vintage, the wine was bottled under the *négociant* label of Dujac Fils et Père, despite this being from a vineyard owned by the domaine at the time. The '05 was raised in forty percent new wood and offers up a really lovely nose of dark plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, a bit of gamebird, a complex base of dark soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pure on the attack, with a rock solid core, great soil signature, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the ripely tannic and youthful finish. Given the Dujac style of elegant wines, this is one 2005 that is accessible today, albeit still very youthful in personality. I would still want to give it at least a few more years in the cellar to start to show some of its secondary layers of complexity. It is a lovely wine of great promise and it is too bad that it was only fashioned in the single vintage of 2005. 2017-2050. **92+.**



### ***The 2004 Vintage- Ranking: B-***

*The 2004 red Burgundy vintage is probably the most disliked vintage for the region in twenty years, and I am sure that there are some detractors of the 2004s that would rather have bottles of the truly last disastrous Burgundy vintage of 1984 in their cellars, instead of their 2004s. The issue of course is the “green meanies” which some attribute to lady bugs and others to insufficient phenolic ripeness in the grape skins. Whatever the cause, the vintage, to varying degrees depending on specific wines, shows an herbacité and pepperiness that is not typical of top flight red Burgundies. The herbal element of the vintage was far more prevalent in some wines after bottling than when the wines were in cask, and its intensity varies from wine to wine. As has been commented on frequently, each taster has different threshold sensitivity to pyrazines, so the same wine can cause quite different impressions to tasters with different tolerances to pyrazines, and fortunately, I am not particularly sensitive to them and seem likely to derive more pleasure out of the 2004 than some others. Oddly, I still like this vintage in general and have a goodly supply in my cellar for future drinking, as since day one, I have guessed that the more overt vegetal tones in these wines will change over time into something more savory and less unappealing with sufficient bottle age, and I am expecting to actually like my 2004s quite a lot down the road. I have not been opening my wines now, other than the Coche Bourgogne rouge, but have been served a few by other folks in the last year or two, and may have just been fortunate with the examples that I have tasted, but I have liked the wines quite a lot. My gut feeling that there will be a percentage of the vintage that never loses its vegetality and succumbs to the “green meanies”, while others will age into quite successful and complex middleweights down the road, with fine soil signatures and little overtly vegetal elements. Time will tell, but I will not start drinking my 2004 premier or grand crus for at least another five to seven years, as the wines are evolving very nicely in terms of structure, but still remain on the young side for my palate. In the fullness of time, I think this vintage is going to provide a much larger number of very nice wines than staunch detractors of the vintage imagine. In any case, I bought more 2004 red and 2009 reds for my cellar and do not regret the decision at all.*

### **2004 Bourgogne Rouge- Domaine Coche-Dury**

The 2004 Coche-Dury Bourgogne rouge is drinking very well indeed at age ten and shows just a touch of the vintage’s peppery character on the very backend of the palate, but none now remains on the nose and this wine is really quite enjoyable to drink today. The bouquet is impressively complex for its level, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, black cherries, fresh thyme, a bit of sarsaparilla, a nice base of dark soil tones and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and tangy, with a nice core of fruit, fine focus and good length and grip on the well-balanced and faintly peppery finish. Quite tasty. 2014-2025+. **88.**

### **2004 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas”- Domaine Michel Gros**

Go figure, the 2004 Clos des Réas was my absolute favorite vintage in a vertical tasting spanning a dozen vintages! The 2004 was raised in fifty percent new wood and really is an excellent example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, plums, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, dark soil and a deft base of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely black fruity in personality, with a fine core, lovely focus and gr9p and a long, moderately tannic and complex finish. This is a lovely vintage of Clos des Réas! 2016-2040+. **92.**

#### **2004 La Romanée- Domaine Liger-Belair**

The 2004 La Romanée from Domaine Liger-Belair is really a lovely wine in the making, no matter what folks may think of the overall profile of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and very complex, offering up a mix of cherries, raspberries, exotic spice tones, orange zest, beetroot, coffee, a very complex base of soil tones, cedary wood and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and exuberant in personality, with a good core, stunning transparency, modest tannins and a very long, tangy finish that closes with impressive complexity and lovely grip. This is a very, very pure 2004 that is going to be a great drink at its zenith. 2017-2045+. **94+**.

#### **2004 Volnay “Santenots du Milieu”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon (served from magnum)**

Back when I was writing my article on the 2007 red Burgundies, I asked Dominique Lafon if we could taste an example of one of his wines from the vintage, and he commented that “the 2007s are really starting to drink very well today, but the other vintage I also like to pull when I am in the mood for a younger red is 2004.” And he came back with this magnum of Santenots du Milieu to taste after a couple of 2007s, as he was apparently in the mood for a younger red that evening. The wine is really a very lovely example of this vintage, with absolutely no signs of “green meanies” on either the nose or palate. The bouquet is a pure, black fruity and still fairly youthful blend of cassis, espresso, fresh thyme, emerging notes of *sous bois*, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebirds and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and very elegant in personality, with lovely soil signature, moderate and well-measured tannins and a very long, complex and tangy finish. A lovely bottle that I would still give a few years in the cellar to (at least in magnum!), as it is still climbing and will be even better with a bit more bottle age. 2018-2045+. **93**.

#### **2004 Volnay “Caillerets”- Domaine Michel Lafarge**

The 2004 Caillerets from the Lafarge family was really showing well when I tasted it earlier this year. The bouquet is deep, pure and already quite complex, as it wafts from the glass in a vibrant blend of red and black cherries, gamebirds, summer truffles, a touch of mint and incipient notes of *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and complex, with a good core, lovely minerality, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. There is still just a whisper of backend pepperiness here, but far less than when the wine was just bottled, and I suspect that this element will morph into something savory and interesting with a bit more bottle age. This is certainly not one of the egregiously vegetal 2004s that one hears about so often. The wine could use a few more years to more fully blossom from behind its structural elements, but its true apogee is probably still eight to ten years from now. A very successful 2004 red. 2017-2040+. **91+**.

#### ***The 2003 Vintage- Ranking: C-***

*The freakishly hot and early vintage of 2003 produced very atypical red Burgundies, and this is the only vintage of Burgundy that I have not tasted “sur place” in the last fifteen years, as I had to have shoulder surgery in November of 2004 and consequently did not make my trip over to taste the 2003s out of barrel. Early on, out of bottle, I did not like the 2003s at all, finding them overripe and quite uncharacteristic of Burgundy, but I have been gently warming up to the wines in the last couple of years and like them far better today than I did at the time, and while they are a far cry from classical expressions of their underlying terroir, the soil tones are here to some degree and the wines are not as overripe in fruit today as they were early on. I am still not a believer that a small percentage of 2003s will be legendary wines in the long haul, matching*

*the style and longevity of the 1947s (which they are so often compared to by the vintage's strongest proponents), but I can see the vintage providing serviceable drinking over the next decade or two, and this is probably a very good time to be drinking the wines from 2003. There are still some tannins buried under the fruit, and the tannins are not always fully ripe in texture, as the sugars were soaring out of control in the oven that was the summer of 2003 and the ripening of the tannins could not quite keep pace, so the wines today have a slightly chewy aspect to them, but given the balance of the vintage, it seems to me that it might be better to drink the wines relatively soon- still with a bit of tannin- than wait in the hopes that these tannins will fully fall away with extended cellaring. The likelihood is that there will be some tannins that never really budge much beyond where they are today. But, all in all, not as bad of a vintage as I once thought and I do not mind drinking the wines today.*

### **2003 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas”- Domaine Michel Gros**

The 2003 Clos des Réas from Monsieur Gros is a very ripe wine, but one certainly expects this far more in the context of 2003 than in 2005! The bouquet is quite good and true to the vintage, offering up scents of black cherries, black raspberries, venison, woodsmoke, coffee bean and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plump, with a good core, very good focus and complexity, melting tannins and a long, wide open and quite satisfying finish. This was raised in seventy percent new wood in the 2030 vintage, but the depth of fruit has absolutely devoured the wood. The acids are solid, framing acids and the wine will probably want drinking on the early side, but it is very well-balanced and may age longer than one suspects at the present time. Good juice. 2013-2025+. **89.**

### **2003 Nuits St. Georges “Roncières”- Domaine Robert Chevillon**

The 2003 Nuits St. Georges “Roncières” from Domaine Robert Chevillon is a very good example of the vintage, with its deep fruit tones quite ripe, but not overripe, and the once sturdy tannins now starting to fade nicely into the background of the wine. The bouquet is deep, complex and showing lovely sings of development in its mélange of black cherries, leather, venison, dark soil tones, bonfires and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely broad-shouldered, with a fine core, good balance, modest tannins and a long, low acid, but still quite vibrant finish. This is really quite tasty today and has reached its plateau. 2014-2030+. **88.**

### **2003 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Vergelesses”- Domaine Simon Bize et Fils**

The 2003 Savigny “Vergelesses” from Patrick Bize is a very fine example of the vintage, with the nose and palate quite ripe, but not overripe and the tannins very well managed. The deep and vibrant nose offers up scents of currants, cherries, coffee, hang game, woodsmoke and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very powerfully built for this bottling, with a fine core, modest tannins and a long, focused and well-balanced finish that closes with impressive grip and no signs of *sur maturité*. A very successful 2003 that is drinking well today, though it should cruise along nicely for a couple of decades. 2013-2035+. **90+.**

### **2003 Pommard “les Arvelets”- Domaine Camus-Bruchon**

Domaine Camus-Bruchon's 2003 les Arvelets is a fine example of the vintage, with very good freshness for this torrid growing season. The bouquet is a classy blend of cherries, plums, grilled venison, coffee, soil tones and a touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sweet with fruit on the attack, with a good core, sound acids for the vintage and a bit of backend tannin perking up the reasonably long finish. It is only on the

tail end of the finish that the vintage's atypical personality pokes through, with just a whisper of *sur maturité* showing to the closing notes of fruit. But, overall, not a bad result by any stretch of the imagination. 2011-2025. **88.**

***The 2002 Vintage- Ranking: B***

*I had done a report on the 2002s in an issue of the newsletter a couple of years ago, so my rather lukewarm opinion of this vintage is pretty well known. The wines are not bad by any stretch of the imagination, as a very beautiful "fin de saison" with plenty of sun, relatively cool temperatures and a keen and constant north wind made the quality in the couple of weeks leading up to the picking of the pinot noir grapes. The vintage was already being heavily hyped prior to my arrival to taste them for the first time out of barrel in November of 2003, as they had been widely dubbed as the "second coming of the 1978s", and maybe one day they will merit this moniker. However, out of barrel, I was very surprised to see the wines show so little soil tones, which is just not typical in a vintage of moderate ripeness and tangy acids, as are the 2002s, and it is the lack of terroir in the majority of 2002 red Burgundies that has always been the Achilles' Heel of the vintage for me. As the fruit tones in most 2002s are really lovely, I have not hesitated to drink many of my 2002s on the early side, as I felt vintages such as 2000 and 2001 actually had the great upside potential with bottle age, but have now decided to let the rest of my vintage purchases rest for a while in the cellar to see if there will be terroir lurking here in the bottles down the road. I have had a few examples in the last year or two that showed pretty good soil tones for the vintage, so perhaps we will find terroir here when the wines are fully mature. Structurally, they are certainly still quite accessible at the village and premier cru level today, and not too bad even at the grand cru level, but they are not really mature today and will keep very well, so there is no rush to drink them. 2002 is a perfectly pleasant vintage of red Burgundy, but less interesting by some margin to vintages such as 2006, 2007 and 2008.*

**2002 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Christophe Roumier**

The 2002 Ruchottes-Chambertin from Christophe Roumier is a lovely example of the vintage, but it is still a tad fruit-driven in my book and not one of my favorite recent vintages of this beautiful cuvée. The very refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, black truffles, gamebirds, chocolate, just a bit of soil and a deft base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows a lovely core of fruit, with excellent focus and balance, impressive fruit complexity, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the tangy and dancing finish. This is a beautiful 2002 red Burgundy, but it is a far more fruit-driven example than most vintages of Roumier Ruchottes. Perhaps more soil tones will emerge somewhere down the road? 2015-2040. **92.**

**2002 Morey St. Denis- Domaine Jacky Truchot**

The village wines from Jacky Truchot were some of the best values to be found in all of Burgundy when Monsieur Truchot was not yet retired, and his 2002 Morey AC bottling was really a fine example of this vintage. The bouquet is a very stylish, and for this cuvée, quite black fruity blend of plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, forest floor, a touch of French roast and a topnote of both fresh thyme and mustard seed. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with fine complexity, a good core, nice juiciness on the attack and beautifully focused finish. There are no tannins to speak of here, but the sound acids should carry this wine quite nicely in the cellar. There is really quite a lot of soil signature here for a 2002 *villages*. 2011-2035. **90.**

### **2002 Morey St. Denis “les Charrières”- Domaine Alain Michelot**

The 2002 Charrières from Domaine Michelot is a very pretty example of the vintage, with plenty of vibrant red fruit, good depth and bounce, but like so many wines of the vintage, rather a discreet signature of soil. The bouquet is pure and inviting, as it offers up scents of cherries, quince, woodsmoke, venison, fresh herb tones and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and moderately tannic still, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, stylish and fruit-driven finish that still could use a year or two more to really blossom completely. Good juice. 2016-2035. **89+**.

### **2002 Morey St. Denis “Clos de la Bussière”- Domaine Georges Roumier**

This most recent bottle of 2002 Clos de la Bussière from Christophe Roumier was perfectly fine, but really came across as fruit-driven in personality in comparison to another vintage of the same wine with which it was paired up. The nose is quite cherry Kool-Aid-like in its mélange of cherries, chocolate, rose petals, gamebird, smoke and fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and fairly four-square at the present time, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins, tangy acids and a long, well-balanced, but still fairly simple finish. The last bottle of this wine that I tasted, back when I was preparing the article on this cru, seemed far less fruit-driven in personality than this particular bottle. 2012-2040. **89**.

### **2002 Clos St. Denis- Domaine Dujac**

When tasting out of barrel back in the winter of 2003, I had the sense that the 2002 vintage was a bit more extracted at Domaine Dujac than had been or is currently customary at this great estate. When I crossed paths with this wine at a dinner in Germany in the spring of 2013, this perception had subsided quite a bit and I did not find the wine any more muscular in profile than I would expect for a more than ten year-old Clos St. Denis, but the wine was still pretty mild in its signature of soil than most top vintages of this great bottling. The bouquet offers up beautiful fruit tones of roasted plums and black cherries, venison, herb tones, coffee, a touch of iron from the soil and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and is beginning to develop very good complexity, with a plump core, melting tannins, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the complex, but ultimately, fruit-defined finish. It is not that there are not some solid soil tones here, but in the context of the great complex base of minerality that the Dujac Clos St. Denis usually will be awash in at age eleven, this is still quite fruit-driven. However, one could not really ask for a more beautiful expression of pinot noir fruit. 2013-2050+. **93**.

### **2002 Chambolle-Musigny “les Sentiers”- Domaine Jacky Truchot**

While Jacky Truchot was best-known for his superb wines from the villages of Morey St. Denis and Gevrey-Chambertin during his long career, he also made a couple of very good wines from Chambolle. His *villages* bottling from Chambolle I have not tasted for many years, but it was always very good out of barrel, and his Sentiers is a very good example of this premier cru vineyard. The *climat* lies on the Morey St. Denis border and is probably the most “masculine” of Chambolle’s premier crus, but a very good wine in its own light. The 2002 from Jacky Truchot is a very strong example of this vintage, albeit, more black fruity in ’02 than was customary for this bottling, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, baked plums, venison, a lovely base of soil, a touch of dark chocolate, fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fairly powerful in profile, with a good, sappy core, fine focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic and bouncy finish. There is pretty good soil signature here for a 2002, and I imagine that more will come with further bottle age. This has far more concentration than the lovely 2001 version, but it should be lovely in the fullness of time. 2018-2040+. **92+**.



**2002 Chambolle-Musigny “les Feusselottes”- Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg (magnum)**

Out of magnum, the 2002 Feusselottes from the Mugneret sisters is drinking very nicely today, wafting from the glass in a bright and stylish blend of plums, black cherries, coffee, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, a nice touch of soil and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely complex, with a fine mid-palate depth, modest tannins, vibrant acids and lovely length and grip on the focused and quite refined finish. Like so many 2002s, this is not particularly long on soil signature *vis à vis* other top-rated recent vintages of this lovely wine, but it is a good drink and it is no crime to be drinking it now, even out of magnum. 2014-2035+. **92.**

**2002 Chambolle-Musigny “les Cras”- Domaine Ghislaine Barthod**

The 2002 les Cras from Ghislaine Barthod is a very pretty wine and a fairly soil-specific example of the vintage. The lovely bouquet offers up scents of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, mustard seed, a touch of nutskin, a discreet signature of soil and a bit of weediness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, still very primary in personality and fairly closed, with a good core, still some firm tannin to resolve and a long, tangy and well-balanced finish. This still needs at least a few years to blossom. 2017-2040+. **92.**

**2002 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier**

Monsieur Mugnier’s 2002 Amoureuses is really a lovely example of this vintage, and though it is still fairly youthful, there is an awful lot going on in the glass already and it is really not a crime to be drinking it already. The very classy, if youthful nose wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, red plums, mustard seed, vinesmoke, coffee, soil tones and a pungent topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very elegant on the attack, with a good core, a silky palate texture, suave tannins and a long, tangy and still pretty primary finish. I know this would be better with more bottle age, but it was already pretty irresistible when I last had a chance to share a bottle with friends. 2014-2040. **94.**

**2002 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 2002 Clos Vougeot from Domaine Méo-Camuzet was showing a bit too new oaky for my tastes when I last sampled this wine at the twentieth anniversary tasting, but it may have better integrated its new wood component over the ensuing four years. The bouquet certainly offers up plenty of freshness to its fruit tones, with notes of red and black cherries, chocolate, woodsmoke, a nice dollop of soil and toasty new oak wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a fine core of pure fruit, tangy acids and a long, chewy finish that seems a bit pinched by its oak at the present time. Perhaps it is better balanced today than it was at that moment in its evolution. If the wine attains a better sense of equilibrium between wood and wine, then it will certainly place at the upper limit of the range, as the other components here are excellent. 2015-2030+? **88-92?**

**2002 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas”- Domaine Michel Gros**

The 2002 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas” from Domaine Michel Gros is typically fruit-driven in personality, but that is standard for the vintage, and the wine is nicely balanced and shows good depth and length on the palate. The bouquet is a pleasant mélange of strawberries, cherries, coffee, mustard seed and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tangy, with a good core, sound focus and grip, soft tannins and a long, fruity finish. A good, solid effort for the vintage. 2013-2030+. **88.**

**2002 Vosne-Romanée “aux Brûlées”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

I am not sure if Jean-Nicolas Méo’s 2002 Brûlées is still just young, or if this wine is going to always be a bit more emblematic of the vintage than the very fine 2002 Echézeaux, as

this wine was very much a fruit-driven example of this excellent *terroir* when I last tasted it at the twentieth anniversary tasting. The bouquet offers up really beautiful fruit tones in its mix of plums, black cherries, chocolate, fresh herbs, woodsmoke and plenty of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with tangy acids, suave tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused, complex and well-balanced finish. Today, this is a classic 2002 red Burgundy that cries out for more soil signature, but if that arrives with further bottle age, my score will need to be moved up by three or four points, as the other elements here are outstanding. 2014-2040. **91+?**

#### **2002 Echézeaux- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 2002 Echézeaux from Domaine Méo-Camuzet is a very fine bottle in the making, with a fine signature of soil tones to augment the pure and classy fruit which is the cornerstone of this vintage. The bouquet is a first class blend of cassis, dark berries, espresso, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, a lovely and complex base of soil and a fine base of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and complex, with fine intensity of flavor, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. Really a lovely bottle of Echézeaux in the making. 2017-2050. **93.**

#### **2002 La Tâche- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

The 2002 La Tâche from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is still a young and fairly adolescent wine, but it is also one of the finest recent examples of the vintage I have had the pleasure to taste. The deep, complex and still quite primary bouquet delivers a fine mélange of black cherries, beetroot, game, a touch of bonfire, a truly beautiful and complex base of soil tones, fresh herbs and a lovely framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, outstanding focus and grip, moderate tannins and a very long, pure and classy finish. If all 2002 red Burgundies showed this level of *terroir*, I would be a much bigger fan of the vintage! 2018-2050+. **95.**

#### **2002 La Romanée- Domaine Liger-Belair**

The 2002 La Romanée is a beautiful example of the vintage. The pure, complex and utterly flamboyant nose soars from the glass in a blend of sappy cherries and raspberries, cocoa, fresh nutmeg, dusty rose, duck, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a suave base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and utterly suave on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, really very good soil signature for the vintage, tangy acids, moderate tannins and impeccable focus and grip on the very long, complex and well-balanced finish. I kind of like the more vanillin oak in the 2002, in comparison to the more nutty and spicy wood tones one finds in the wine in more recent vintages. It strikes me as a bit less “*Cuvée de Luxe*” in profile and more La Romanée, if this makes any sense. A really lovely vintage for La Romanée and a harbinger that even early on in his tenure at the head of the family estate, Louis-Michel Liger-Belair was destined for great things here. 2011-2040+. **95.**

#### **2002 Nuits St. Georges “Chaignots”- Domaine Robert Chevillon**

The 2002 Chaignots from the Chevillon family is a very nice example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a sappy mélange of black cherries, blood orange, a touch of game, bonfires, mustard seed, coffee, a nice bit of soil and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with good, but not great soil signature, modest tannins, bright acids and good length and grip on the complex and tasty finish. A very good 2002 that is already drinking well, but will have no difficulties cruising along for several decades in bottle. 2012-2040. **91+.**

### **2002 Savigny-lès-Beaune “aux Guettes”- Domaine Jean-Luc et Hugues Pavelot**

I bought quite a bit of 2002s from Domaine Pavelot for my cellar and have drunk quite a few of them in their youth, as the wines have always had lovely, sappy fruit tones and fine purity. However, I am going to try and leave my remainder in the cellar to see what time will do with them, as they have firmed up a bit in the last year or two and really deserve some hibernation now. The 2002 Guettes is a lovely wine, offering up a deep, pure and impressively transparent nose of black cherries, red currant, coffee bean, woodsmoke, really quite lovely soil tones, fresh herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with a good core, tangy acids, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, focused and classy finish. This was a bit more plush in its early days, but now, though it is still quite tasty and accessible, it seems to want to move to a higher level of soil expression, if given some cellaring and will be even more interesting to drink with further bottle age. 2018-2035+. **90+**.

### **2002 Savigny-lès-Beaune “la Dominode”- Domaine Jean-Luc et Hugues Pavelot**

The 2002 la Dominode from the Pavelot family is an excellent wine in the making, but it has always been a bit less accessible than the Guettes and is still a few years away from truly blossoming and starting to drink with generosity. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, blood orange, spiced meats, coriander, dark chocolate, incipient *sous bois* and a nice signature of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, lovely transparency, ripe tannins and a long, vibrant and still quite youthful finish. This will be excellent, but give it a few more years to really blossom. 2017-2040. **92+**.

### **2002 Volnay “Premier Cru”- Domaine Coche-Dury**

The 2002 vintage of Volnay “Premier Cru” from Monsieur Coche is a good, solid example of the vintage, and with a bit more soil signature, it would be outstanding. The bouquet is very perfumed and engaging, offering up a mix of sweet cherries and pomegranate, coffee, a bit of beetroot, venison and a fairly nice spread of various fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex in fruit tones, with modest soil signature, a lovely core, melting tannins and a long, tangy and nicely balanced finish. The herbal notes on the nose poke out just a bit on the backend today, which probably means that this wine could use a few more years in the cellar to really hit its stride. But, it is a classic '02 red Burgundy, with great fruit and rather discreet soil tones. 2015-2030. **90**.

### **2002 Volnay “Taillepieds”- Domaine Marquis d’Angerville**

The 2002 Taillepieds from the Marquis d’Angerville is a very pretty example of the vintage, offering up an aromatic constellation of cherries, blood orange, woodsmoke, a touch of nutskin, coffee, fresh herb tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fairly fruit-driven personality, but lovely bounce and backend grip. The finish is long, modestly tannic and quite classy, and if one does not need a whole lot of soil in one’s Volnay, there is an awful lot to like here. 2010-2040. **91**.

### ***The 2001 Vintage- Ranking: A-***

*The 2001 vintage is a terrific year for red Burgundy, and I was very happy to hear its name come up in the context of vignerons discussing the high quality of the 2013 reds. I have quite a lot of this vintage in my own personal cellar, as its superb character was readily apparent from the outset and the prices were pretty reasonable for the day, as the hype had already started for the 2002 reds when the 2001s were released and many Burgundy merchants were looking to “pass through” the 2001s with relatively modest mark ups, so that they could free up cash to buy the 2002s heavily and hit them with higher margins. The 2001 vintage is a*

*“cool vintage” in Burgundy, with difficulties in flowering leading to a relatively small crop and there were issues with uneven ripeness of bunches when it came time to pick, so careful sorting was required to really maximize the potential of the vintage. There was hail in Volnay and Pommard in August of 2001 (sounds sadly familiar these days), and the two communes generally did not have the same success as the rest of the Côte d'Or in this vintage as a result of the hail. Early September was grey and fairly cool, which did not help the final ripening prior to picking, and rain was forecast for the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month, which did not look like a particularly promising close to the month and the start of harvest. Happily, the rain was not a real problem, and for those who waited to get respectable ripeness, the wines have turned out quite well. The malos were long and leisurely in this vintage, as the winter of 2001 was very cold and most wines did not finish up malolactic until the late in the summer of 2002. From the outset the wines had good, but well-integrated tannins, very solid fruit components and excellent expressions of terroir. They have aged quite gracefully, and while it is really still a bit early for primetime drinking, the wines are showing well today and seem to be following through quite faithfully on their early promise. I have plenty in the cellar, but I am not yet drinking them, as they are still climbing in quality and I plan to let my cases sleep at least another five years before starting to open them in earnest, as I think around age twenty the wines are really going to start to drink with true generosity. A very strong vintage in my book.*

#### **2001 Marsannay “Clos de Jeu”- Domaine Philippe Roty**

Philippe Roty's 2001 Clos de Jeu is a very good wine, but when I last tasted it back at the end of 2010, it was still a bit marked by its wood tannins on the backend and in need of a bit more cellaring. The bouquet is first class, offering up a gently new oaky mélange of red berries, cherries, bacon fat, a fine base of soil tones and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and impressively complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, tangy acids and a bit of wood tannin on the finish in need of complete integration. The stuffing here is certainly sufficient to absorb the new wood with a bit more age, but it would have been even a better wine with a lower percentage of new oak (or raised all in one wine barrels?). 2014-2030+? 88+.

#### **2001 Gevrey-Chambertin “aux Combottes”- Domaine Jacky Truchot**

The 2001 Gevrey-Chambertin “aux Combottes” from Jacky Truchot is a beautiful example of the vintage, and unlike several other of my favorite '01 premier crus, this wine is already into its apogee and it is drinking with great verve today. The beautiful bouquet offers up a deep and red fruity constellation of cherries, a touch of red plum, beetroot, fresh herb tones, a superb base of autumnal soil nuances, coffee and a gentle topnote of cinnamon. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very intensely flavored, with a lovely core of red fruit, exceptional transparency, melting tannins and a long, tangy and very complex finish. A beautiful wine. 2012-2035+. 93.

#### **2001 Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos St. Jacques”- Domaine Fourier**

The 2001 Clos St. Jacques from Jean-Marie Fourier is a stellar example of the vintage. The outstanding nose leaps from the glass in a blaze of cherries, blood orange, cocoa, a touch of grilled meat, mustard seed, roses and a stunning expression of minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very, very intensely flavored, with a sappy core, stunning transparency, modest tannins, excellent acids and laser-like focus on the pure, complex and utterly refined finish. I would still try to keep my hands off of bottles of this great wine for a couple more years,

as it is not done blossoming, but that is no easy task, as this wine is flat out delicious today. This is my kind of red Burgundy! 2017-2050. **94+**.

**2001 Charmes-Chambertin “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Jacky Truchot**

Jacky Truchot made stunning 2001s and I have been very fortunate to have the opportunity to drink them with some frequency over the last few years. The 2001 Charmes is still a young wine, but in the inimitable style of Monsieur Truchot in his heyday, it has always been accessible and enjoyable to drink. The bouquet is a deep, pure and red fruity blend of cherries, strawberries, grilled meat, beetroot, plenty of mustard seed and thyme, coffee, a touch of cinnamon and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with fine intensity of flavor, superb complexity and a long, modestly tannic and very tangy finish. This is still very early days for this beautiful wine, but it is already very tasty to drink. 2012-2045+. **94**.

**2001 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Claude Dugat**

The 2001 Chapelle-Chambertin from Claude Dugat all hails from the subsection of the vineyard known as les Gemeaux, which historically was ranked as the filet section of this cru. I do not taste the wines from Monsieur Dugat with any frequency, as I have always found them a bit too new oaky for my tastes, but given the high esteem that his colleagues hold him for his excellent viticultural work, I really wish I liked the wines better. His 2001 Chapelle-Chambertin is okay, but a bit heavy-handed for this outstanding vintage, as it offers up a very new oaky nose of black cherries, cassis, a touch of tariness, woodsmoke and plenty of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a rather four-square personality, moderate, well-integrated tannins and a long, modestly complex finish. There is a certain sense of heaviness here that one should not find from this most elegant of Gevrey grand crus, and that is the cellar technique coming through. This is okay, but no better. 2015-2035. **88**.

**2001 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg**

The 2001 Ruchottes-Chambertin from the Mugneret sisters is a brilliant example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and starting to blossom, as it jumps from the glass in a fine constellation of red and black cherries, grilled meat, a gloriously complex base of soil, coffee bean, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke and a very stylish base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, tangy acids and outstanding balance on the very long, suavely-tannic and complex finish. A great wine in the making. 2020-2060. **96**.

**2001 Morey St. Denis “Clos de la Bussière”- Domaine Georges Roumier**

It had been a few years since I last tasted a bottle of the 2001 Clos de la Bussière, and the wine is progressing very nicely, though still a bit too young for primetime drinking. The nose is deep and still fairly reserved in its constellation of black cherries, dark berries, bitter chocolate, a bit of balsam bough, woodsmoke, gamebird, fresh herb tones and a fine base of dark soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still showing a bit of its youthful stemminess, with a fine core, lovely soil inflection, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and still very primary finish. This will be a lovely wine, but give it at least a few more years in the cellar. 2017-2040+. **90+**.

**2001 Clos St. Denis- Domaine Arlaud**

The 2001 Clos St. Denis from Domaine Arlaud was served to me by a very good friend in California, as he felt I had not been particularly fair to the domaine's wines in characterizing them as a bit over-oaked in style. However, much to his surprise, but not mine, the 2001 Domaine Arlaud Clos St. Denis was indeed over-oaked and was already starting to dry out! The nose is mature and quite complex, but already quite tertiary, offering up scents of beetroot,

cherries, herb tones, a bit of tomato, forest floor, coffee and charred wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and lacking the complexity of the nose, with a rather fruit-driven personality, a chunky profile and a short, drying out finish under a whole lot of lumber. A pretty pedestrian example of this superb vintage. Drink soon. 2013-2020+? **83.**



*Jacky Truchot, in front of his placard on the main street up from the RN74 to the center of Morey St. Denis.*

### **2001 Chambolle-Musigny “les Sentiers”- Domaine Jacky Truchot**

The 2001 Sentiers from Monsieur Truchot is more what I tend to think of as an archetypical example of this bottling, as it is far more red fruity and high-toned than the 2002 version. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of strawberries, beetroot, orange peel, mustard seed, blossoming notes of forest floor and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine complexity, modest tannins and fine focus on the long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This is a suave middleweight that is starting to drink well, but will continue to age very well indeed. 2012-2035. **90.**

### **2001 Chambolle-Musigny “les Feusselottes”- Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg**

The 2001 Feusselottes from Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg is a beautiful wine that is not quite into its plateau of maturity, but offers up lovely complexity and breed already on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a very classy blend of dusty rose, violets, red plums, cherries, a touch of chocolate, mustard seed, a lovely base of soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with a sappy core, lovely soil

inflection, fine-grained tannins and a very long, tangy and perfectly focused young finish. A beautiful wine in the making, but give it a few more years. 2017-2040+. **93.**

**2001 Chambolle-Musigny “Gruenchers”- Domaine Dujac**

The 2001 Gruenchers from Domaine Dujac is a very lovely bottle of wine in the making, but like so many of my very favorite 2001 premier crus, I would be inclined to still give this wine a few more years of bottle age before really starting to drink it with wild abandon, as there is still another layer of complexity waiting in the wings here. The beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of cherries, sweet beetroot, mustard seed, vinesmoke, a touch of cocoa, a lovely base of soil and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and just starting to blossom in earnest, with a sappy core, lovely transparency, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the still moderately tannic and classy finish. It is not a crime to be already drinking this wine today, but give it a few more years’ worth of bottle age to really capture it in its prime. 2016-2040+. **93+.**

**2001 Chambolle-Musigny “les Cras”- Domaine Ghislaine Barthod**

The 2001 les Cras from Ghislaine Barthod is a very pretty reflection of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, cranberry, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, rose petals, mustard seed and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, complex and soil-driven finish. A lovely wine that is already drinking very well, but should continue to improve with further bottle age. 2012-2035. **92.**

**2001 Chambolle-Musigny “les Cras”- Domaine Georges Roumier**

I never get tired of drinking Christophe Roumier’s example of les Cras, which I seem to manage to do with some frequency! The 2001 is just entering its plateau of maturity, as it offers up a deep, pure and complex nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, black truffles, a touch of game, a beautifully complex base of soil, fresh thyme and espresso. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovely soil inflection, melting tannins, great focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. A beautiful bottle of Chambolle. 2013-2040+. **93.**

**2001 Musigny- Domaine Georges Roumier**

Christophe Roumier has made an absolutely magical bottle of Musigny in the lovely 2001 vintage, and the wine is just starting to really blossom on both the nose and palate and is not too far away from reaching its primetime window of peak drinkability- where it will probably stay for half a century. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a glorious constellation of red and black cherries, gamebirds, a very, very complex base of soil, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, forest floor, coffee, a touch of balsam bough and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure, complex and rock solid at the core, with laser-like focus, melting tannins, tangy acids and stunning length and grip on the complex and oh so refined finish. Many thanks to my friend Florian for searching out a bottle of this wine to celebrate my birthday one evening while we were both in Burgundy! 2017-2060. **96+.**

**2001 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Jean Grivot**

I really did not know what to make of the 2001 Domaine Grivot Clos Vougeot when I last crossed paths with it in the fall of 2010, as the wine was very shut down and obviously extracted in style, with some uncovered oak tannins poking out on the hard and charmless finish. I do not know if this wine is every going to come around, but its surly shape at age nine was quite surprising and hard to fathom. The bouquet is a mix of slightly stewed black fruit, woodsmoke, soil tones, coffee grounds and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is

deep, full-bodied and quite austere today, with a solid core, fine focus, little signs of developing complexity and a dry-edge, hard finish. ???

**2001 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat**

The 2001 Hudelot-Noëllat Clos Vougeot is a beautiful example of the vintage that is getting pretty close to blossoming. The first class nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, lovely minerality, mustard seed, game, incipient notes of *sous bois* and a nice base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and a very long, tangy and superbly focused finish. A very high class example of the Clos. 2019-2050+. **94.**

**2001 Vosne-Romanée “les Jachées”- Domaine Bizot**

The 2001 Vosne-Romanée “les Jachées” from Domaine Bizot is an odd wine, as its bouquet is already quite advanced by the standards of the vintage and seems to be threatening decline, but on the palate the wine is pinched and woody from its new oak, with the finish dry and astringent. Not a happy combination. The simple bouquet lacks vibrancy, offering up a blend of raspberries, beetroot, Vosne spices and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, quite thin at the core (despite the fruit being very primary and showing no signs of evolution) and the finish over-oaked and already withering from the uncovered oak tannins. This wine is dead on arrival, and as it was made with the low or no sulfur regimen that the estate is renowned for these days, it is not a very strong endorsement for this methodology, which seems inherently flawed- at least based on this poor wine. DOA. **60.**

**2001 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

I do not taste the Drouhin family’s Suchots bottling with any regularity, as I assume they do not produce a whole lot of this wine, but on the occasions that I do cross paths with the wine, I am always quite impressed. The 2001 Suchots is a lovely and quite classic example of this black fruity vineyard, offering up a bouquet of dark berries, black plums, venison, espresso, forest floor and base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and just starting to really show some of its secondary layers of complexity, with a good, but not great core, modest tannins and a nice touch of iron in the soil signature on the long and tangy finish. A very good wine, but not in the same league as the Petits Monts bottling *chez* Drouhin. 2014-2040. **90.**

**2001 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas”- Domaine Michel Gros**

The 2001 Clos des Réas from Monsieur Gros is an okay wine, but it seems just a touch stewy in its fruit component for this very pure vintage. The bouquet is starting to show some secondary layers of complexity in its mélange of black raspberries, coffee, venison, a touch of tomato, herb tones, soil and toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chunky and four-square, with solid depth at the core, melting tannins, bright acids and a long, slightly stewy, but complex finish. I was hoping for more here from one of my favorite recent vintages. 2013-2030. **87.**

**2001 Vosne-Romanée “aux Brûlées”- Domaine René Engel**

I always liked the wines from Monsieur Engel and it is a pity that I only had the opportunity to visit him on one occasion and taste in the cellars here before his untimely and tragic passing. His 2001 Brûlées is a beautiful example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a pure and complex blend of roasted cherries and plums, *sous bois*, duck, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil and a nicely framed base of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very classy, with a lovely core, tangy acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, modestly tannic finish. A beautiful example of the vineyard and vintage. 2012-2035. **92.**



### **2001 Echézeaux- Domaine Dujac**

The 2001 Echézeaux from Domaine Dujac is still quite closed down, but with a bit of swirling in the glass it does show plenty of youthful potential. The bouquet eventually yields up notes of dark berries, cassis, espresso, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, venison, still a bit of youthful stemminess and a fine base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a rock solid core, ripe tannins, tangy acids and a fine sense of reserve on the very long and nascently complex finish. Give this fine wine another five years in the cellar. 2020-2050+. **93+**.

### **2001 Richebourg- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 2001 Richebourg from Domaine Méo-Camuzet was still hermetically sealed when I last tasted it at the twentieth anniversary tasting, a bit more than four years ago, and I wondered how long it was going to take to fully integrate its wood tannins on the backend. The bouquet was deep, young and nascently complex, as it offered up scents of roasted plums and black cherries, dark berries, herb tones, a fine base of soil, espresso and plenty of toasty, almost Bourbon-like new wood. On the palate the wine was full-bodied and very tight, with its core of fruit totally constricted by its wood component at that point in its evolution, with plenty of depth at the core, but in serious need of further bottle age to synthesize all of its elements. More than four years have passed since I last saw this wine and I would love to taste it now and see how it is progressing. Given the fine track record of this wine under the twenty-five years of Jean-Nicolas' stewardship of the domaine, it is hard to bet against this wine blossoming, but it was tough sledding when last tasted. ???

### **2001 Beaune "Clos des Mouches"- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 2001 Clos des Mouches is a beautiful example of the vintage and the wine is now drinking very well indeed. The deep, complex and totally *à point* nose jumps from the glass in a blend of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, a touch of cocoa, venison, autumnal notes of fallen leaves, a lovely base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its peak, with a lovely core, fine soil inflection, melting tannins and superb length and grip on the focused and classy finish. A beautiful bottle of Clos des Mouches. 2013-2035+. **93**.

### ***The 2000 Vintage- Ranking: B***

*I have been very, very fond of the 2000 red Burgundy vintage since its very earliest days and I bought a lot of this vintage for my own cellar and have drunk the wines with great satisfaction over the years. This type of vintage is one of my favorite kinds, as it is sandwiched between two superior and more structured red Burgundy years in 2001 and 1999, and it has served as a perfect foil in the cellar to allow those two vintages to continue sleeping peacefully in my collection, as it seemed insane to be opening bottles of either '01 or '99 when I had such a goodly selection of 2000s to drink when the urge for a younger, really fine bottle of red Burgundy was upon me. The vintage is generally stronger in the northern half of Burgundy for red wines, and though it is a bit low in acid compared to some other recent "sleeper" vintages, the wines have always shown excellent depth of fruit and classic signatures of soil and are quite complete wines that have drunk with great style since very early on in their lives. The village wines were terrific out of the blocks, the premier crus generally needed a few years to blossom after release and the grand crus really required close to a decade to start to blossom and have steadily improved since the start of the new millennium. This is one of my favorite vintages for*

*current drinking and the top premier crus and grand crus still have decades of life ahead of them.*

### **2000 Bourgogne Rouge- Kalin Bourgogne**

Terry Leighton is a great student of history in Burgundy, and in the 2000 vintage, when hail struck his parcel of vines in the Beaune premier cru of Chouacheux, he thought back to the great success Louis Jadot's former cellar master, Jacques Lardière had early on in his career in a similar situation in the 1971 vintage. In that instant, Monsieur Lardière decided that a very short maceration would keep any *goûte de grail* out of the wines, and in fact, this was indeed the case with the Jadot 1971s, which are amongst the finest and cleanest wines to be found in that vintage from the Côte de Beaune. Of course, short macerations mean light colors, and *Les Officials* did not feel that the 2000 Kalin Chouacheux was properly deep in color to merit its premier cru level and forced the Leightons to declassify the wine down to Bourgogne rouge. So, we have the finest bottle of Bourgogne one could ever hope to taste, as the decidedly pale color is followed by a wine of stunning aromatic and flavor purity on both the nose and palate. The stunning bouquet wafts from the glass in an explosive constellation of strawberries, cherries, *sous bois*, woodsmoke, orange rind, incipient notes of beetroot and a hint of cinnamon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and very intensely flavored, with outstanding focus and grip, impeccable balance and lovely length on the complex and very refined finish. This wine is at its apogee, but clearly has at least another fifteen to twenty-five years of potential longevity ahead of it. Great juice. 2015-2040. **93.**

### **2000 Côte de Beaune "les Pierres Blanches"- Kalin Bourgogne**

As I have written in the past, this vineyard is located up on the top of the slope that houses the best premier crus in Beaune, on a profound base of limestone, and the *terroir* here is probably better than almost all of the top premier crus in Beaune in their lower sections on the hillside. As readers may recall from the series on Beaune in the newsletter a few years back, almost all of the top premier crus in Beaune are fairly large vineyards, with the *terroir* of the top halves of each cru decidedly superior to the halves on the lower slopes. As this wine is not as prone to hail as Chouacheux, it was not struck in the summer of 2000 and the color is quite classically deep ruby. The 2000 Kalin les Pierres Blanches is stunning, offering up a beautiful and deep nose of red plums, cherries, gamebirds, woodsmoke, a stellar base of chalky soil tones and cinnamon. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with still a touch of backend tannin, excellent focus and balance and a long, complex and refined finish that closes with great grip and bounce. This is the ultimate red Burgundy "blind wine" for any Burgundy-centric tasting group, as I guarantee none of your fellow tasters is going to guess les Pierres Blanches for this grand cru quality wine in 2000! 2015-2040+. **93+.**

### **2000 Charmes-Chambertin "Vieilles Vignes"- Domaine Jacky Truchot**

I cannot overstate just how beautiful this wine was to drink in its early days, as I consumed my case in a couple of years and simply could not keep my hands off of the wine! Consequently, my bottles have been long gone for nearly a decade now, but I was fortunate to have a chance to taste this with a friend a couple of years ago and was very surprised to find that the wine today is currently in a closed down phase and in need of some time in the cellar. The bouquet is deep and fairly reserved today, offering up scents of black cherries, beetroot, grilled meats, black minerality, mustard seed, espresso, a touch of new wood and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sports as superb core of fruit, with fine soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, closed and promising finish. The tannins today, though

perfectly integrated, really have the upper hand on the wine at the present time, and I would not touch a bottle now for at least another five years, as there is still an excellent core of fruit here and this wine will reopen down the road and be absolutely stellar again. 2020-2040+. **93+**.

**2000 Griotte-Chambertin- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

I may be underrating this wine a touch, as it was sandwiched between bottles of 2001 Roumier Musigny and 1980 La Tâche, and that is a pretty fast crowd with which to run! The complex bouquet is deep, pure and slightly jammy in profile, offering up scents of cherries, strawberry *confiture*, mustard seed, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, nutskin, grilled meats and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a tad on the young side for primetime drinking, with a good core, still a touch of tannin and a long, tangy finish of blossoming complexity and lovely grip. If the slight jamminess here recedes (and this may simply be a reflection of the company it was keeping on this evening!) then my score will seem conservative, but like several 2000 grand crus I have tasted of late, this wine now seems like it should be left alone in the cellar for a few years, as its shutter is closing a bit at the moment. 2018-2035+. **90+**.

**2000 Griotte-Chambertin- Domaine Fourrier**

I had this wine after a superb lineup of mature old California cabernets, and given its relative youth, I may be underrated the wine just a touch in the wake of all those fully resolved oldies from the west coast. The bouquet is very lovely in its red fruity mélange of wild strawberries, cherries, mustard seed, a great base of chalky minerality, gamebirds and a gently topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite complex on the attack, with a lovely core of red fruit, soft tannins, tangy acids and a long, still quite youthful finish. Good juice that is just starting to drink well, but which will be even better with further bottle age. 2013-2040. **93+**.

**2000 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg**

The 2000 Ruchottes from the Mugneret sisters is a beautiful wine that has just reached its apogee and is drinking with great breed and style. The classic nose delivers a complex constellation of black cherries, red plums, mustard seed, grilled meats, dark soil tones, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and wide open, with excellent mid-palate depth, melted tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and beautifully balanced finish. I had opened up a bottle of this a few years back and it was still a bit bound up in its structure, but this most recent bottle was absolutely singing. 2013-2040. **93+**.

**2000 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Domaine Armand Rousseau**

I am quite embarrassed to admit that I had a half box of both this and the Chambertin in 2000 and drank all dozen bottles before the wines had reached their fifth birthdays, but they were so good in their youth that I just could not keep my hands off of them! However, as good as they were in the blush of youth, both wines are immeasurably better today and it is quite clear that I committed infanticide on the wines. The 2000 Clos de Bèze is drinking gloriously today, offering up a deep and very sappy nose of black cherries, plums, grilled meats, exotic spices, a great base of soil, woodsmoke and a fine base of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really sappy at the core, with outstanding focus, moderate tannins and a very, very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. A great 2000 Burgundy that is really drinking well today, but will last for decades. 2013-2040. **95**

**2000 Chambertin- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 2000 Drouhin Chambertin is a beautiful example of the vintage that is drinking with great style and complexity at age thirteen, offering up a pure and classy bouquet of red and black cherries, grilled meat, cocoa, a beautiful base of soil, mustard seed, woodsmoke and cedar. On

the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and perfectly balanced, with a fine core, still some backend tannin to continue to carry it for decades and lovely, tangy acids adding brightness and transparency on the long and pure finish. A really lovely bottle of Chambertin that has not quite reached its apogee, but is already drinking very well indeed. It will cruise along for many, many years to come, and I would be inclined to try and keep it tucked away in the cellar for just a few more years and let a bit more tannin resolve on the long backend. 2017-2040+. **94.**

**2000 Chambertin- Domaine Armand Rousseau**

The 2000 Rousseau Chambertin another majestic example of the vintage, and there cannot be too many 2000 reds that are in this same league. The deep and utterly classic nose soars from the glass in a blend of raspberries, cherries, clove-like spice tones, coffee, a touch of venison, cedary wood and that magically complex signature of Chambertin soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a great, great core of fruit, exquisite focus and balance, seamless tannins and exceptional length and grip on the poised, elegant and powerful finish. A great example of Chambertin. 2013-2040. **96.**

**2000 Clos St. Denis- Domaine Dujac**

The 2000 Clos St. Denis from the Seysses family is one of the most transparent examples of the vintage I have tasted in recent times, which is not always the strongest suit for this vintage. The bouquet is really beautiful, delivering a complex aromatic constellation of red cherries, raspberries, coffee, cinnamon, mineral-laced forest floor, mustard seed and a nice base of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and tangy, with a lovey signature of soil, melting tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the long, refined and complex finish. Like several other 2000 grand crus, the structure is still present here, but the wine is so impeccably balanced that it is hard not to say it is at its apogee, despite the fact that it still has decades of life ahead of it. 2012-2035. **94.**

**2000 Chambolle-Musigny “Premier Cru”- Maison Joseph Drouhin (375 ml.)**

The 2000 Chambolle Premier Cru from the Drouhin family is a lovely wine at its apogee and is really drinking well in half bottle. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of baked cherries and plums, fresh herb tones, gamebird, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, just a whisper of chocolate and a discreet base of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and velvety on the attack, with fine mid-palate intensity, sound framing acids and fine length and grip on the complex and wide open finish. A lovely drink. 2013-2025. **91.**

**2000 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The Drouhin family's Bonnes-Mares is one of the very finest examples of this great grand cru produced in all of Burgundy, but as it is made in small quantities, it seems to always float a bit below the radar. The 2000 vintage has produced another absolutely stellar bottle, as the wine delivers a deep, intense and utterly classic blend of cherries, pomegranate, coffee, a bit of venison, a superbly complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly youthful in profile for a 2000, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, suave tannins and a long, vibrant and still fairly primary finish. I would still give this excellent wine a few more years in the cellar to really come into its own. 2017-2040. **93+.**

**2000 Musigny- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

My most recent encounter with the 2000 Musigny from Joseph Drouhin found the wine starting to really close down and in need of a bit of hibernation. The bouquet is again somewhat adolescent in its mélange of spicy red berries, mustard seed, coffee, venison, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite closed, with a good

core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy, but today, slightly weedy finish. This bottle needs some time in the cellar, as it is one of those 2000 grand crus that is shutting down again at the moment. 2020-2050. **93+**.

**2000 Musigny- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier**

I had not crossed paths with a bottle of Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier's 2000 Musigny since the great vertical tasting hosted by Chet Kern that I wrote up back in October of 2009, and based on this most recent bottle, it certainly seems that the wine has continued to blossom with further bottle age and is really a stunning glass today. The pure and very refined bouquet delivers a red fruity and soil-driven constellation of cherries, beetroot, mustard seed, coffee, a touch of venison, a glorious base of complex soil nuances, a bit of iron and a floral topnote that is exotically redolent of orange blossoms on this occasion. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with relatively low acidity for this bottling, but lovely depth of fruit, excellent complexity and focus, melting tannins and superb length and grip on the poised, suave and utterly classic finish. A really lovely example of the vintage at its apogee, but with decades of life still ahead of it. 2014-2035+. **94.**



**2000 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg**

The 2000 Clos Vougeot from Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg is a superb vintage for this great wine, with the bouquet offering up a classic and wide open mélange of red and black plums, gamebird, woodsmoke, a very complex base of soil tones, a bit of graphite, raw cocoa and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very refined, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, still a touch of remaining tannin and outstanding

length on the elegant and vibrant finish. One of the vintages of Clos Vougeot from the Mugneret sisters that I would not hesitate to reach for today for current consumption- though the wine still has plenty of life ahead of it! 2014-2035+. **94.**

**2000 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas”- Domaine Michel Gros**

The 2000 Michel Gros Clos des Réas is similar in style to the 2001, with a bit of stewiness to the fruit tones that takes away from the overall elegance of the wine. However, it is deep, reasonably complex and quite suave structurally, so there are some very pleasant elements here as well. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, raspberries, beetroot, coffee, herb tones, *sous bois* and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and nicely tangy, with good balance and complexity, modest tannins and a long, slightly blurry finish. This is not a bad drink, but one expects a bit more from Clos des Réas. 2013-2022. **87.**

**2000 Vosne-Romanée “Cros Parantoux”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 2000 Cros Parantoux from Domaine Méo-Camuzet is a superb example of this underrated vintage. The pure and perfumed bouquet delivers a fine constellation of black plums, black cherries, Vosne spice tones, a complex base of soil, espresso, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke and toasty oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very deep at the core, with excellent complexity, fine focus, melting tannins and a long, vibrant and utterly refined finish. A beautiful wine for current drinking, but with years and years of life in it. 2009-2030. **94.**

**2000 Echézeaux- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg**

The 2000 Echézeaux from Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg is still a tad on the adolescent side and could use at least a couple more years of bottle age. The wine will be excellent in time, as it offers up a very classy bouquet red and black cherries, venison, cocoa powder, a touch of balsam bough, a complex base of soil and a fine framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the pure and still slightly primary finish. Structurally, this wine is already quite accessible, but it has not yet developed its secondary layers of complexity and it is well worth leaving it alone in the cellar for a few more years. 2017-2040. **94.**

**2000 Volnay “Premier Cru”- Domaine Coche-Dury**

I have a few bottles each of the full range of 2000 Coche-Dury reds in my cellar somewhere, but I have not been able to find them in several years and consequently, have been aging them longer than intended ☺ This particular bottle was served by a very generous friend in Munich, Germany, when I was visiting him and showed very well indeed, but without the precision on either the nose or palate of the 1998 or 1999 versions. The bouquet is a very pretty and succulent blend of cherries, backed red plums, chocolate, woodsmoke, *sous bois*, woodsmoke and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep and fullish, but a bit soft at the present time, without the customary grip and precision on the backend of this cuvée in most vintages, with melting tannins, lovely flavors and a long, velvety and ready to go finish. A very pleasant bottle for near-term drinking, but not a great vintage for this wine. 2010-2025. **89.**

***The 1999 Vintage- Ranking: A***

*The 1999 red Burgundy vintage is one of my all-time favorites of the last quarter century, as I love the combination of the sumptuous, deep fruit tones and utterly classic expressions of terroir found in so many wines of the vintage. However, despite the relatively forward nature of these sumptuous beauties, to my palate, the vintage is still inherently too young to be drinking and it is still a waste to be opening bottles at the present time. I have opened a few village wines and premier crus out of my own cellar in the last year, just to check in on the vintage, and found*

*all of them really still on the primary side and wishing for more cellaring, despite the wines offering up plenty of youthful pleasure. I have not touched any of my grand crus, but have had a few served to me in recent times, and these are really wines that deserve another decade of bottle age (at least) before they are opened, as they will be truly spectacular wines at their apogees. This is a great red Burgundy vintage, and one of the best in the Côte de Beaune that I have ever tasted, and while the wines offer up plenty of pleasure today, they are still fairly primary and will offer up so much more complexity if a bit more patience is exercised. It was a freakishly large crop for pinot noir in 1999, with yields often way beyond what was allowed by the INAO in this vintage, and this with maximum crop loads increased fully twenty percent prior to the harvest! However, the vines managed to ripen the huge crop load completely in the beautiful weather of the summer of '99, and the berries were much smaller than usual in the bunches in this vintage, so that the skin to juice ratio was very good, despite the enormous yields. This is what has given the wines their absolutely superb structures, as the tannins are ripe, present and this vintage will make old bones with no problems at all. The fruit is truly beautiful and very deep, with the accompanying soil signatures absolutely classic, so the wines have been immensely popular since day one, and a great many have already been drunk before their times. But, this is going to be one of the reference point vintages of our generation and it makes sense to leave these wines hibernating in the cellar at the present time, drink other vintages, and let the 1999s capitalize fully on their enormous potentials.*

#### **1999 Gevrey-Chambertin “Lavaux St. Jacques”- Domaine Maume**

I do not get to taste the wines from Domaine Maume with any consistency, but I quite liked this example of '99 Lavaux St. Jacques, despite the wine being just a touch bretty. The bouquet is deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a soil-driven mélange of cherries, strawberries, leather, mustard seed, a lovely base of soil, coffee, cedar and the aforementioned dollop of brett. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nicely transparent, with a good core, modest tannins and good length and grip on the focused finish. Not bad, though I do not mind a bit of brett in my wines- for those with a lower tolerance, this may not be clean enough for your palate. 2016-2035. **89.**

#### **1999 Gevrey-Chambertin “Champeaux”- Domaine Fourrier**

I have had this wine on a couple of occasions over the last year and have enjoyed it immensely, and it is one 1999 premier cru that I do not feel too guilty about opening now. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a very red fruity and soil-driven constellation of cherries, beetroot, a lovely base of complex soil tones, a touch of cinnamon, mustard seed, coffee and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and beautifully transparent, with a lovely core of red fruit, still a bit of suave tannin to resolve and excellent length and grip on the long, complex and very vibrant finish. This deserves another four or five years in the cellar to really blossom structurally on the palate, but aromatically, it is already an really lovely bottle of wine. 2019-2050. **93+.**

#### **1999 Gevrey-Chambertin “aux Combottes”- Domaine Jacky Truchot**

I have had the great fortune to drink the 1999 Combottes from Jacky Truchot on three or four occasions in the last year, and each time it has shown beautifully, but differently in the varying contexts that I have tasted it. This most recent bottle was paired up with Jean-Marie Fourrier's Champeaux and surprised me by showing a bit more tertiary development on both the nose and palate than the lovely Champeaux, as it soars from the glass in a very complex blaze of cherries, beetroot, fresh herb tones, grilled meat, *sous bois* and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the



palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very suave on the attack, with a bit more plushness than the Fourrier Champeaux. The tannins are modest and velvety, the acids are bright and the wine has a beautiful core of sweet fruit, with the finish long, focused and gently autumnal and very complex. A beautiful example of the vintage that is getting pretty close to primetime drinking. Previous bottles have shown a bit more structure and were a few years further away from their peaks. 2017-2040+. **94.**

**1999 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet**

The 1999 Chapelle-Chambertin from Rossignol-Trapet is an outstanding wine, soaring from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, grilled meats, dark chocolate, blossoming notes of *sous bois*, woodsmoke, espresso, dark soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with excellent mid-palate depth, ripe, chewy tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very well-balanced, pure and focused finish. An outstanding young bottle of Chapelle. 2022-2060+. **94+.**

**1999 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Christophe Roumier**

The 1999 Ruchottes-Chambertin from Christophe Roumier is still quite closed on both the nose and palate, but it will be an excellent wine in the fullness of time. The still very primary nose offers up a constellation of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of grilled meat, a superb base of soil tones, nutskins and a bit of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still quite closed down, with a sappy core of fruit, outstanding soil inflection, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, pure and powerful finish. All this wine needs is more bottle age! 2018-2060. **94+.**

**1999 Chambertin- Domaine Denis Mortet**

Monsieur Mortet produced a more extracted style of red Burgundy during his days at the head of the family domaine, and this is not usually a style that I gravitate towards, but I quite liked this bottle of his 1999 Chambertin. The bouquet is deep, pure and still a bit on the youthful side, as it offers up scents of roasted black cherries and plums, grilled meat, cocoa, a lovely base of soil, woodsmoke and a well-done base of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a beautiful core of sappy fruit, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the tangy and nascently complex finish. It is still early days for this wine, but it is very well-balanced and not a bad drink today in its relative youth. A very well-made example. 2014-2040+. **94+.**

**1999 Clos des Lambrays- Domaine des Lambrays**

The 1999 Clos des Lambrays is an outstanding example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep and classic, offering up an adolescent blend of dark berries, cassis, espresso, a fine, complex base of soil tones, incipient notes of venison and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with a fairly closed personality today, fine depth at the core, lovely soil signature and excellent length and grip on the moderately tannic and still fairly tightly-knit finish. This is certainly approachable today, but give it another five to ten years to really let it reach its apogee, as the wine is still quite obviously still ascending. 2018-2050+. **94.**

**1999 Chambolle-Musigny- Domaine Dujac**

I love the domaine version of Chambolle AC from the Seysses family, and this wine is really a superb village wine in the making. The deep, ripe and very pure nose offers up scents of black cherries, plums, cocoa, a lovely touch of soil, incipient notes of *sous bois* and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a sappy core, nice acids and a long, modestly tannic and classy finish. I had no trouble

drinking this wine with great pleasure, but it will be significantly better with further bottle age and, due to its impeccable balance, should prove to be a very long-lived and outstanding example of Chambolle AC. 2016-2040+. **91.**

**1999 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat**

The 1999 Clos Vougeot from Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat is a lovely example of the vintage that is still a tad on the youthful side, but which shows excellent potential. The deep, pure and blossoming nose offers up scents of black cherries, plums, chocolate, venison, incipient notes of *sous bois*, woodsmoke and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows excellent mid-palate depth, with ripe, suave tannins, excellent focus and grip, nascent complexity and a very long, classy and succulent finish. A superb bottle in the making, but keep it tucked away in the cellar for another five or six years. 2020-2065+. **94.**

**1999 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

Jean-Nicolas Méo's 1999 Clos Vougeot is a wonderful wine in the making. The deep and pure nose offers up a vibrant blend of black cherries, plums, chocolate, fresh herb tones, incipient notes of venison, a beautiful base of soil, espresso, vanillin oak and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a sappy core, fine soil inflection, suave tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully focused finish. More complexity is going to emerge here with further bottle age, but the wine has no rough edges today and is already a very tasty bottle. 2015-2060. **93+.**

**1999 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg (served from magnum)**

I am certainly not opening up bottles of the brilliant 1999 Mugneret Clos Vougeot today out of my own cellar, but when friends generously bring back half a magnum for a Paulée that they were attending while I was working in the cellars, who I am to refuse the first or second glass? This is a beautiful example of the vintage, but still too young for primetime drinking in my opinion. The youthful nose soars from the glass in a superb constellation of black cherries, plums, a bit of developing game, woodsmoke, forest floor, chocolate and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a superb core, lovely, nascent complexity, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the refined and focused finish. Out of regular bottle, this still needs three to five years to really blossom and more out of mag. 2030-2065+. **95+.**

**1999 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas”- Domaine Michel Gros (served from magnum)**

This seemed quite forward for a 1999 Vosne premier cru, particularly out of magnum. The bouquet is already showing some tertiary elements in its constellation of black cherries, raspberries, beetroot, *sous bois*, gamebirds, herbs and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and a bit four-square, with a good core, melting tannins, sound acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. The wine is not completely focused and why is it showing such a forward personality for a 1999 in magnum format? 2015-2045. **87+?**

**1999 Vosne-Romanée “1er Cru” Cuvée Duvault-Bloch- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

The first vintage ever of the premier cru bottling of Cuvée Duvault-Bloch from DRC was not showing as well as I expected the last time I crossed paths with a bottle at a fine blind tasting down in Atlanta, as the wine came across as quite simple on both the nose and palate. I hope it was just a stage that the wine was going through, as this has never been my impression of the wine previously. The bouquet is quite marked by its spicy new wood in its mélange of cherries, raspberries, coffee, a touch of *sous bois* and the aforementioned spicy wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, simply and a touch dull today, with a good core, moderate tannins and a bit of unnatural rigidity on the backend from wood tannins. I have had lovely bottles of this

in the past, so I am assuming we just caught this wine as it was closing down for a bit and it will be more interesting again with some more bottle age. 2013-2035+? **89+?**

**1999 Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

The 1999 DRC Echézeaux is a very young and unevolved example of the vintage, but this will be a lovely example of this bottling in the fullness of time. The deep and primary nose wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, raspberries, venison, coffee, chocolate, herb tones and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in personality, with a plump core of fruit, lovely soil signature waiting in the wines to unfold, ripe, beautifully integrated tannins and a long, tangy finish that closes with excellent length and grip. This is a puppy, but will be an excellent vintage of DRC Echézeaux in the fullness of time. 2025-2075. **93+.**

**1999 Grands Echézeaux- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 1999 Grands Echézeaux from Joseph Drouhin is a superb example of the vintage, and though it is quite accessible in terms of structure, it really deserves more time in the cellar to truly blossom. The excellent nose offers up a youthful blend of cherries, red plums, a bit of cherry pit, vinesmoke, balsam boughs, incipient notes of gamebird, a lovely base of minerality and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, but with a fairly tight palate impression at the moment. The finish is very, very long, focused and vibrant, with seamless tannins, a plush texture to the fruit and superb complexity just starting to emerge. Let this beauty hibernate a handful of more years in the cellar to really offer up all of its inherent beauty. 2020-2050+. **94+.**

**1999 Nuits St. Georges “aux Murgers”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 1999 Murgers from Jean-Nicolas Méo is a beautiful example of the vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful and very classy blend of black cherries, plums, roasted game, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a plush core of youthful fruit, moderate tannins, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, pure and blossoming finish. A fine, fine bottle of Nuits. 2012-2035+. **92+.**

**1999 Chorey-lès-Beaune- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

I love wines like the 1999 Chorey-lès-Beaune from Joseph Drouhin, as it is not overly complex, but it offers up really lovely expressions of both fruit and soil tones and is eminently drinkable. The bouquet is a very pretty and maturing mix of cherries, coffee, bonfires, gamebird and forest floor. On the palate the wine is fullish, sappy and nicely broad-shouldered for a Chorey AC bottling, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, meltingly tannic and vibrant finish. Not a great wine, but a really, really good example of its level and vintage. 2011-2020+. **88.**

**1999 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Serpentières”- Domaine Simon Bize et Fils**

I was really surprised how beautifully the 1999 Serpentières from Patrick Bize was drinking when I ordered this off of a wine list in Beaune, as this is usually a pretty sturdy premier cru and takes its time to come around, but the wine was absolutely singing. The bouquet is a beautiful red fruity blend of cherries, strawberries, bonfires, coffee, gamebirds, incipient *sous bois*, orange zest and lovely soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a fine core, moderate tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and very classy finish. A beautiful bottle of Savigny that is already showing its elegant side of maturity- yet with decades of life still to come. Patrick Bize truly made some of the most beautiful red wines in all of Burgundy during his career! 2013, 2040+. **93+.**

### **1999 Beaune “Premier Cru”- Dominique Laurent**

The is a very new oaky example of Beaune, but the wine was still nicely balanced and had sufficient stuffing in this outstanding Côte de Beaune vintage to carry Monsieur Laurent's new wood regimen. The bouquet is a new oaky blend of black cherries, chocolate, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil tones, gamebirds and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully sappy at the core, with a good signature of soil, excellent acidity and a mix of skin and wood tannins perking up the long finish. This is very well-made in its style, but it is not a wine I would put in my own cellar, as I have no real sense if the skin tannins and the wood tannins will evolve over the long haul. During the next decade, the wine will provide plenty of enjoyment, but from that point forward, I wonder if the wood will become more prominent in the structure of the wine. In any event, it is quite clear that Monsieur Laurent had stellar raw materials to work with here in 1999, and at least for the next decade or so, the wine should still be very good. 2012-2025+? **89.**

### **1999 Volnay “Premier Cru”- Domaine Coche-Dury**

It is still very early days for the '99 Volnay “Premier Cru” from Jean-François Coche, and I may be underrating this wine a bit, as it is still pretty hunkered down and in need of further bottle age. The nose is deep, ripe and pure, as it offers up scents of cherries, beetroot, fresh thyme, incipient *sous bois*, pomegranate, gamebird and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and intensely flavored, with lovely bounce and grip, bright acids, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Give this a bit more time to fully blossom. 2019-2040+. **92+.**

### **1999 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 1999 Clos des Chênes is an absolutely gorgeous example of the vintage, and unlike so many top premier crus from this year, which are still not quite ready, this wine is absolutely singing at the present time! The stunning nose soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, sweet dark berries, black truffles, a complex base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, a bit of chocolate and a deft framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy, with excellent mid-palate depth, a superb signature of soil and a very long, suavely-tannic and very complex finish. Really a stellar example of Clos des Chênes! 2014-2050. **94.**

### **1999 Auxey-Duresses- Domaine Coche-Dury**

Having very happily drunk cases of this wine out of my own cellar from the 1996, 1998 and 2000 vintages, I am now starting to work on the 1999, which is still a tad on the young side, but a delicious glass of wine. The pure and sappy nose leaps from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, plums, roasted game, cocoa, a touch of nutskin and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and succulent on the attack, with a sappy core, great inner mouth perfume, melting tannins and a very long, velvety and complex finish. A beautiful wine and a very great value in its day. 2014-2030+. **92+.**

### **1999 St. Aubin “Sur le Sentier” Rouge- Domaine Henri Prudhon et Fils**

The 1999 Sur le Sentier rouge from the Prudhon family is really a lovely bottle that is beginning to drink well, but which will be even better with a couple of years more in the cellar. The fine nose offers up scents of black cherries, dark soil tones, charred wood, *pigeon*, fresh herb tones, coffee and blossoming notes of *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, modest, well-integrated tannins and lovely length and grip on the classy, albeit, still slightly youthful finish. I last tasted this in March of 2013, and then it still needed another three to four years in the cellar to really start to sing. Good juice in the making. 2016-2040. **90+.**

### **1999 Chassagne-Montrachet “Clos de la Boudriotte”- Domaine Ramonet (375 ml.)**

I had a considerable stash of both this wine and the Clos St. Jean rouge from the Ramonet brothers in my cellar at one time, and wish I could have exercised a bit more patience with the wines, as they have drunk beautifully from day one, but have increased in complexity and breed with each passing year. Today, I only have a few Clos de la Boudriotte halves left, but think in retrospect, if I had it to do over, I would have kept back the Clos St. Jean instead, as this may well be the finest *terroir* for pinot noir in the village. In any case, this most recent half of 1999 Clos de la Boudriotte is very good, wafting from the glass in a sappy blend of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, chocolate, vinesmoke, a fine base of soil, fresh herbs and a touch of resinous, slightly tarry tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still a bit structured, with a fine core, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. This may be just a touch more extracted than the Clos St Jean (you think I would have at least once opened them side by side, but I never did!) and as a result, not quite as refined. But, still a fine drink and a terrific value in its day. 2013-2030+. **90+**.

#### ***The 1998 Vintage-    Ranking: B***

*As I just recently wrote a full length feature on the red wines of the 1998 vintage, I have not included the vintage characteristics here, which can be found in Issue Fifty-Two. However, I have tasted a few wines subsequently whose notes have not appeared in that article, so those notes appear below. The vintage, as I wrote a few months back, is currently in a closed phase and the wines are not drinking as well as they did five or six years ago. Prudence would leave this vintage alone in the cellar to come around again with further bottle age, if that indeed is its destiny.*

### **1998 Savigny-lès-Beaune “aux Guettes”- Domaine Simon Bize et Fils**

The 1998 Guettes from Patrick Bize is really a lovely example of the vintage and one of the few 1998s that has not shut down in recent times. The lovely nose offers up a classic blend of black cherries, black raspberries, a touch of red currant, woodsmoke, new leather, gamebirds, woodsmoke and a superbly complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still fairly youthful in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil inflection and moderate, well-integrated tannins on the long and complex finish. This is not a bad drink at all today, but I would still be inclined to treat it like the rest of its brethren from the vintage and leave it tucked away in the cellar for four or five more years and let it come completely into its own. It is one 1998 I have no worries about. 2019-2040. **92**.

#### ***The 1997 Vintage-    Ranking: C-***

*I thought I was going to like the 1997 red Burgundy vintage very well when I tasted it out of barrel in November of 1998 and March of 1999, as the wines seemed plump, pure and nicely reflective of their underlying terroirs and likely to offer up very stylish drinking early on and capable of aging for a bit as well. They were not particularly tannic, but velvety and showed a nice synthesis of soil and fruit tones on both the nose and palate and were really quite agreeable. A couple of years out from bottling, they turned decidedly prune and overripe in profile, with a strong streak of vegetality as well, and they seemed to be rather stewy and a far cry from what I thought they would be out of barrel. The growing season had been a bit up and down, with periods of heat and sun interspersed with unseasonably cool temperatures and rain. August was plenty warm, but rather tempestuous, and September was hot, pushing up sugars before the*

*tannins could catch up, and this is what probably brought on the rather green streak in the wines a couple of years out after the bottling. As it was very hot leading into harvest, timing the collection of the bunches was very important once the ban de vendange was lifted, for if one was a bit late getting going, one ended up with overripe grapes. At picking in mid-September, it was very hot, and stayed so throughout the periods of fermentations, so that alcoholic and malolactic fermentations rolled through the cellars at lightning speed, giving wines of superficially plump fruit, but not a whole lot of stuffing in reserve for down the road, as it was difficult to extract in the warm temperatures and brisk pace of both fermentations. The vintage was fairly attractive out of the blocks, but got rather stewy in profile with a bit of bottle age and was downright vegetal about age five or so, but it seems to have been freshening up again as it has gotten a bit older, and is more interesting to drink as it closes in on age twenty than it was at age ten. It is still one of the weakest vintages of the decade of the 1990s, having been passed by 1992 and only if 1998 and 1996 stay stuck in their ornery phases (which seems unlikely) will 1997 not ultimately end up at the very bottom of the list of red Burgundy vintages in this decade, alongside 1994. Still, the couple that I have drunk in the last year were really not too bad and better than what I expected, and given the small size of my recent sampling of the vintage, there may be more pleasant surprised out there than I imagine. Granted, the three wines I did taste usually have pretty good pedigree to maximize whatever potential is to be found in the vintage.*

#### **1997 Clos St. Denis- Domaine Dujac**

The 1997 Clos St. Denis from Domaine Dujac is aging quite well and is now drinking with plenty of style and complexity at age sixteen. The deep and complex nose offers up a musky mélange of beetroot, baked cherries, coffee, a fine base of soil tones, herbs, grilled venison, cinnamon and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and starting to drink with real generosity, with a fine core, modest tannins, excellent complexity and a long, tangy and nicely balanced finish. A very fine example of the vintage. 2013-2030. **92.**

#### **1997 Nuits St. Georges “aux Murgers”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet (served from magnum)**

I tasted this wine back at the end of 2009 and Jean-Nicolas Méo’s twentieth anniversary tasting, and I cannot believe five years have gone by and I still have not found occasion to publish these notes! The ’97 Murgers out of magnum is fully mature and drinking very well, offering up a very fresh nose (particularly for the vintage) of black cherries, nutty overtones, espresso, a touch of lead pencil, lovely soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and a bit easy-going at the core, with lovely complexity and balance, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the poised and stylish finish. Given the plumpness of the 1997s out of the blocks, I was a bit surprised that this did not have a bit more stuffing at the core at this point in its evolution, but perhaps that is just the nature of the vintage. A very tasty bottle, but not a top recent vintage for the Méo Murgers. 2009-2025. **89.**

#### **1997 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Dominodes”- Maison Louis Jadot**

The 1997 Dominodes from Louis Jadot is a very fine example of the vintage and the wine is now drinking within its window of peak maturity, though still with many years of life ahead of it. The complex and quite classy nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, orange zest, *champignons*, coffee, forest floor, iron and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a fine core, still a touch of tannin and fine length and grip on the focused and impressively complex finish. A very good bottle from a vintage I have not generally been thrilled with in the past. 2012-2030+. **90.**



*The architect of the very tasty '97 Dominodes, retired Louis Jadot Cellar Master, Jacques Lardière.*

***The 1996 Vintage- Ranking: B (+?)***

*As I have fairly recently written a big report on the 1996 red Burgundy vintage, I do not have a whole lot of new notes to add from the vintage for this article. I still hold out hope that this year will come around and fulfill its truly excellent early promise. As I noted in my feature on the 1996 reds, the wines are generally not measuring up to that promise at the present time, but red Burgundy ages through a series of peaks and valleys, and maybe there are still some peaks to come for this vintage. Despite the rather salutary notes for three of the four wines below, this is a vintage that generally needs keeping in the cellar for at least another four or five years, as the wines are in an awkward phase and are not particularly happy to be opened at the present time.*

**1996 Chambolle-Musigny “les Cras”- Domaine Georges Roumier**

The 1996 les Cras from Domaine Roumier is a gorgeous example of the vintage and is now at its apogee and drinking with great style and breed. Christophe opened this up in the cellar after a very good bottle of 2002 Ruchottes-Chambertin, and this was a decided step up! The beautiful nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, black truffles, gamebird, a bit of charred wood, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and an exotic touch of fresh eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a very sappy core of fruit, great transparency, lovely complexity, melting tannins and a very long,



tangy and laser-like finish. This is a beautifully resolved 1996 red Burgundy that is just entering into its plateau of maturity, where it will delight Burgundy lovers for the next two to three decades! 2013-2040+. **93+**.

**1996 Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Réas”- Domaine Michel Gros**

The bottle of 1996 Clos des Réas that we sampled at this vertical tasting was showing some signs of volatile acidity, and as the importer did not choose to decant the wine, it did not get a good chance to blow off. The bouquet is a blend of raspberries, cherries, *sous bois*, beetroot, gamebirds, a nice base of soil, toasty wood and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, bright and tertiary in complexity, with a good core, still a touch of tannin, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the focused and complex finish. Other than the VA, this was a very strong 1996, and the wine did clear up a bit in the glass and I would have loved to have tried it after it was decanted, as it could well merit a score a few points higher. 2013-2030+. **90+?**

**1996 La Tâche- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

It has been a couple of years since I last crossed paths with the 1996 La Tâche, but the wine was showing enormous potential when I last had the pleasure to taste it. The bouquet is deep, pure and still quite primary in its mélange of red plums, black cherries, Vosne spices, duck, a beautifully complex base of minerality, woodsmoke, a bit of cocoa and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very tangy, with a rock solid core, a fine sense of focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, youthful and vibrant finish. All this vintage of La Tâche needs is more time in the cellar. 2025-2075+. **96.**

**1996 Savigny-lès-Beaune “Narbantons”- Domaine Jean-Marc et Hugues Pavelot**

The 1996 Narbantons from Domaine Pavelot is another of those grumpy 1996 reds which is not drinking at a great place at the present time, but may well rally down the road. The bouquet is a bit rusty in its quite complex aromatic constellation of dark berries, dried cherries, woodsmoke, venison, a touch of cinnamon, *sous bois* and coffee. On the palate the wine is medium-full and developing lovely autumnal elements, with a good core, moderate tannins, sound acids and good length and grip on the finish. The fruit element here seems to be getting a bit tired today and I hope it revives with a bit more bottle age, as the structural elements are not as far along the path. 2013-2030+? **87+?**

***The 1995 Vintage- Ranking: B***

*The 1995 growing season in Burgundy was as topsy-turvy as any of the recent years, but in this vintage, the early spring was warm and got the budbreak underway early, only to have the region hit with snow on May 13<sup>th</sup> on the upper vineyards and frost following on the flatter, lower sections a couple of days later! The flowering in June therefore was very stretched out and not particularly successful, making for a small crop. There was also plenty of mildew to be warded off in the vines once the snow had finally melted. Heat arrived in late June and hydric stress was an issue throughout much of the next two months, so that many vines shut down for periods along the way and ripeness was lagging at the start of September. Chassagne-Montrachet was hit by hail in August. There was some rain in the second week of September, which was beneficial for the vines, but also caused some pressure from rot, to add to the vignerons' worries. Harvest was started on September 21<sup>st</sup>, under good weather conditions, with most producers waiting until the last week of the month to pick the pinot noir and take advantage of the sun and fine blue skies for a bit more ripeness. Malos were slow and the reds are tannic wines, as the hydric stress of mid-summer has left its mark on the wines with rather sturdy and*

*slightly dry-edged tannins. The best wines certainly have the stuffing to outlast their tannins, but the vintage has taken its time evolving in bottle and I have not been opening too many of my bottles in the cellar, as the wines are generally still a bit dominated by their tannins. From the examples I have tasted, it seems that this is a vintage that is far better at the grand cru level than elsewhere, as one might expect, as the grand crus are usually in the finest section of the slope and would have handled the hydric stress of July and August better, and consequently, the tannins often seem a bit riper than in the premier crus. As this year marks their twentieth anniversary, perhaps I should plan a report on the vintage for later this year and get a wider perspective on where the vintage stands at the present time.*

### **1995 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Christophe Roumier**

The 1995 Ruchottes-Chambertin from Christophe Roumier is an excellent bottle in the making, and all this fine wine needs is further bottle age to really blossom into a superb Ruchottes. The bouquet is pure, complex and quite refined in its blend of red and black cherries, cocoa powder, a beautifully elegant base of soil, mustard seed, heather and spiced meats. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with perfectly integrated, moderate tannins, good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2050. **94.**

### **1995 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 1995 Clos Vougeot from Méo-Camuzet is really a beautiful example of the vintage and one of the few 1995s that has not been fairly closed down when I tasted it, as this wine was showing extremely well, albeit still youthful, at the twentieth anniversary tasting. The bouquet is a beautifully pure and classy blend of roasted black cherries, dark plums, forest floor, coffee, a bit of venison, dark chocolate, woodsmoke and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a rock solid core of fruit, modest tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and complex finish. At the end of 2009, I wanted to give this wine another four or five years to fully blossom, so it should be hitting on all cylinders today! 2013-2035. **92.**

### **1995 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg**

I really like the 1995 Clos Vougeot from the Mugneret sisters, as the wine shows excellent promise for a long and very rewarding life in bottle. The bouquet is deep, complex and first rate in its mélange of red and black cherries, roasted venison, *sous bois*, coffee, woodsmoke a very complex base of soil tones, a bit of mustard seed and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fairly broad-shouldered for this bottling, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the soil-driven and promising finish. Still a few years away from primetime drinking, but this will be one of the great sleeper vintages of this wine from the decade of the 1990s. 2018-2050+. **92+.**

### **1995 Volnay “Clos des Ducs”- Domaine Marquis d’Angerville (served from magnum)**

I was a huge admirer of Jacques d’Angerville’s style of wines, which invariably took their time unfolding from behind their structural elements, but which are reference point examples of Volnay and Pommard at their apogees. Given the sturdy nature of the 1995 vintage, it is not too surprising that Monsieur d’Angerville’s Clos des Ducs- in magnum- is still on the young side, but it showed brighter than the 1998 Clos des Ducs paired up with it and will be a lovely wine when it is ready to drink. The bouquet is a fine blend of cherries, quince, gamebirds, forest floor, cocoa, woodsmoke and a superb base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, still chewy and very soil-driven in personality, with a fine core, sound acids

and lovely focus and grip on the long, fairly tannic and very well-balanced finish. This still needs another five or six years to start to really drink well, but it has excellent promise. 2020-2055+. 92+.

### ***The 1994 Vintage- Ranking: C-***

*The 1994 vintage for red Burgundy has aged better than I initially thought it would, but the small handful of wines that I have tasted in recent years have all, to a greater or lesser degree, retained a bit of the chunky profile of the vintage, without the same precision and complexity of top flight vintages. And these are the best of what was a very inconsistent vintage for red wines in the Côte d'Or, as rot was the bi-product of heavy and consistent rains right before harvest in 1994. Up through the first week of September, things had been looking very promising in the vineyards, as it had been a warm and sunny summer, without much rainfall, but the water tables from the winter had been quite good, so fruit had continued to ripen. The first couple of days of rain, starting on the 10<sup>th</sup>, helped with any vines that might have been suffering from hydric stress, but it kept raining, and botrytis put lot of pressure on growers to start collecting grapes, even when maturity was not ideal. It finally stopped raining on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, but by this time almost everyone was done picking in the Côte de Beaune and only the intrepid (such as Laurent Ponsot) were willing to allow the grapes more time out on the vines, as the fruit was really not particularly clean by this time. Sorting was key, as was staring out with moderate yields when the rains hit on September 10<sup>th</sup>, as those with big crops were not going to ever ripen the grapes from that point forward. Out of the blocks, I preferred the four-square, but fruity 1994 reds to the more weedy 1992s, but time has proven the latter vintage to be the far more interesting year for reds from the Côte d'Or, and today, 1992 can provide some absolutely superb and mature wines, whereas the 1994s have remained a bit simple in comparison. The best 1994 reds have decent concentration, moderate to good soil signatures, soft tannins, but sneaky length in their slightly four-square styles. However, there were plenty of thin and unclean reds to be found in this vintage as well. Today, the 1994 vintage is fully mature and the wines are drinking pretty well, with little remaining tannins, the good ones still with plenty of fruit and reasonable complexity. They are not great wines, but at the right price, there is no reason to pass a 1994 red Burgundy by from a conscientious grower, as they can still offer up quite a bit of pleasure.*

### **1994 Musigny- Domaine Georges Roumier**

The 1994 Roumier Musigny has aged far better than I initially imagined and is today a lovely bottle of wine. The deep and complex nose offers up a fine mélange of dusty cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, a beautiful base of soil, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a vibrant topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite velvety on the attack,. With a good core, a slightly four-square personality (that is part and parcel with the style of the vintage), but really lovely length and grip on the complex, gently-tannic and tangy finish. While this is not a great vintage for Christophe Roumier's Musigny, it is still a very lovely drink and a wine that is now fully mature. 2011-2030+. 93.

### **1994 Vosne-Romanée “aux Brûlées”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet (served from magnum)**

The 1994 Domaine Méo-Camuzet Brûlées is a very good example of the vintage and the wine was drinking very well out of magnum back at the twentieth anniversary tasting. The bouquet is superb, jumping from the glass in a mix of plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, chocolate, fresh herb tones, venison, a lovely base of dark soil tones, vanillin oak and an exotic

topnote of mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core, modest tannins and impressive length and grip on the classy and wide open finish. Just a delicious bottle of 1994 Burgundy. 2009-2030. **91.**

#### **1994 Richebourg- Domaine Leroy**

I remember being quite impressed with the apparent quality of both the 1992 and 1994 Domaine Leroy wines when I had the chance to taste several right after release, but this particular bottle of the '94 Richebourg did not age well at all. Today, the nose seems to have collapsed in on itself and shows quite the concocted profile in its mélange of cherries, plums, cocoa powder, new oak and a slightly unclear topnote that seems redolent of bug spray. It is pretty remarkable for its lack of any soil signature whatsoever. On the palate the wine is medium-full, thin in the mid-palate and pinched by its substantial framework of new oak, with a short, eviscerated finish. In my mind, this is how I imagine wines worked hard in the cellar would implode with bottle age, but of course, I have no idea how the wine was actually made in the Leroy cellars. There were no signs that the bottle was off in any way, as the remaining fruit was still fresh and the cork and label all seemed just fine, but the wine had imploded. 2011-2020? **80+?**

#### **1994 Nuits St. Georges “les St. Georges”- Domaine Robert Chevillon**

Back in my merchant days, I sold the 1994 Domaine Chevillon wines, and like a fool, I did not buy any for my own cellar! The '94 les St. Georges has evolved far better than I ever imagined and today offers up a beautiful and *à point* nose of dried cherries, cocoa, new leather, lovely autumnal notes of *sous bois*, venison and a complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully focused, with a fine core, still a bit of tannin and lovely length and grip on the still slightly chewy finish. If one were to nitpick (and this is after all, what I do best ☺), the structural elements here are just starting to poke out a bit on the backend, indicating that it is time to drink this very stylish example of the vintage up over the near-term, as it is likely that the wine will fray a bit more on the finish as the years go by. But, a lovely drink today and at least over the next dozen years. 2012-2025. **92.**

#### ***The 1993 Vintage- Ranking: A***

*The 1993 vintage of red Burgundy remains one of my favorites of the decade, and I rank it right up there with the superb 1999s at the very apogee of vintages from this outstanding ten year run. This was a cooler fruit vintage, with plenty of structure and high acidity, and to my palate, the vast majority of the top wines here remain still too young for primetime drinking. I have a lot in my cellar, but I did not buy as many village wines back in this day than I would have if I knew then what I know now, and of those that I did buy, most of them I drank up before they saw their tenth birthdays, so I do not have as many notes on this level as I should. The premier crus for the most part are still very promising, but also still fairly primary and have not yet started to show all of the aromatic complexity that will come with further bottle age. Conversely, the 1993 grand crus that I have tasted in recent times have shown more complexity on both the nose and palate than the premier crus at this point in their respective evolutions, but this I attribute to the greater level of complexity that they will have to give at full maturity, rather than any indication that they are aging faster than their premier cru counterparts. This is a great, great vintage which will make old bones, and it seems to me to be a waste to be opening bottles now and I would wait at least until 2020 or so to start dipping my toe in the water with my remaining stocks of 1993s.*

*It was rather a surprising growing season to produce such excellent red wines, as it was on again, off again rainy throughout the months of June and July in 1993 and oidium was a problem and mildew the worst that had been scene in the Côte d'Or in forty years. Vignerons were on their tractors most of the summer and constant vigilance was necessary to protect the crop. However, August turned hot and sunny and ripening proceeded nicely, with skins thickening up for the pinot noir and supplying the vintage with its structural backbone. In a rare juxtaposition, the pinot noir was picked ahead of the chardonnay in 1993, as the white grapes had not fared as well in the heat and dry conditions of August and many vines had shut down for an extended period of time. The Ban de Vendange was announced for the 15<sup>th</sup> of September in the Côte de Beaune and growers there gathered their red grapes; the Côte de Nuits started a few days later and everything was generally picked by the first of October. There was intermittent rain during the last two weeks of September, so growers had to dodge showers, but it stayed cool enough that there was no spread of rot from the damp conditions and windows where the grapes could be picked in reasonable weather. The berries were small, the acids relatively high and the skins thick, and this gave wines with black fruity character, fine structures for long-term aging and very good underlying soil signature. Malos were slow, and the wines seemed to gain in depth week by week once they came out of malo and the vignerons were very pleasantly surprised with how well the wines were evolving in the cellars prior to bottling, given the rain at harvest. This was the first vintage where I spent an extended period of time in Burgundy, as I was here for twelve days in the spring of 1995 to taste the vintage, and I was very impressed with the potential the wines showed out of barrel. Post-bottling, 1993 was the most closed and out of sorts red Burgundy vintage I have ever encountered, and it took a good year or two after the mise for the fruit to gain its proper place as the centerpiece of the vintage, after many months of stormy, tannic and aggressively acidic showings. But the wines really started to show their quality by their tenth birthdays and today, though still young, their exceptional quality is self-evident to virtually everyone. This is a great vintage and it is still generally too young for primetime drinking (though if I had held onto my village wines until now, these might be really at a great point), though most premier crus today can offer up a lot of pleasure (though still on their way up). The grand crus are showing very well indeed, but my gut instinct is that the very finest of this category really still deserve another five years or so in bottle to fully blossom.*

### **1993 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Domaine Frédéric Esmonin**

The 1993 Ruchottes-Chambertin from Domaine Frédéric Esmonin is rather a disappointing effort for the vintage and the vineyard. The nose is reasonably complex, but surprisingly, lacks freshness in its blend of black cherries, damp leaves, coffee grounds and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, but also flat and rather dulled, with soft tannins and a short, uninspiring finish. Perhaps this is just an off bottle? ???

### **1993 Griotte-Chambertin- Maison Joseph Drouhin (served from magnum)**

It was a bit of a crime to be opening up this great wine in magnum at such a young age, but as it was not from my cellar and someone else had already pulled the cork, I was very happy to drink this lovely wine in its youth. The bouquet out of magnum is still very youthful and primary, offering up scents of cherries, mustard seed, vinesmoke, coffee, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of gamebird and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite young, with impeccable focus and balance, a good core, outstanding transparency, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the just starting to stir finish. A very fine wine in the making, but give it more time in the cellar- particularly out of magnum! 2020-2075. 94+.

### **1993 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Domaine Pierre Damoy**

The 1993 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze” from Domaine Damoy is a perfectly fine example of red Burgundy, but it is not quite up to the high standards one expects from a prime parcel of this magical *terroir* in a great vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows nice ripe fruit in its mélange of black cherries, a touch of raspberry, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a bit of game, chipotle peppers and spicy wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe for a 1993, with a good core, solid complexity and good length and grip on the gently tannic finish. Not a bad bottle by any means, the '93 Damoy Clos de Bèze is starting to drink quite well, but it does not have quite the complexity and breed of a first rate Bèze. 2011-2035. **91.**

### **1993 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Jacky Truchot**

This was a vintage from Jacky Truchot that I missed buying for my own cellar, so I was delighted when a friend brought this to a tasting a couple of years ago. I had tasted it a year or two before that as well, and the wine is progressing nicely towards maturity and is quite open structurally today, but I would still love to give it at least a few more years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers on the nose to more fully emerge. The bouquet today is still a tad primary, but offers up notes of cherries, beetroot, mustard seed, heather, a lovely base of soil and coffee. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and tangy, with a fine core, excellent transparency, ripe, beautifully-integrated tannins and a very long, focused and bouncy finish. This is not hard at all to drink today, as it is so well-balanced, but there are more fireworks to come if patience is exercised for just a few more years. 2018-2050. **93+.**

### **1993 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Comte de Vogüé**

This particular bottle of the 1993 Comte de Vogüé les Amoureuses was showing quite oddly when I last tasted it in 2011, with a strange, oxidative component and a distinctly black fruity profile that I have also found in the 1991 Musigny from the domaine. I do not know if this was an off bottle or not, as I do not have any bottles in my own cellar. The bouquet is very black fruity in its mélange of black cherries, prunes, chocolate, coffee grounds and damp earth. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and surprisingly flat in profile for the tangy 1993 vintage, with a good core, plenty of complexity, melting tannins, but not a whole lot of Amoureuses personality to be found. Is this representative? ???

### **1993 Musigny- Domaine Jacques Prieur**

I like the underlying quality of the wines at Domaine Jacques Prieur in this era, and also in some of the recent examples I have tasted from time to time, but their style of new wood is not mine and I would find the wines much stronger if they could change their new oak profile a bit in the wines. The 1993 Musigny has a lot going on underneath its veneer of toasty new oak, as it wafts from the glass in a sweet constellation of red and black cherries, plums, chocolate, a complex base of soil tones, fresh herbs and toasty, smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more evolved than many of the 1993s I have tasted of late, with a good core, fine soil signature, melting tannins and a long, slightly chunky finish that shows just a bit of uncovered wood spice these days on the backend. A good, solid example of Musigny, but this could be so much better with a few changes in the cellar! 2013-2035+. **88.**

### **1993 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”- Domaine Robert Arnoux**

I have always had a warm spot for the 1993 Suchots from Domaine Robert Arnoux, which seems less marked by its new wood than more recent vintages of this bottling. The wine was stellar in its youth and has aged very well indeed, so that today it offers up a deep, vibrant and complex bouquet of raspberries, plums, coffee, Vosne spice tones, a lovely base of autumnal soil tones and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and

beautifully focused, with a lovely core of red fruit, excellent transparency and a very long, autumnal and tangy finish of modest tannins and outstanding complexity. A beautiful bottle at its peak, but with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2013-2035. **93.**

**1993 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”- Domaine Confuron-Cotetidot**

The 1993 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots” from Domaine Confuron-Cotetidot is already a tired wine that lacks freshness and vigor. The bouquet is an old wine blend of mocha, dried red fruit, *sous bois*, coffee, woodsmoke and new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, autumnal and only modestly complex, with its structure crumbling, its freshness gone and not a whole lot left to stir the soul on the short and flat finish. One foot already in the grave. 2013-2015. **82.**

**1993 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”- Dominique Laurent**

The 1993 Suchots from Dominique Laurent is fully mature and really very nicely balanced, without the excess of new wood that some of his other bottlings have shown on the infrequent moments when I cross paths with them. The '93 Suchots offers up a very fine nose of cherries, orange zest, duck, beetroot, *sous bois* and cedary new wood. On the palate the wine deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the poised and tangy finish. This does not quite possess the same level of complexity as the '93 Arnoux version of Suchots, but this is a very well-made wine in its own right. One of the best wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Monsieur Laurent. 2013-2035+. **92.**

**1993 Echézeaux- Domaine Georges Mayer**

In contrast to the 1993 Nuits AC from Domaine Georges Mayer, which may now be carrying just a bit too much new wood for its own good, the balance on the 1993 Echézeaux is absolutely impeccable and the wine is a brilliant example of this outstanding vintage. The deep and utterly stunning nose soars from the glass in a blaze of cherries, raspberries, Vosne spice tones, orange zest, duck, summer truffles, forest floor, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a lovely sense of sappiness, superb soil inflection, tangy acids, modest tannins and superb length and grip on the complex and utterly refined finish. A monument to the long and glorious career of the *Maestro*, Henri Mayer! 2013-2040+. **97.**

**1993 Richebourg- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

Prior to this particular bottle of the 1993 Méo-Camuzet Richebourg, served at Jean-Nicolas' twentieth anniversary tasting, I had not crossed paths with this wine since a bottle totally dominated a very in-depth flight of 1993s at Michael Rockefeller and Doug Barzelay's famous Richebourg tasting held many years ago in New York. I was hoping for similar fireworks at the twentieth anniversary event, but the wine had shut down considerably and was in the mood for hibernation, not tasting. The bouquet is closed down, but deep and very promising, as it offers up notes of roasted black cherries, sweet dark berries, cocoa powder, woodsmoke, *sous bois*, venison, a lovely base of soil and toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and hunkered down for hibernation, with a fine core, tangy acids, lovely focus and grip and a very long, tightly-knit and moderately tannic finish. At the tail end of 2009, this wine was sound asleep and in need of at least another six to eight years of cellaring, so it may well be starting to come out of hibernation at the present time and showing its considerable qualities in a more charming manner than it did at our tasting. 2015-2050. **92-95+?**



### **1993 Romanée-St.-Vivant- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

I have loved the 1993 RSV from Maison Drouhin since very early on in its evolution, as this is one grand cru from the vintage that has always been fairly accessible in structure, at least until recently. This most recent bottle seemed to be shutting down just a bit and really wants a bit more time in the cellar to blossom again, but it will be worth the wait, as the wine is really lovely. The deep and pure nose wafts from the glass in a black fruity mélange of black raspberries, sweet dark berries, a touch of fresh nutmeg, lovely minerality, woodsmoke, dark chocolate, fresh herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, very pure and intensely flavored, with a fine core, tangy acids, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the poised and complex finish. This has always been a middleweight in profile, trading on complexity and breed, rather than sheer depth, as is proper with this most refined of *terroirs*. I have drunk the wine with some frequency over the years and it has never failed to excite, but I would now be inclined to let it hibernate for a bit and let it reach its true apogee of peak maturity. 2020-2050. **94.**

### **1993 La Romanée- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils**

The 1993 La Romanée from Maison Bouchard Père et Fils is a very nice bottle of wine in the making, but it is not as refined as the examples being made from this vineyard today by Louis-Michel Liger-Belair. However, be that as it may, this is still an excellent wine, delivering a lovely aromatic constellation of black raspberries, dark plums, Vosne spice tones, espresso, a really lovely base of soil, incipient *sous bois* and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit marked by its new wood tannins on the backend, with a fine core of pure fruit, ripe fruit tannins and a long, complex and promising, albeit youthful finish. I sold this wine in its youth and tasted it on a few occasions and the wood was better integrated at the start than it seems today, but there is plenty of stuffing here and I have a hard time imagining that the wood tannins will not eventually integrated completely. However, the wine is in a less than flattering stage at a moment in this regard, and I would keep it in the cellar for a while longer, as it should prove to be very, very good in the fullness of time. 2020-2050. **93.**

### **1993 Nuits St. Georges- Domaine Georges Mayer**

This was one of the 1993 village wines that I did buy in depth and happily drank my case of this beautiful wine over its first decade in bottle. As readers are probably already aware, this wine was made by Henri Mayer from his brother George's parcel of vines and sold under the George Mayer label. It was an absolutely brilliant village wine in its youth (which helps explain why I plowed through a case of this in a relatively short time), and I was a bit surprised to not love it quite as much when I recently crossed paths with a bottle in the summer of 2014. The wine is still aromatically very complex and vibrant, but the one hundred percent new oak that it was raised in seems to have begun to show a bit of wood tannin on the backend of the palate that was never there when this wine was still absolutely loaded with youthful, sappy fruit. The bouquet today offers up a very lovely blend of red and black plums, dark soil tones, nutskin, gamebirds, lovely spice tones and plenty of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite tangy, with fine focus and mid-palate depth, but with a bit of uncovered oak tannin now showing through on the long finish. This is still a very good bottle of Nuits AC, but it was decidedly better when it was younger and there was sufficient depth of fruit to simply cover all of the wood tannins. Today, despite its beautiful complexity, it has lost a little with the wood coming up to the surface a bit on the backend. 2014-2030+? **89.**



### **1993 Beaune “Clos des Mouches”- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

Other than one oddly shut down and inky bottle, I have had nothing but good results with this excellent vintage of Clos des Mouches, and as I purchased a case of this wine on release, I have had it with some frequency in the last couple of years. The wine is still probably a few years away from its absolute prime, but as Clos des Mouches is one of my eighty-three year-old father’s favorite red Burgundies, I have been opening it with regularity when I visit him, as he is less interested in waiting for wines to reach their apogees these days! The wine offers up a deep and classic ’93 black fruity constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, forest floor, a touch of French roast, gamebirds and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with melting tannins, tangy acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, pure and vibrant finish. A beautiful vintage of Clos des Mouches. 2013-2040. **94.**

### ***The 1992 Vintage- Ranking: B***

*If you had told me back in 1995 that I would end up preferring both 1991 and 1992 to the 1990 vintage for red Burgundies, I would have told you that you were crazy. But, Burgundy has a way of confounding one’s expectations of the wines when they are young, and today, the 1992 reds are preferable to the 1990s in my book and I rank the vintage far higher than I would have ever imagined when the wines were young. This vintage produced red wines that went through a horrible, funky adolescence of intense vegetality, with lots of aromas and flavors of stewed*

vegetables and pepper in ascendancy in the wines, and they really looked like a very poor lot in the latter 1990s. However, after a decade of funkiness, the vintage emerged to show shocking purity of fruit, excellent terroir and really quite classical profiles that are highly enjoyable today. The vintage is fully mature, but there is a lot of pleasure to be had here for those who were smart enough to hold onto their wines (I drank all my 1992s in my own cellar during their vegetal period and did not particularly enjoy them at that time). 1992 was a big crop, with good weather during the growing season undone by just a bit of rain at harvest, which affected the Côte de Nuits more than the Côte de Beaune. The spring had been warm and dry; the midsummer sun arrived in earnest for the months of July and August, but with very little precipitation, so that there was some hydric stress in the vines and blocked maturation for a period towards the second half of August. A bit of rain at the end of August got everything rolling again in the vines, and then came a fortnight of high heat and constant sun, which pushed up sugars nicely and the Ban de Vendange was a week earlier than normal for the Côte de Beaune, as picking started on September 14<sup>th</sup> of this year. Most of the grapes in the south, both red and white were already safely in cellars before a couple of days of heavy rain arrived on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, after which there was a small window of sunny weather again until the 27<sup>th</sup>.

From that point onwards, it rained pretty constantly and vigneron with grapes still out on the vines had missed. With the period of blocked maturation in the latter half of August, physiological ripeness was a bit behind what would have been optimal for the reds, and though the sugars mounted nicely in the heat and fine fortnight of sun in early September, there was never quite that extra element of concentration to the reds in 1992, which might have been attained if that rain on the 22<sup>nd</sup> had held off just one more week. In any event, vigneron, even in the Côte de Nuits, were able to pick a goodly portion of their crop under good conditions on either side of that first rain, and those who got most of their grapes in before the 27<sup>th</sup> made very nice wines in the long run, though the vintage's red wines did not really show its charms for the first decade or more of its lifetime. The wines were pleasantly fruity and velvety out of the blocks, but without the customary shape and mineral drive of a top year, and then shut down for a good five to seven year period of herbal, funky vegetality and stewy fruit that seemed like a disaster. I would guess that the less than ideal physiological ripeness of the vintage was the cause for this very stewy adolescence for the vintage, but around their tenth birthdays, they miraculously began to drink with quite a bit of style and freshness again. This is Burgundy! Interestingly, the wines have shown better structure and focus at maturity than they ever did in their period of puppy fat, and the vintage has far outperformed my initial impressions. I was not yet tasting every year out of barrel back in these days, so I did not see the 1992s until they arrived in New York in bottle in the fall of 1994, and was fairly underwhelmed with the vintage at that point. Even the Burgundians were not particularly sanguine about their reds' prospects, as I recall spending a lot of time tasting the 1993s in cask in the spring of 1995, and after barrel tasting the coming vintage, the growers would offer a couple of 1990s to taste! I actually asked if we could try 1991s when offered 1990s on that trip, despite the 1990s being absolutely spectacular wines to drink at that point in time, as I had seen the 1991s starting to blossom a bit post-bottling just prior to my departure for that two weeks in Burgundy. It turned out to be fortuitous, as there were still lots of unsold 1991s in the pipeline when I got back to New York. But, I had no inkling back in 1995 or 1996 that the 1992 reds would actually turn out to be very fine wines, and it was a very pleasant surprise when a friend opened a bottle of 1992 Roumier Bonnes-Mares for us to share around 2002 or 2003 and opened up my eyes to the '92 vintage!

### **1992 Chambolle-Musigny “les Charmes”- Domaine des Chézeaux**

The 1992 Chambolle “Charmes” from Laurent Ponsot is a complex bottle that still shows a bit of the vintage’s youthful weediness on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a blend of strawberries, beetroot, mustard seed, coffee, fine autumnal soil tones and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with a solid core, fine complexity and good length and grip on the suave and slightly weedy finish. Not a bad drink by any stretch of the imagination, but not quite as good as I might have expected. 2011-2020+. **88.**

### **1992 Vosne-Romanée “aux Reignots”- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils**

The 1992 Reignots from Bouchard Père et Fils is a tasty and fully mature example of the vintage, with a bit of a four-square personality on the palate, but plenty of nicely resolved elements on both the nose and palate that make up for this character. The fine nose offers up a tertiary blend of roasted cherries and raspberries, *sous bois*, coffee, bonfire and gamebirds. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and impressively complex, with melted tannins, sound acids and very good length and grip on the slightly chunky finish. Really a very well-made example of the vintage and a tasty bottle for current drinking. 2011-2025. **88.**

### **1992 Vosne-Romanée “Cros Parantoux”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

Jean-Nicolas Méo’s 1992 Cros Parantoux is a beautiful bottle of wine that is now at its peak of maturity, but still shows plenty of potential ahead of it. The beautiful nose wafts from the glass in an *à point* constellation of roasted plums and cherries, a very complex base of soil tones, duck, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, cocoa and toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and beautifully complex, with a fine core, vibrant acids, melting tannins and excellent grip on the focused, pure and very long finish. A very, very classy example of this sleeper vintage! 2009-2025+. **93.**

### ***The 1991 Vintage- Ranking: A-***

*The 1991 vintage has turned out splendidly for red Burgundy and is one of my favorite vintages for current consumption, as the wines have been fully mature for at least the last decade and are at their peaks of maturity, albeit still with decades of life ahead of them. However, there is one important exception to the generally high quality across the board in the 1991 vintage, and that is in the village of Chambolle-Musigny, where August hail reduced the crop to such unimaginable low levels that the wines have ended up quite uncharacteristically concentrated, broad-shouldered and black fruity in personality, so this is hardly a classic vintage in this commune. It had already been a plenty difficult vintage for vignerons before the hail on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August that blasted Chambolle, as spring was cold and damp and flowering was late and extended into the end of June. This was not auspicious for growers in Gevrey, as hail on the 22<sup>nd</sup> that fell in this village in June caused widespread disruption of the flowering and yields would end up being very, very small in that commune as a result. However, after the late June hail in Gevrey, the entire Côte d’Or enjoyed excellent weather for July and much of August, with soaring temperatures and very little precipitation, so ripening had a chance to recoup a bit from the cold spring and late start to the season. Then, Chambolle was hammered by a hail storm on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, which did serious damage to the line of top premier crus and grand crus. This was late in the season, after the grapes had started to mature fully and the damage was severe, with several domaines going out in the vines in the wake of the storm and removing as many damaged berries that they could spot, as the fear was to get another set of wines like the more hail-affected 1983s, where certain wines show of their hail taint in both aroma and taste. Yields became absolutely miniscule as a result of the hail sorting in Chambolle- for example, Domaine*

*Dujac made no Bonnes-Mares in this vintage and simply blended the small amount of fruit left out on the vines here into their premier cru bottling of Gruenchers to make a more realistically-sized cuvée. Often, after such severe hail, the vines take some time to try and rebuild vegetation, directing energy away from the ripening of the bunches, and this may account a bit for the somewhat atypical style of the '91s here in Chambolle-Musigny. The wines from this commune were quite tannic out of the blocks and not all have aged as well as one might have hoped. However, beyond the August hail centered on Chambolle, the remainder of the growing season ended up being excellent, as the weather was fine for the remainder of the cycle and picking began on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September. Malos were generally late and the wines eventually blossomed to be quite classically styled, (outside of Chambolle), with good soil signatures, solid tannic structures and sound acidities. They did not catch the imaginations of Burgundy lovers right out of the blocks; after the very plush young vintages of 1989 and 1990, the 1991s seemed a bit austere upon release, with the tannins a bit underripe in appearance in comparison to the previous two years, but within the first couple of years after release they began to really settle down in bottle and show fine potential. Today the wines are at their peaks, but with decades of life still ahead of them for the top premier and grand crus and this is one of the top vintages of the decade.*

**1991 Charmes-Chambertin “Trés Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Joseph Roty**

I really love the style and quality of the 1991 vintage *chez* Roty and the '91 Charmes-Chambertin is really starting to come into its own at age twenty. The bouquet offers up a stellar constellation of black cherries, grilled meats, dark chocolate, a bit of bacon fat, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, tangy acids, still a fair bit of fine-grained tannins and outstanding complexity on the long, pure and soil-driven finish. A remarkable wine. 2011-2040. 94+.

**1991 Chambolle-Musigny “les Fuées”- Domaine Jacques Frédéric Mugnier**

The 1991 les Fuées from Frédéric Mugnier is a superb wine and one of the best Chambolles I have tasted in recent times from this vintage. There is no signs of any atypical aromatics or flavors in this wine, which wafts from the glass in a superb constellation of cherries, strawberries, mocha, gamebirds, mustard seed, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very long, with a fine core, excellent complexity, melting tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the *à point* and very refined finish. Just a beautiful bottle of les Fuées at its apogee. 2009-2030+. 92.

**1991 Musigny “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Comte de Vogüé**

The 1991 Musigny from Comte de Vogüé was really a fine-looking wine out of the blocks, but this is one Chambolle that has not aged anywhere near as well as I initially hoped it would. This most recent bottle was already quite mature and seemed to be tiring a bit on the palate, though the nose remains quite complex in its more idiosyncratic guise. The bouquet is a deep-pitched blend of black cherries, damp earth, sealing wax, bonfires, venison, orange rind, singed heather and a bit of chipotle pepper in the upper register- hardly classic Musigny, but certainly complex! On the palate the wine is full-bodied and very black fruity, with a good core and soil signature, but again, very deep-pitched and almost resinous, with modest tannins and the first vestiges of oxidation poking out on the backend. Maybe there are better bottles out there, but this one looked fine in terms of fill, capsule and cork and I really do think this is just how the

wine has evolved in the tiny and hail-traumatized vintage of 1991 in Chambolle. 2012-2020+?  
85+?

### **1991 Nuits St. Georges “les Cailles”- Domaine Robert Chevillon**

The 1991 Domaine Chevillon les Cailles is a brilliant bottle of wine at its absolute apogee. The marvelously complex nose soars from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, *sous bois*, roasted quail, coffee, nutty overtones, leather, a fine, complex base of dark soil tones, fresh herbs and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and brilliantly complex, with a fine core, outstanding focus and elegance, melting tannins and superb length and grip on the utterly refined and *à point* finish. As this wine so eloquently demonstrates, all one needs to do is wait patiently for the inherent elegance of Nuits St. Georges’ top premier crus to arrive! A great, great wine at its zenith, but with decades of life still ahead of it. 2014-2040. 95.

### ***The 1990 Vintage- Ranking: C+***

*I had intended to write a full article on the 1990 red Burgundy vintage in the coming year, but have decided to just include my accrued tasting notes on wines from the vintage in this report. I had loved this vintage out of the blocks, as the wines were pure, deep and stunning in their first blush of youth, but found it became progressively more prune and overripe in its fruit component as it crossed the threshold of its tenth anniversary. I ended up selling off almost all the bottles I had in the cellar (and I had purchased this vintage very aggressively in its youth) and replacing them with their 1999 versions in the early years of the new millennium. However, as the wines have passed their twentieth birthdays, they have seemed to get a bit less marked by their overripe, roasted, chocolaty and prune fruit tones and to begin to show again a bit more terroir than they did during that particularly overcooked fruit-driven stretch of their evolutions. As I abandoned ship on the vintage more than a decade ago, most of the bottles I cross paths with today are due to the generosity of others. Some wines still seem quite overripe to my palate, but others are showing more soil character once again (they were not short of terroir at all when they were young!) and are better drinks at age twenty to twenty-four than they were at age twelve or thirteen. It is still not one of my favorite vintages, as the plush fruit has gotten a bit buxom and straightforward in many of the wines as they have aged, and even where there is ample soil tones to complement the fruit, the wines are still rather thick and lacking in transparency, verve and bounce in comparison to other top vintages from this epoch. I far prefer the 1991s for instance, over the 1990s. But, that said, the vintage in general has gotten better over the last few years and I do not dislike drinking them as much today as was the case in the early years of the twenty-first century. Still a bit of a second division vintage of red Burgundy in my book, but better than it was and still with plenty of life ahead of it, so it may one day fulfill even more of its early promise than seemed possible when the wines celebrated their tenth birthdays. Of the notes that follow, my friends know of my disillusionment with the 1990s and often try to trot out their favorites from the vintage to re-ignite my love affair with the vintage, so I have tried in recent times the crème de la crème from this year, and my laudatory notes on those wines should not be misconstrued as overt enthusiasm for the vintage in general. Not yet anyway.*

*The 1990 red Burgundy crop was very large- ten percent larger than the generosity of 1989, which was already considered a big crop- despite some unsettled June weather at flowering, which produced a bit of an uneven pace to full ripeness at the end of the season.*

*However, the spring had been mild and the vines were a bit ahead of schedule, which proved beneficial, as hot and sunny weather arrived from July first and stayed that way until the end of August. 1990 was a drought vintage during these two months, which caused hydric stress that was particularly difficult for younger vines with less developed root systems, but a series of thunderstorms during the last week of August get maturation rolling again across the board, and the remainder of the growing season was excellent, with plenty of sun and temperatures that were not too warm. The grapes ripened beautifully, and the fine “fin de saison” allowed vigneronns to pick each parcel as the ripeness was optimal and the uneven pace of flowering and the large crop size were able to be negated. Picking began on September 20<sup>th</sup> in the Côte de Beaune and followed a week later in the Côte de Nuits, with many domaines finishing up as late as the 10<sup>th</sup> of October with their parcels that had lagged just a bit in ripening due to later flowering or a large number of bunches. The one caveat of the fine growing season was that the two months of drought in July and August had caused many vines to shed some of their leaves, and many of the bunches got a bit sun-burned as a result. This was the Achilles’ Heel of the vintage in the long term, as the roasted and slightly pruney character to the fruit of this vintage, that came on from about age seven forwards, is most likely a result of the sun burn, though some vigneronns did wait too long to pick in 1990 and ended up with notes of sur maturité the old fashioned way as well. As I noted above, the vintage did not show this characteristic at all (or in only a very tiny handful of wines, and I drank a ton of young 1990 red Burgundy) and the wines were truly spectacular out of the blocks. Time has not been as kind to the vintage as I expected early on, and early quality comparisons to 1964, 1959 and 1949 now seem inaccurate and overly optimistic. However, that said, the vintage is far more pleasing today than eight or ten years ago, so perhaps it is going to rally a bit and move up the ladder a bit with further bottle age. It is never going to be another 1949 vintage, but if it could rise to the level of the more roasted, but deep and complex 1947s, I think everyone would be happy who still has these wines in their cellars. Structurally, the vintage is ready to drink, and has been for several years, but with more terroir starting to show and the fruit seeming to freshen up a bit from its nadir of roasted pruniness, perhaps keepers of this vintage might be rewarded by giving the wines further bottle age. Certainly the concentration is here to carry the vintage for several more decades and with the progress some of the wines have made in the last five years, I would be inclined to wait on this vintage a bit longer- if I had any left in the cellar!*

### **1990 Griottes-Chambertin- Domaine Joseph Roty**

The 1990 Domaine Roty Griottes-Chambertin is one of the finest wines I have tasted from this year, as it offers up a deep, ripe, but very fresh aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, grilled meats, lovely spice tones, a very complex base of chalky soil nuances, a bit of chocolate, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and still fairly chewy on the backend, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and complex finish. This is quite noteworthy for its freshness for the vintage. 2015-2050. **94+**.

### **1990 Chambolle-Musigny “Premier Cru”- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 1990 Chambolle Premier Cru from Joseph Drouhin is quite typical of the vintage, with a roasted and dried fruit character these days, but also with fine depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The complex bouquet offers up a fully mature and tertiary blend of roasted plums, desiccated cherries, tea, heather, chocolate, roasted squab, forest floor and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and ready, with a plump



core, pretty good acidity for a 1990, melted tannins and a long, velvety finish. Not bad at all, in the context of the vintage. 2012-2025+. **89.**

**1990 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Louis Jadot (375 ml.)**

Jacques Lardière produced some of my favorite wines of the vintage in 1990, as the bottles I have crossed paths with in recent times have maintained their freshness very well indeed and seem a bit less marked by the *sur maturité* of the vintage than a great many other wines. The 1990 Bonnes-Mares, out of half bottle, was showing lovely promise when I last tasted it, jumping from the glass in a beautiful, black fruity mélange of sweet dark berries, black truffles, coffee, *sous bois*, roasted venison, woodsmoke and a gorgeous base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with fine complexity and balance, moderate tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex finish. In half bottle, this was only a few years away from primetime drinking, but in regular sized format, I would imagine that this is still at least five or six years away from truly blossoming, as the Louis Jadot 1990 reds are some of the more structured wines to be found in the vintage. This is a lovey bottle in the making. 2017-2050. **93.**

**1990 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier**

Christophe Roumier's Bonnes-Mares is a very good example of the vintage, as it offers up a deep and still quite youthful nose of black cherries, plums, chocolate, venison, mustard seed, smoke, a touch of beetroot and a really very good base of autumnal soil tones (particularly in the context of the vintage). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a thick core of fruit, really very good *terroir*, ripe, moderate tannins and a very long, powerful and promising finish. This wine is still fairly primary in personality and I would opt for giving it further bottle age, but it is one of my favorite 1990 red Burgundies that have crossed my path in the last few years. 2018-2050+. **94.**

**1990 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Prieuré-Roche**

The 1990 Clos Vougeot from Domaine Prieuré-Roche is more interesting on the nose than the palate, as the new wood here has produced a rather dry-edged backend that is defined by a fair bit of uncovered wood tannins. The bouquet is really pretty fresh for a 1990, offering up scents of cherries, leather, road tar, forest floor, a bit of barnyard and toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and complex, but chunky from its wood treatment. The core is sufficient, but not plump and the finish is a bit out of balance for sloppy oak management. The wine is certainly drinkable, but bottom tier second division. 2011-2020. **86.**

**1990 Vosne-Romanée "Suchots"- Domaine Jean Grivot**

The 1990 Suchots from Etienne Grivot is a very nice example of the vintage, with pretty good freshness and lovely complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a refined blend of black cherries, plums, venison, Vosne spice tones, forest floor, coffee and a nice touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still a tad youthfully chunky, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, complex and fairly low acid finish. This may get a bit malty in profile as the years go by, but for the next several years, it is going to provide plenty of enjoyment. 2013-2035+. **90+.**

**1990 Vosne-Romanée "Clos des Réas"- Domaine Michel Gros**

The 1990 Clos des Réas from Michel Gros is a good, solid example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep and roasted, but certainly not prune in its aromatic constellation of baked cherries and plums, coffee, forest floor, a bit of cigar wrapper, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a touch of toasty new wood still hanging around in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fully mature, with a plump core, melting tannins and quite good length and

grip on the complex and velvety finish. This is a strong 1990 and fully ready to drink. 2013-2030. **89.**

**1990 Vosne-Romanée “aux Brûlées”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

I cannot overstate how beautiful this wine was in the first blush of youth, when I had occasion to drink it with immense pleasure. My small handful of bottles were long consumed by the time I had a chance to try this at Jean-Nicolas’ twentieth anniversary tasting, and the wine seemed a bit more overripe at this point in its evolution than it did when young. It is still a good, solid 1990, but a bit prune now, as it offers up notes of plums, chocolate, coffee grounds, prunes, herbs, bonfire and forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fairly deeply-pitched, with good length and grip, a fairly soft structure and a bit of prune also defining the long finish. Not a bad wine in the context of the vintage, but there are so many more exciting vintages of Méo-Camuzet Brûlées out there from this era! 2009-2030. **88.**

**1990 Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

The 1990 DRC Echézeaux is still quite tightly-knit, which I take as a very good sign for its ultimate level of quality. The bouquet offer sup a deep and pure mélange of raspberries, cherries, a bit of blood orange, duck, beetroot, exotic spice tones, a touch of bonfire, *sous bois* and a bit of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, tangy and showing signs of the autumnal elements to come, with a good core, melting tannins, great focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This wine is already a great pleasure to drink today, but I have the distinct impression that it is still climbing and will be even better with further bottle age. 2010-2050. **93.**

**1990 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

The 1990 Grands Echézeaux from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is an utterly brilliant example of the vintage, soaring from the glass in a complex blaze of red and black cherries, plums, lavender, venison, woodsmoke, *sous bois*, a touch of celery seed and smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and utterly refined on the attack, with the broad shoulders of the vintage playing to fine advantage with the inherent elegance of the wine this year. The core is pure and sappy, the tannins modest and seamless and the finish is very, very long, poised and gloriously complex. I am not sure if this a tad more evolved than the 1990 Echézeaux, or if the wine simply has a bit more material and therefore is even more stunning to drink at a similar stage of evolution. Dynamite wine! 2010-2050. **95.**

**1990 Romanée-St.-Vivant- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

The 1990 RSV from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is also a beautiful example of the vintage, but it seems a bit further along its evolutionary march than either the Echézeaux or Grands Echézeaux. The truly superb nose offers up scents of raspberries, beetroot, cola, duck, woodsmoke, forest floor and smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and already quite tertiary, with a fine core, lovely soil inflection and a long, modestly tannic and slightly chunky finish. In this wine, the ripeness of the vintage has taken away just a hair of the inherent elegance of the *terroir* on the backend of the palate, but it has countered this with a bit more mid-palate muscle than in many vintages. A lovely wine, but I suspect it will not be quite as long-lived as either of the above two wines. 2010-2035+. **94.**

**1990 Romanée-St.-Vivant- Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat**

The 1990 RSV from Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat is a superb example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and fully mature, soaring from the glass in a lovely blaze of raspberries, coffee, Vosne spices, a very complex of soil tones, cinnamon, coffee and a touch of fallen leaves in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and suave on the attack,

with a lovely core, fine focus and complexity, melted tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced and resolved finish. A lovely wine. 2013-2030. **93.**

**1990 Richebourg- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

The 1990 Richebourg from DRC is another excellent example of the vintage, but the ripeness of the year here has given the wine a more advanced profile than many of the other wines from the domaine in this vintage. The bouquet is deep and beautiful in its mélange of raspberries, red plums, venison, coffee, woodsmoke, spice tones, a bit of acorn and a lovely soil signature that is already getting quite autumnal and redolent of fallen leaves. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and again, quite broad-shouldered, with a plump core, fine complexity and length and a very long, modestly tannic and well-balanced finish. Good juice in a vintage that seems tailor-made for this cru. 2010-2040. **94.**

**1990 La Tâche- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

This particular bottle of the 1990 La Tâche offered up simply stunning aromatic complexity on the nose, but seemed surprisingly autumnal and a bit unstructured on the palate. I would have fully expected to like this wine the best of the lineup (though all of these 1990 DRCs were tasted side by side, double-blind), but that was not the case on this particular day. The bouquet is first rate, jumping from the glass in a blaze of black raspberries, beetroot, venison, forest floor, woodsmoke, chocolate, a bit of acorn and a topnote of cola. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite chocolaty today, with a fine core, broad and generous depth on the attack, suave tannins and a very long, autumnal and voluptuous finish. This is very good, but I have to imagine there are even better bottles of this wine out there, as this particular bottle mirrored stylistically a bottle of 1990 La Tâche I tasted at the domaine several years ago and was also not singing. 2010-2040+. **91+.**

**1990 Pommard “Clos des Epeneaux”- Domaine Comte Armand**

The 1990 Clos des Epeneaux from Domaine Comte Armand is an over-extracted and quite dulled example of the vintage. The ham-fisted bouquet is a mélange of cassis, dark berries, espresso, woodsmoke, venison and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerfully built, but lacking freshness, detail and complexity. The finish is long, tannic and plodding, with a bit of firm tannin that seems likely to always be a part of the equation. The wine will continue to cruise along for at least a couple of decades, but I do not envision it ever improving. Nothing special here. 2010-2030. **82.**

**1990 Volnay “Champan”- Domaine Marquis d’Angerville (served from magnum)**

The 1990 d’Angerville Champan is one of the more typical 1990s, with its roasted character and chocolaty overtones. The bouquet is a blend of prune, heather, coffee, charred wood, chocolate and forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in profile, with a good core of sweet chocolate-covered fruit, some rustic tannins, good focus and balance, but an overtly dried leaf, autumnal component poking out on the dusty finish. This is okay, but no better and a rather typical, overripe and disappointing ’90 red Burg. 2013-2030+. **83.**

***The 1989 Vintage- Ranking: B***

*The 1989 vintage has aged far better than I initially thought it would, as these wines were plump, forward and utterly charming out of the blocks, but did not seem destined to make old bones. However, they have really stood the test of time very well, seemingly picking up more soil nuances as the years have gone by, and are more serious wines today than at any time in their history. It was a very precocious year, with a warm and early spring getting the vines going*

*early and everything was ahead of schedule throughout the growing season, with harvest starting in mid-September. It was a hot summer, but not as warm as it was in Bordeaux in this year, and the grapes were picked under very warm conditions as well, so it was important to keep an eye on fermentation temperatures. The skins were thin, so it was never a particularly tannic vintage, and the heat at the end of the growing season produced low acid wines that drank well very early, but did not seem destined to age more than medium-term. There was a roasted element to the fruit of the wines early on- not particularly strident- but the wines were nowhere near as fresh out of the blocks as the 1990s! Over time, however, the '89s have seemed to freshen up very nicely, while the 1990s got more overripe in personality, and the very good balances of the top 1989 red Burgundies have stood them very well, despite the rather modest tannins and the vintage continues to drink with great style and complexity today. As the puppy fat of fruit has receded over the years it has become evident that there was more signature of soil to the vintage in general than it seemed early on and the wines are really quite lovely. The best will continue to cruise along for several more decades to come. This is a very pretty vintage for current drinking and is a very classic example of the non-linear way that red Burgundy ages.*

### **1989 Charmes-Chambertin- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The Charmes-Chambertin at Joseph Drouhin is one of my favorite “sleeper” grand crus in their lineup, but this particular bottle of the 1989 feel into the “good, but not great” camp. The nose is a complex and tertiary blend of cherries, coffee, damp earth, grilled meat, herb tones and autumnal soil elements. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave on the attack and shows plenty of stuffing at the core, but it is not that vibrant today and also seems a bit muddled in terms of focus. The finish is long, meltingly tannic and fairly low acid, with good complexity and soil signature, but missing a bit of a spark. Perhaps it is just this bottle, as other 1989 Drouhins I have tasted in the last five or six years have been very strong examples of their respective *terroirs* and the vintage. 2009-2025+? **88+?**

### **1989 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Domaine Georges Mugneret**

The 1989 Ruchottes-Chambertin from Domaine Mugneret is a lovely wine, with a beautifully complex and perfumed nose and very good depth and length on the palate. The fine bouquet is a blend of plums, black cherries, a bit of grilled meat, incipient notes of *sous bois*, mustard seed, dark soil tones and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with fine complexity, lovely transparency, melting tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. A fine, fine example of the vintage. 2012-2035. **93.**

### **1989 Clos de la Roche “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Ponsot**

I have not had the pleasure to taste too many 1989s from Laurent Ponsot, but based on this magical Clos de la Roche “Vieilles Vignes”, it is quite clear that this is a brilliant vintage for the domaine. The beautifully elegant and complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, plums, chocolate, gamebirds, a marvelously complex base of soil tones, summer truffles, woodsmoke and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined, with a beautiful core of pure fruit, great soil signature, melting tannins, good acids and a very, very long, complex and exceptionally velvety finish. A beautiful bottle of wine from Laurent’s hippy days, showing that even in that epoch, he knew a thing or two about making stunningly beautiful wines! 2013-2040. **96.**

### **1989 Vosne-Romanée “aux Brûlées”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

Jean-Nicolas Méo's first vintage was really outstanding, and the wines have aged beautifully. The '89 Brûlées is fully mature and gorgeous, as it wafts from the glass in a complex and refined constellation of cherries, raspberries, cinnamon, *sous bois*, coffee, Vosne spices, gamebirds and a stylish framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a lovely core, superb complexity and grip, melting tannins, bright acids and gorgeous length and grip on the ethereal and very complex finish. I had a few bottles of this rare wine in my cellar in the early days, but it was so sexy in its black fruity and exotic youth that I could not keep my hands off of my bottles and they have been gone many a year now. Consequently, I was extremely happy to be served this great wine while tasting with some of the *Tastevin* members of the Atlanta chapter back in the spring of 2013. A beautiful wine. 2013-2030+. **94.**

### **1989 Echézeaux- Domaine Georges Mayer**

The 1989 Georges Mayer bottling of Echézeaux is a beautiful wine that is now into its absolute apogee of peak drinkability and offers up a lovely, tertiary aromatic and flavor profile. The first class bouquet jumps from the glass in a very complex and nicely autumnal blend of plums, desiccated cherries, venison, *sous bois*, woodsmoke, Vosne spices and still a nice dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and lovely balance on the long, complex and autumnal finish. This wine may have been a bit more flamboyant in its more voluptuous younger days, but it has aged very well indeed and is still a truly lovely bottle of Echézeaux. 2012-2025+. **94.**

### **1989 Nuits St. Georges “aux Murgers”- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

This note also comes from the domaine's twentieth anniversary celebration back at the end of 2009. The bouquet on the 1989 Murgers is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of black cherries, pomegranate, a lovely base of soil tones, a bit of Nuits nuttiness, chocolate, venison, bonfire and toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely resolved, with a good core, fine focus and grip and good, but not great balance on the finish, as there is just a touch of uncovered wood tannin now poking out on the backend. The vintage's ripeness also shows here with just a touch of backend pruniness to the fruit component, which keeps the score down a bit, but there is a lot of complexity here, and I suspect my score might have been higher if this was not served amongst such a stellar lineup of great wines! 2009-2025+. **89.**

### **1989 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Lavières”- Domaine Camus-Bruchon**

The 1989 les Lavières from the Camus family is a very fine example of the vintage, though the wine does not quite have the same sense of polish as the top premier crus from the Côte de Nuits. The bouquet is deep, complex and developing nicely in its mélange of cherries, red currants, soil, venison, fresh herb tones, *sous bois*, a bit of bonfire and lovely minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and still fairly young for the vintage, with a fine core, good focus and grip, blossoming complexity and a very long, still slightly chewy finish. This may still be a touch on the young side at age twenty-one and will get even more suave with further bottle age, but I get the sense that this will simply be a slightly more rustic vintage for this outstanding bottling. 2010-2030+. **88+?**



### ***The 1988 Vintage- Ranking: B***

*The 1988 vintage of red Burgundy is starting to open up quite well, and though there are a percentage of wines that have crossed my path in the last few years that seem a bit “rusty pipe-like” in aromatic and flavor profile, there are far more that seem to finally be blossoming fully from behind their structural elements and belatedly starting to drink with plenty of complexity and style. This vintage has taken an awful long time to start to come around (much like the 1966 Bordeaux vintage, which was also rather sinewy behind its structural elements for decade after decade), but the top 1988s now seem to be emerging very nicely and a great many premier crus are now fully mature and offering up lovely textural elements to go along with their layers of fruit and mineral complexity, and many of the grand crus are starting to really blossom as well. It is a high acid vintage with fairly high tannic content as well, and the combination of the two has made them a bit hard to enjoy from the ten year point forward of their evolutions, but I have had some very, very good 1988s of late and I am starting to upgrade this vintage a bit more with each passing year. However, it is not a consistent vintage, as the weather was a bit of a roller coaster throughout the growing season, with periods of sun and warmth interspersed with clouds, rain and cool temperatures. There was quite a bit of rain in the middle of September, and it was incumbent on vignerons to wait for a few more weeks to allow the rain to work through and the grapes to fully ripen. Not everyone waited, so there are some lean and underripe 1988 reds out there, but for those who did choose to wait to start picking, they were rewarded with excellent weather on into October and mounting ripeness and phenolic maturity in their bunches.*

*The top 1988 wines should still keep for many decades to come and there is no rush to drink them, but they are really starting to show quite well, particularly at table, where their higher acids really work well with a wide variety of cuisine. While it is not a consistently excellent vintage like 1999, nor anywhere near as fleshy as many recent years, the top 1988 wines are really starting to come around now and will be even better over the course of the coming years. For those who prize red Burgundy for its inimitable complexity of soil nuance, coupled with purity of fruit and tangy personalities, the 1988 vintage looks likely to (finally) be emerging as a reference point for this style of vintage.*

### **1988 Charmes-Chambertin “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Truchot-Martin**

I am fortunate to still have a few bottles of this great wine in my cellar, as it is one of my favorite 1988 red Burgundies. This was the first vintage that I ever tasted *sur place* with Jacky Truchot, and I will never forget just how lovely these wines were out of barrel and how well they have stood the test of time. Today, the gorgeous nose offers up a red fruity and very transparent blend of cherries, strawberries, mustard seed, a very complex base of soil, coffee, a gentle base of grilled meats and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very soil-driven, with a lovely core of red fruit, tangy acids, great focus and balance and a very long, pure and complex finish. The intensity of flavor here, without undue weight, is just stunning. 2013-2035+.

**95.**

### **1988 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Christophe Roumier**

The 1988 Ruchottes-Chambertin from Christophe Roumier is drinking very well today, but like many 1988s, there would be no harm in letting this wine snooze away in a cool corner of the cellar for another decade! The bouquet is deep, complex and quite classic in its blend of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, gentle notes of grilled meat, a fine, fine base of soil, woodsmoke and a bit of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and very soil-driven in personality, with a very good core of fruit, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the still modestly tannic finish. Quite a good drink today, but probably even better somewhere down the road. 2010-2040+. **92.**

### **1988 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Domaine Armand Rousseau**

The 1988 Clos de Bèze from Charles Rousseau is a great, great wine and has to be one of the wines of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and very spicy in its aromatic constellation of cherries, raspberries, orange zest, exotic Asian spices, a gloriously complex base of soil, gentle notes of game and a fine framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and magically complex, with a sweet core of red fruit, melting tannins, tangy, perfectly-integrated acids and great purity and elegance on the very long, vibrant and absolutely seamless finish. This was the very last vintage of Rousseau Clos de Bèze before the parcel the family purchased from Domaine Marion was added to the cuvée, and the wine definitely has a slightly more red fruity character back in this era. A great, great vintage of this wine, which may one day look to be the second coming of the legendary 1966 Rousseau Clos de Bèze, as the two wines are very similar stylistically. 2011-2040. **96+.**

### **1988 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac**

The 1988 Clos de la Roche from Domaine Dujac is drinking beautifully today, with the tangy acids of the vintage giving the wine a beautiful bounciness on the backend and keeping the red fruit component vibrant. The wine is quite autumnal on both the nose and palate, which works beautifully with the bright fruit tones, as the bouquet delivers scents of cherries, strawberries, forest floor, venison, woodsmoke, mustard seed, cinnamon and cedary wood. On

the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, modest tannins and a long, focused and very classy finish. This is not a particularly powerful vintage of Clos de la Roche, but it possesses fine intensity of flavor, excellent balance and the potential to cruise along for several more decades to come. Lovely juice. 2013-2040. **93.**

#### **1988 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier**

The 1988 Clos de la Roche from Hubert Lignier is really a terrific example of the vintage, and is a wine that offers up excellent balance for a 1988, with the tannins perfectly integrated and buried in lovely fruit. The very complex bouquet offers up an excellent blend of dried cherries and strawberries, orange zest, mustard seed, venison, coffee, *sous bois* and vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very complex, with a blossoming core of red fruit, superb soil signature, fine focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic and still slightly chewy finish. Just a lovely 1988 that is at the cusp of its apogee of peak drinkability. 2013-2040. **94.**

#### **1988 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Truchot-Martin**

The 1988 vintage of Clos de la Roche from Jacky Truchot is really a terrific bottle of wine, with the suave style of Monsieur Truchot perfectly rounding out some of the rough edges of the vintage. In many vintages, I have a slight preference for the Truchot family's Charmes-Chambertin over their Clos de la Roche, but in 1988, it is a tie, as both wines are stellar. The Clos de la Roche offers up a deep and pure bouquet of cherries, beetroot, *sous bois*, gamebirds, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a touch of orange peel, coffee and a discreet topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and intensely flavored, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, bright acids and a very long, complex and meltingly tannic finish. This is one of the most beautifully balanced 1988s out there. 2011-2040+. **95.**

#### **1988 Chambolle-Musigny "les Feusselottes"- Domaine Georges Mugneret**

1988 was the last vintage produced by Dr. Georges Mugneret, as he fell ill and passed away at an untimely young age early the following year. This was also the first vintage of his wines that I ever offered as a young wine merchant, and would have loved to have had the opportunity to meet Dr. Mugneret if fate had been a bit kinder. In any case, I have certainly been fortunate to taste a wide array of the marvelous wines that he made during his career, and this most recent bottle of 1988 Feusselottes was drinking very well indeed, with still a bit of the sturdiness of the vintage in evidence, but plenty of complexity and breed to go along with its bit of remaining tannin. The fine bouquet is a vibrant blend of dried cherries, blood orange, slightly rusty soil tones, coffee, gamebirds and an exotic topnote of eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, moderate tannins and very good balance on the complex finish. This may always be a bit marked by the structure of the vintage and never attain quite the customary elegance of top flight Chambolle-Musigny, or it may still be a bit on the young side and a more svelte profile will appear with a bit more bottle age. In any case, the wine is drinking quite well, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. 2012-2035. **89+.**

#### **1988 Musigny- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 1988 Musigny from Maison Drouhin is a lovely wine that is just starting to get close to primetime drinking, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of roasted cherries, orange rind, heather, coffee, *sous bois*, mustard seed, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and tangy, with lovely focus and grip, fine intensity of flavor, superb soil signature and a very long, modestly tannic and complex finish. This is not overly generous on the palate today, and may never be so, but it is complex and nicely balanced and is starting to drink quite well at



the present time. Maybe, like some of the 1972s, with further bottle age, the wine will really blossom texturally on the palate. 2015-2045+. **93+**.

**1988 Vosne-Romanée “Brûlées”- Domaine Leroy**

I once had a few of these in my cellar, but drank them fairly early on in their evolution, when they offered up some of the best youthful drinking of any of the premier crus from the '88 vintage in my own cellar. The wine has lost a bit over the years and now seems a bit hollow at the core, though it remains very good on the nose and does offer good flavor complexity as well. The bouquet is a blend of cherries, raspberries, herbs, woodsmoke, *sous bois*, orange zest and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and complex, with melting tannins, tangy acids and good focus and grip on the moderately long finish. The wine dips a bit in the middle, as it does not have a very good core these days, but it is not a bad drink for the relative near-term. As good as one would expect from Madame Leroy's lofty reputation? No chance, but it is not too bad. 2012-2022. **88**.

**1988 Vosne-Romanée “Cros Parantoux”- Domaine Henri Jay**

The 1988 Cros Parantoux from Monsieur Jay is an outstanding bottle of red Burgundy that is starting to drink very well indeed, but still has decades of life ahead of it and may well offer up more generosity on the palate with a bit more bottle age. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a blend of crushed raspberries, red currants, fresh thyme, beautifully complex minerality, orange rind, *sous bois*, cinnamon, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, long and intensely flavored, with a good core, tangy acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, complex and transparent finish that still sports a bit of tannin and excellent grip. This is not a vintage that delivers the more plush style that Henri Jay was famous for, but the wine is outstanding and very much representative of its vintage and glorious *terroir*. I would be inclined to leave it alone in the cellar for another five years and let its structural elements continue to relax a bit more. 2012-2040+. **94+**.

**1988 Richebourg- Domaine Jean Grivot**

The 1988 Richebourg from Etienne Grivot is still a fairly young example of the vintage and I suspect that even more complexity will emerge with further bottle age, despite the wine not being all that tannic today. The bouquet is a fine blend of cherries, raspberries, woodsmoke, a bit of celery seed, a lovely base of soil, cinnamon, coffee and a bit of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty extracted in style, with a good core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. A good, solid example of the *climate* and vintage. 2013-2035+. **92**.

**1988 Nuits St. Georges “Vaucrains”- Domaine Robert Chevillon**

The 1988 Vaucrains from Domaine Robert Chevillon continues to blossom beautifully with further bottle age, and this example was drinking with great style and breed. The deep and complex nose offers up a very classy blend of black cherries, red plums, venison, woodsmoke, a touch of nutskin, fresh herb tones, a marvelously complex base of soil tones and a touch of balsam bough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now quite sappy at the core, with excellent focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin to resolve and outstanding length and grip on the very, very transparent and complex finish. A terrific 1988 that is only going to get better with further bottle age, but which is drinking very well indeed at the present time. 2014-2050+. **94+**.

### ***The 1987 Vintage- Ranking: C+***

*The 1987 red Burgundy vintage was really lovely in its day, with these medium-bodied and quite tangy wines offering up really classic expressions of their underlying terroir and drinking very beautifully right out of the blocks. I drank a ton of these when they were languishing in the market here in New York, as stocks had backed up in the pipeline and the subsequent vintages of '89, '90 and '91 had really taken the luster off of the forgotten 1987s. Consequently, the wines were deeply discounted and were available for remarkably low prices (\$40 a bottle for Rousseau Chambertin or Drouhin Musigny sound okay?), and only a few connoisseurs seemed to know just how good they were at the time- at least for more near-term drinking. However, as they were generally wines of fairly modest depth of fruit, little tannin and very tangy acids, they were not built for the long haul, and many began to get consumed by their acidities as they reached their fifteenth birthdays. It was a cooler vintage, as weather during the summer months was really very cool, grey and damp. However, the month of September was beautiful and really took a disastrous crop and made it perfectly sound, if not all that remarkably ripe. It was a late harvest, with the Côte de Beaune picking in the last week of September and the Côte de Nuits in early October. Rain around the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October complicated things for growers in the north, and one was best to wait a bit and let the water work through the plants' systems, if possible. The pinot noir berries tended to be small in 1987, with fairly modest juice, so that the wines ended up with good skin to juice ratios and pretty good structural elements to go along with their tangy acids. They were very transparent and pretty wines out of the blocks, with medium-full personalities, lovely fruit tones and great expressions of terroir. I drank a ton of 1987s in their prime, and I really have this vintage to thank for the far better depth of remaining wines from 1988, 1991 and 1993 in my cellar today, as I would most certainly have drunk more of these vintages in their youths if I had not had such a beautiful collection of wide open 1987s to enjoy at that time! I would have ranked this vintage a very solid "B" when the wines were at their best. I occasionally still cross paths with one here or there, and though they are not as fine as they were in their youth, they can still be a pleasant surprise in their middleweight and more autumnal profiles. But, at this point in time, it is really a bit hit or miss for the vintage as a whole, and one feels pretty lucky to catch a bottle that still offers as much charm and complexity as such a large segment of the vintage did back in the first half of the decade of the 1990s.*

### **1987 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Domaine Georges Mugneret**

While most of the 1987 reds have lost most of their youthful magic, the '87 Ruchottes-Chambertin from Dr. Georges Mugneret is still at its apogee and is really a brilliant window back into the past, showing just how good the best wines from '87 were in their heyday. The stunning nose offers up a complex and refined blend of dark berries, plums, fresh nutmeg, a beautifully complex base of soil, a bit of allspice, gamebird and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tangy, with great focus and grip, a lovely core still intact in the mid-palate, melted tannins and an utterly suave, pure and seamless finish of impressive length. This is one 1987 red Burgundy that has not lost a step and still has plenty of life ahead of it. Bravo Dr. Georges! 2013-2025+. **94.**

### **1987 Savigny-lès-Beaune "Cuvée Arthur Girard"- Hospices de Beaune (mise S.D.V.)**

I have no idea who the bottler, S.D.V. was or how they were doing at this period in their history, but I found this bottle languishing on a wine shop shelf in Beaune last year and figured I would take a chance on it, as the tariff was not steep. This was the end of the era when André Porcheret was the winemaker at the Hospices de Beaune, as he was about to be hired away by

Madame Bize-Leroy to run her newly-formed Domaine Leroy the following year. The wine has stood the test of time very well, offering up a deep and complex nose of cherries, red currants, *sous bois*, gamebirds, cinnamon and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and still beautifully balanced, with a good core, fine complexity and a long, soil-driven and still very vibrant finish. A very impressive 1987 at this point in time. 2013-2025. **90.**

***The 1986 Vintage- Ranking “C-” in Côte de Beaune and “B” in Côte de Nuits***

*The 1986 vintage for red Burgundy was not consistent, but there are some very impressive high water marks and this is a vintage I try to keep an eye out for at auction or on wine lists, as there are an awful lot of wines from this vintage in the Côte de Nuits in particular that have aged very gracefully and are currently drinking with impressive quality. It was a cold and wet spring, but by the time flowering came around in June, the weather was hot and dry, which continued on for most of July and the first half of August. The second half of the month and all of September were more problematic, with rains hitting hard in mid-September and again around the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month. Due to the cold and sluggish spring, no one had picked yet, as the grapes were not quite ready, and the rains of September encouraged the spread of rot, so one had to pick carefully when the time came to harvest and sorting was an absolute requirement. Some growers picked soon after the second September rains ended on the 24<sup>th</sup>, being afraid of the rot, and made pretty dilute wines that reflected the vines uptake of precipitation. However, many others waited to let the water work through the vines and were rewarded with a fine period of cool sunny weather, and most importantly, a steady drying wind from the north (much like in the 2002 fin de saison) which really helped make the quality of the vintage for the more successful estates. However, as the sugars mounted in the first couple of weeks of October in 1986, the acids fell, so the vintage does not share the same tangy brightness of the 2002 reds. As the pinot noir has to be picked sooner in the Côte de Beaune, the vintage is not quite as successful there as in the Côte de Nuits, where vigneronns could benefit from an extra week’s ripening of the bunches prior to starting to pick. Today, the vintage is drinking at its apogee, and the most successful wines are really quite excellent and well worth keeping both eyes open for in the auction markets.*

**1986 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Domaine Georges Mugneret**

Not surprisingly, the 1986 Ruchottes-Chambertin from Dr. Georges Mugneret is outstanding, as he was at the absolute top of his game just before his untimely passing and probably making the very finest wines of his illustrious career in this epoch. At age twenty-seven the wine is drinking beautifully, offering up a pure and classic bouquet of black cherries, plums, grilled meats, autumnal soil tones, a touch of porcini and beautiful spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still just a touch chewy on the backend, with a fine core, excellent grip and balance and a very long, complex and classic finish. A terrific sleeper vintage of this iconic bottling. 2013-2035. **93.**

**1986 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg (served from magnum)**

Out of magnum, the 1986 Clos Vougeot from Dr. Georges Mugneret is drinking beautifully, as the wine soars from the glass in a beautifully refined constellation of plums, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, black truffles, *pigeon*, a complex base of soil, a bit of charred wood and a lovely topnote of fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open, with a fine core, still a touch of backend tannin and excellent length and grip on the

complex and beautifully balanced finish. Nothing “off vintage” about this outstanding wine. 2012-2040+. **94.**

### ***The 1985 Vintage- Ranking A***

*This is a lovely vintage that has seemingly put on weight and shown more structure over the last ten to fifteen years and I now rate it even higher than I did when it was younger. For fully mature vintages of red Burgundy, there are not many more appealing to drink today than the lovely 1985s. The most problematic weather characteristic of the 1985 growing season was the bitter cold of the winter, when many vines in lower-lying areas were killed by the freezing temperatures. It was the coldest winter in Burgundy since 1956 and there are a lot of parcels today that were replanted after the killing cold of the winter of '85. However, where the vines were not affected by the winter frosts, the growing season got rolling in quite satisfactory fashion, with a slightly late, but perfectly abundant floraison in June. The first half of the summer was calm, if unremarkable, and the vines were a bit behind schedule at the halfway point of the year, but August was very nice and Septembers' weather absolutely perfect, so that the bunches ripened evenly and very thoroughly by the time picking got started towards the end of the month. It was a pretty big crop by the standards of the 1960s or 1970s, though far smaller than what we would see in the latter half of the decade or in the 1990s. The wines started out life plush, pure and utterly seductive, with lovely transparency and seamless balances and very refined tannins. This was the first vintage of red Burgundy I sold as a young wine merchant, and I greatly rued the salary level of young retailers in that day, as I would have bought ten times as many bottles from the vintage if I could have. But, I put as many in the cellar as I could in my youth and drank them with great, great pleasure over the first fifteen years of their lives, as the wines never shut down and they were my favorite vintage to share with serious wine-loving friends out of my young cellar. The 1985s went through a period around the turn of the century where they seemed to be fully mature and starting to look over the far side of the plateau, with more autumnal elements in ascendancy on both the nose and palate and very gentle structures, but then another evolutionary cycle started and the wines have freshened up a bit and are showing decidedly more structure today than was the case in the late 1990s. It really is a top flight vintage at its apogee today, but likely to keep for many more decades to come.*

### **1985 Gevrey-Chambertin “Combes aux Moines”- Domaine Fourrier**

The 1985 Combes aux Moines from Jean-Marie Fourrier's father is really a beautiful example of the vintage that has reached its apogee of peak maturity. The pure, refined and utterly complex nose offers up scents of cherries, strawberries, coffee, orange zest, mustard seed, a complex base of soil tones, venison and a touch of fallen leaves in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and very, very pure, with a fine core, beautiful complexity and soil signature and a very long, velvety and *à point* finish. A lovely wine of complexity and intensity of flavor, if not a whole lot of weight at this point in its evolution. 2009-2025. **91.**

### **1985 Charmes-Chambertin “Trés Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Joseph Roty (magnum)**

I was expecting just a bit more from this magnum of 1985 Charmes-Chambertin from Joseph Roty, but the wine seemed to lack just a touch of length and grip on the backend. The bouquet is certainly first rate, as it wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, grilled meats, a bit of inkiness, espresso, dark soil tones, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with a good core, fine focus, but a pretty

laid back, meltingly tannic finish that closes with a bit of chocolate. Perhaps this was not a totally pristine magnum? 2011-2025+? **91+?**

**1985 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Domaine Georges Mugneret**

The 1985 vintage was one of the last of the illustrious career of Dr. Georges Mugneret, and I wish I had a few more bottles of this stunning wine still in my cellar to follow down the road, as it has years and years of life still ahead of it. This most recent bottle was magical, delivering a glorious and very floral bouquet of black cherries, very intense violets, dark chocolate, a discreet touch of grilled meat, a very, very complex base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fresh as a daisy, with a lovely core, stellar transparency, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, tangy and modestly tannic finish. This beautiful vintage of the Mugnerets' Ruchottes-Chambertin is not at its zenith, but it shows no signs of slowing down for decades to come! 2014-2045+. **94.**



**1985 Clos St. Denis- Domaine Dujac**

I have been fortunate to drink this wine on a handful of occasions over the course of the last seven or eight years and it is a classic example of this beautiful *terroir*. The pure and utterly refined nose delivers a constellation of cherries, red plums, *sous bois*, cinnamon, gamebirds, a bit of chocolate, fresh nutmeg, woodsmoke, cedar and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very intensely flavored, with a lovely core, outstanding soil signature, tangy acids, melting tannins and great length and grip on the *à point*

and very complex finish. This wine has reached that beautiful, ethereal stage of full maturity, where the wine dances across the palate and never seems to end. 2011-2035. **94.**

**1985 Musigny- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 1985 Drouhin Musigny is as beautiful today as it has ever been in its lifetime, and it has delivered beautiful drinking already since the mid-1990s! The gorgeous and utterly classic bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of cherries, orange zest, *fraises du bois*, coffee, heather, a touch of game, forest floor, a bit of iron and a topnote of sweet mushroom. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and *à point*, with a beautiful core of fruit, stunning soil signature, melting tannins and great bounce and grip on the stunningly pure, complex and refined finish. I love Musigny at its apogee, particularly from the Drouhin family! 2013-2040+. **95.**

**1985 Corton “Renardes”- Domaine Michel Gaunoux (served from magnum)**

I am deeply indebted to a friend of mine for spotting this unopened magnum at a Paulée a few years ago and convincing the magnum’s owner that the wine would be very much worthy of inclusion in the festivities, as it is a wine of outstanding potential. The bouquet is still on the young side out of magnum, but offers a very promising constellation of cherries, red currants, coffee, woodsmoke, incipient notes of venison, coriander and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with firm, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and nascent complexity, good acids for the vintage and a very long, soil-driven and still quite tightly-knit finish. Out of bottle this may be starting to really drink well today, but out of mag, I would not touch it for another five years at least. 2020-2050+. **93.**

**1985 Savigny-lès-Beaune “aux Gravains”- Domaine Camus-Bruchon**

Monsieur Camus made an absolutely lovely range of wines in 1985, and over the last few years, I have been lucky to taste a few of his premier crus from this vintage. The 1985 Gravains is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a pure and *à point* constellation of black cherries, a touch of black truffle, woodsmoke, autumn leaves, a beautiful base of dark soil tones and an exotic topnote of eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very refined on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins, excellent complexity and grip and a very long, bright and elegant finish. Savigny at its finest. 2013-2030+. **92.**

***The 1983 Vintage- Ranking C-***

*I do not drink 1983 red Burgundies with any frequency these days, as this is not a vintage I bought for my own cellar (not having really gotten rolling in the wine trade until the 1985s and their “tied-in” 1984s were released) and do not cross paths that often with many examples from the vintage. The vintage is known, rather ingloriously, for its hail taint, but the primary hail damage from July of that year was focused on Vosne-Romanée, Vougeot and Chambolle-Musigny, and other villages were far more affected by the severe drought of the summer than the hail. July and August were hot and absolutely bone-dry, causing thick skins and dehydrated berries, but it rained heavily during the first two weeks of September of 1983, which ended the drought conditions, plumped up the desiccated berries a bit, but also brought problems with rot. When the rain stopped, the temperatures soared, so the grapes got another push of sugars right before picking, and some grapes ended up overripe, as well as very thick-skinned and potentially scarred by the hail. It was a very tricky vintage and I have never really liked the style of the 1983s all that well, as it is tannic, concentrated, sometimes raisiny from overripeness and sometimes gritty from either hail taint or rot. One has to remember that the Burgundy of 1983 was far, far different from today, and the vast, vast majority of domaines simply did not have the economic resources of the present time to make draconian selections and only use the very finest*

*fruit from any given year to make their wines. However, there are also some successful wines in 1983 (Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret famously made simply brilliant 1983s that continue to drink with great character, though I have not had any in the last couple of years) and I am always curious to taste examples from the vintage these days, just to see how they may have turned out more than thirty years one from the vintage. In general, the 1983 red Burgundies are fully mature today, with some not particularly interesting, but others rather a pleasant surprise and perfectly drinkable, with a very small minority absolutely stunning.*

### **1983 Chambertin- Domaine Ponsot**

The 1983 Chambertin from Domaine Ponsot is a truly superb example of this vintage. The deep and tertiary bouquet offers up a superb constellation of cherries, strawberries, orange zest, venison, a complex base of autumnal soil tones and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and very complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, melted tannins and a very long, transparent and classy finish. High class juice in a more middleweight format at this point in its evolution, but with decades of life still ahead of it. 2009-2030+. **94.**

### **1983 Vosne-Romanée “Malconsorts”- Domaine Lucien Mayer**

Given the heavy hail damage in Vosne in 1983, the Lucien Mayer Malconsorts has really turned out marvelously and had to be the product of very, very strict sorting back in the day. The utterly superb nose jumps from the glass in a mix of raspberries, cherries, forest floor, coffee, cinnamon, woodsmoke, fresh nutmeg and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and complex, with a lovely core, melted tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, perfectly balanced and very clean and classy finish. Really a superb example of mature Malconsorts with decades of life still ahead of it. 2013-2035. **93+.**

### **1983 Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

I remember well the big flap about the 1983 DRCs when they were released, as The Wine Spectator famously came out and called the vintage “hail-tainted” at the domaine and it was pretty hard to sell the wines in my merchant days (though I think the price on this ’83 Echézeaux was under fifty dollars a bottle back then!) and they tended to languish on the shelf for a few years. I had not tasted a bottle of the ’83 DRC Echézeaux since fairly soon after release and was very curious to try this wine when a bottle crossed my path recently. It was really a very fine example of the vintage, a bit lean in style, but with plenty of depth and intensity and no signs of hail taint that I could see. The bouquet is a fine blend of cherries, orange zest, cinnamon, woodsmoke, really fine minerality, fresh herb tones and forest floor. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and impressively transparent, with a good core, fine complexity, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the modestly tannic finish. The tannins have resolved here very nicely, and while this is not a particularly opulent Echézeaux, there is an awful lot to like here today. 2010-2035+. **92.**

### **1983 Beaune “Clos des Mouches”- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 1983 Clos des Mouches is not a bad example of the vintage by any stretch of the imagination, as it offers up good balance and pretty good complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a deep and complex blend of cherries, beetroot, woodsmoke, herb tones, coffee, forest floor, orange peel and a bit of dried spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and just a touch dry-edged from the drought conditions of 1983, but with a good core, fine complexity and a long, tertiary finish. Really not bad at all. 2012-2020+? **88.**

### ***The 1982 Vintage- Ranking C-***

*1982 was not a great year in the Côte d'Or, as the yields were enormous and the wines never really developed a whole lot of concentration as a result- even where the crop load could be all fully ripened. This was the vintage where Vincent Mongeard of Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret first famously started "green harvesting" his vines in Vosne in this vintage, which his neighbors thought was absolutely crazy, as in those less wealthy days in the Côte d'Or, this was tantamount to throwing away hard-earned money. Monsieur Mongeard recalled that no less a sage than Henri Mayer asked him what he was doing when he started cutting off bunches in mid-summer, but it turned out that if that practice would have been standard operating procedure back in this era, the 1982 vintage could have been very special, instead of just interesting. The growing season of 1982 was fantastic, with no mishaps in the spring leading to a very, very satisfying flowering and the weather was sunny, warm, but not too hot and there were absolutely no pressures from the usual suspects of mildew, oidium or rot. But the size of the crop was enormous, as there were tons of bunches on the vines and very big bunches at that! It rained a bit in August- not too close to the harvest, but this tended to also help swell the size of the grapes a bit more. September's weather was sunny and hot, so the grapes were brought in under ideal conditions, but the combination of the sheer size of the crop and the warm temperatures for fermentation led to a solid, rather than a great year. Again, we have to remember that Burgundy in 1982 did not have the same financial resources as today, so growers could not run out and buy two or three extra fermentation tanks to handle the huge number of bunches a couple of weeks before the harvest, like they might be able to do today. Corners had to be cut in terms of space, so that maceration periods were not always as long as would have been ideal, given that there were tractor-loads of grapes waiting to be crushed and a very real shortage of equipment. The hot temperatures also produced quick fermentations, so there was never really an opportunity for better extraction and the wines in general ended up pleasant and correct, but a bit spineless and without a lot of depth. If these same conditions had occurred today, there would have been space made somehow so that everything could be crushed and macerated properly and temperatures would have been controlled for the fermentations, so that we might have seen a higher quality vintage with the same conditions today. But, those were different times in Burgundy. The quality was certainly not consistent in '82, and most of the wines were drunk up on the young side, but there have been some pretty serious high water marks in the vintage as well and it seems logical that mostly the finest wines of the vintage are still around in the cellars of those who purchased the wines, so when they pop up today in the market, one is reasonably assured to be looking at a top example from '82. I do not cross paths with bottles of 1982 Burgundy too often these days, but they can sometimes prove to be very pleasant surprises, as some examples still have pretty good depth of fruit at the core and the vintage was certainly quite true to the underlying terroir of each wine.*

### **1982 La Tâche- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

The 1982 La Tâche from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is a very pretty example of the vintage, but this last bottle seemed to be on the verge of volatility somewhere down the road and I would guess that this is a vintage that is going to deliver the most pleasure in the near-term from now on. The bouquet is pure and fairly complex, offering up scents of cherries, beetroot, orange zest, La Tâche spice tones, smoke, soil and a touch of game. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with acids ever so slightly edgy today. There is good depth at the core, the tannins are faded and the wine shows lovely complexity and bounce on the long finish.



If the structure was just a bit more stable, this would continue to cruise for decades, but this bottle at least, would probably be best drunk up in the next ten years. With older bottles, there is always the question of how representative it is of the group as a whole. 2013-2020+? **89.**

### **1982 Nuits St. Georges “les Boudots”- Maison Louis Jadot**

I always keep an eye out for the Boudots from Louis Jadot, as these vines are owned by the domaine and it is always one of the strongest premier crus in the cellars. The 1982 Boudots is not a bad drink today, but is just a touch chunky in personality and I would guess that it was chapitalized fairly generously in this vintage. The bouquet is very pretty, offering up scents of plums, cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of dried eucalyptus, a fine base of soil and a bit of Nuits nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite solid at the core for a 1982, with a slightly four-square personality, sound acids, melted tannins and pretty good length and grip on the complex finish. Not bad at all, and a perfect Tuesday night bottle of Nuits St. Georges! 2013-2025. **88.**

### ***The 1981 Vintage- Rank: D***

*It has been many, many years since I last crossed paths with a bottle of 1981 red Burgundy, but in November of 2012, I had the chance to try a bottle of the Jean Gros Richebourg from this vintage. Back in this era, Domaine Jean Gros was certainly one of the very finest producers of Richebourg, so this wine has to be about as good a glimpse on the upside possibilities of 1981 today as one is likely to find. The vintage was exceedingly small in size, as yields were adversely affected by frost in the spring. The growing season was actually quite good throughout much of the summer and there was hope for another 1971, where the short yields at least were tied to quite high quality, where the hail damage was not severe. However, it started raining about ten days before harvest and never relented, so that the grapes had to be gathered in wet conditions and the wines were simply not particularly good. I almost never taste an example from 1981 today and imagine that most have been drunk up by now, as would seem proper for this year.*

### **1981 Richebourg- Domaine Jean Gros**

The 1981 Jean Gros Richebourg is still quite enticing on the nose, which is its best element today, as it offers up a nicely complex bouquet of dried red fruit, Vosne spices, forest floor, venison, orange zest and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and starting to fade a bit, with the complexity of the nose still to be found on the palate, but with the fruit getting to the end of its useful life and the wine now sliding gently down the far side of its plateau. It is not particularly long or deep today, but the acids are still nicely integrated into the wine and it is really not at all unpleasant to drink. But, time is clearly in hand and it is time to finish up regular-sized bottles- though the wine might be a real surprise still in magnum, if any were ever produced. 2012-2020. **84.**

### ***The 1980 Vintage- Rank: B-***

*The 1980 red Burgundy vintage ended up quite a bit better than the weather during the growing season would have predicted, and I have had a large number of really beautiful wines from this vintage over the years. I do not cross paths with them anywhere near as much as I did in the late 1990s, when they were still relatively plentiful, but they have been ready to drink since at least the early 1990s and this can be a lovely vintage of perfumed, transparent middleweights if one comes across properly stored bottles. It was another late harvest, much like 1978 and*

*1979, but the size of the crop was larger in 1980 than 1978, and rain around harvest time certainly complicated the vintage and led to a spread of quality across domaines. But, good growers, particularly in the Côte de Nuits really made very, very good wines. Ripeness prior to the rainy weather was quite good, in contrast to the scrawny 1981s, and there were really some fine examples from this vintage. My gut feeling is that the top examples of the vintage will start their descent over the far side of the plateau in the next several years and in regular-sized formats, it is probably a pretty good time to start thinking about when to consume any remaining bottles in the cellar. The wines have really been quite lovely for the entirety of their lives and it has been one of the fine sleeper vintages of the decade of the 1980s and, as the notes below will attest, there is still a lot of pleasure to be had from the top examples of the 1980 vintage.*

### **1980 Clos de la Roche “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Ponsot**

I have probably drunk more bottles of this beautiful wine than any other Ponsot wine over my career in the wine business, which just shows how lucky I have been over the years. This is one of the reference point wines from the 1980 vintage, and I have been drinking it with some frequency since the late 1980s. Today, it is not quite as flamboyantly sumptuous as it was in its relative youth, but is every bit as complex and classy. The bouquet is a beautiful blend of roasted cherries, fresh plums, chocolate, venison, herb tones, a great base of soil and coffee. On the palate the wine is still full-bodied, plump and seductive, with low acids, a fine core and excellent complexity on the long, pure and soil-driven finish. That tannins have fully fallen away and the wine is now just a touch on the soft side and probably not quite what it was at its zenith, but there is still a ton of pleasure to be had here in this iconic 1980 red Burgundy. 2009-2025+. 93.

### **1980 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier**

I have had the pleasure to drink the 1980 Roumier Bonnes-Mares with some frequency in the past, as the wine was often popping up in the 1990s on cellar lists. This was back in the day when Christophe’s father, Jean-Marie Roumier, would bottle the two sections of the vineyard, the *Terres Rouges* and *Terres Blanches*, separately, with his American importer, Château and Estate, purchasing all of the former and the rest of the world getting the *Terres Blanches* version. As this bottle came from Burgundy, it was the *Terres Blanches* bottling, and it was still quite lovely, though now starting to move along towards the far side of its plateau and not quite as vigorous as it was back in the 1990s and early 2000s. The bouquet is still a lovely and very pure mélange of dried cherries, strawberries, gamebirds, *sous bois*, mustard seed, a touch of nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with melted tannins, tangy acids and lovely length and grip on the fully mature and elegant finish. I suspect that the acids are going to start to peel away from the structure of this wine in the coming decade, so it would not be a crime to start to consider drinking it up over the coming years. 2012-2030. 91.

### **1980 Musigny “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de Comte de Vogüé**

I have always enjoyed the 1980 vintage of Musigny from the Domaine de Comte de Vogüé, and this most recent bottle was drinking with great style and complexity, though perhaps starting to just inch its way towards the far side of its plateau of maturity. This is not a blockbuster vintage for this wine, but still has loads of depth and perfume to deliver in its more medium-full style. The outstanding bouquet offers up a pure constellation of cherries, strawberries, orange peel, woodsmoke, gamebirds, iron-infused, complex soil tones, woodsmoke, mustard seed and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and intensely flavored, with a

fine core, superb soil nuance, melted tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the fully mature, resolved and tertiary finish. Just a lovely bottle of mature, middleweight vintage Musigny. 2012-2030+. **92.**

#### **1980 La Tâche- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

I have had the good fortune to drink the 1980 vintage of La Tâche quite a bit over the years, but this most recent bottle was the first one I had seen for nearly a decade. The wine is deep, complex and quite vibrant on the nose, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of cherries, beetroot, beautiful La Tâche spice tones, gamebirds, beautiful minerality, *sous bois* and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, transparent and very complex, with a lovely core of fruit, soft tannins and a very long, tangy and perfectly focused finish. This particular bottle was just a touch volatile in nature, which kept its score down just a tad, but with time in decanter, the VA blew off a bit and it was still a very, very enjoyable bottle of mature La Tâche to share with friends during my birthday in Beaune. Many thanks to Paul Chiu for sourcing the bottle and generously sharing it with us! 2012-2025+. **92.**

#### ***The 1979 Vintage- Rank: B-***

*The 1979 vintage for red Burgundy was considered rather enormous in its time, the flowering was on time and quite generous and this was still before the days of green harvesting was practiced in the vineyards of Burgundy. Yields were more moderate in the villages of Chambolle-Musigny, Vosne-Romanée and Nuits St. Georges in this vintage, as there was hail on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of June that hit these three communes during flowering and reduced their potential crop loads, but the rest of the Côte d'Or really did produce a very large crop load by the standards of this era, and the red wines have consequently ended up more middleweight in character than in top years such as 1978. As always, one had to pick and choose in 1979, but despite the less concentrated style of the vintage, with fairly modest tannins and not particularly high acidities, the top wines have kept quite well and still can provide a surprising level of pleasure of well-stored. Though there was never a lot of tannin in the 1979s, the wines did have excellent balance from day one and this has treated them well as the years have gone by, so that the wines have generally stayed fresh and vibrant as they have gained in complexity with bottle age, and they can often provide plenty of intensity of flavor, if not a lot of weight on the palate, to go along with their often first rate aromatics and soil signatures. It is generally a more red fruity vintage than 1978, and without the same stuffing or potential for longevity, but I still look for this vintage when I can and have had some lovely examples over the last few years that have exceeded my expectations.*

#### **1979 Vosne-Romanée “Malconsorts”- Domaine André Cathiard**

The 1979 Malconsorts from Sylvain Cathiard's father, André, is a very pretty example of the vintage that has certainly been fully mature for many years, but continues to drink very well in its more medium-bodied format. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in an autumnal mélange of cherries, beetroot, lovely soil tones, Vosne spices, coffee and fallen leaves. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with perfectly respectable intensity at the core, fine complexity, no remaining tannins and good length on the slightly rustic finish. A good solid wine that is getting towards the far side of the plateau, but has not yet started its decline. 2009-2023+. **88.**



### ***The 1978 Vintage- Ranking: A***

*1978 is one of the greatest post-war vintages for red Burgundy, and the wines are generally at their absolute zeniths of peak maturity today and drinking with superb breed and complexity. This was a very difficult growing season, and not completely dissimilar from 2013, as the spring was cold and the flowering was very late and rather indifferent, so that the crop was destined to be small and good weather at the end of the growing season was going to be required if the grapes were going to ripen at all. The first half of the summer was cool and rainy and by the first of August, the fruit cycle in the vines was fully a month behind schedule. However, good weather did arrive in August and September was also quite good, albeit not particularly hot, and maturity began to catch up a bit, but on October 1<sup>st</sup>, the grapes were still very low in sugars and in need of a glorious Indian Summer to make anything worthwhile in the cellars. Happily, this is exactly what happened, and the bunches gained nearly two full degrees of sugar accumulation in the last two weeks leading up to the harvest, going from potential alcohol levels hovering around ten percent to a full twelve percent by the time the grapes were starting to be gathered. The small crop made it possible for the vines to ripen the bunches in the good weather of October, and the grapes also retained good acidity to go along with their now very good sugar levels. The wines have aged splendidly, moving from stylish and nicely structured middleweights in their youth to truly refined and classy wines at full maturity, and this is one of the best current vintages of red Burgundy for present day drinking. The top 1978s, and*

*there are a lot of them, will continue to drink with great style and breed for several more decades.*

### **1978 Gevrey-Chambertin- Domaine Louis Trapet**

The 1978 Gevrey *villages* from Domaine Trapet is still drinking beautifully and is a lovely example of just how well AC bottlings can age in a top flight vintage. The lovely and quite vibrant nose delivers a complex constellation of cherries, summer truffles, orange zest, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, a touch of coffee and a really nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, surprisingly full and complex, with a good core, fine focus, little remaining tannin, but good acidity that will continue to carry the wine for many years to come. A lovely bottle. 2010-2025. **90.**

### **1978 Gevrey-Chambertin “Petite Chapelle”- Domaine Louis Trapet**

I love the *terroir* of Petite Chapelle and rank this premier cru right up there with the very finest in Gevrey-Chambertin. The 1978 version from Louis Trapet is superb, offering up a pure and fully mature bouquet of desiccated cherries, red plums, summer truffles, gamebirds, forest floor and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully *à point* finish. The refinement of this wine fully underscores just how elegant Petite Chapelle can be in the hands of a top *vigneron*. 2012-2025+. **92.**

### **1978 Clos de la Roche- Maison Pierre Bourée (served from magnum)**

Back in these days, if memory serves me correctly, the Vallet family sourced their Clos de la Roche from Hubert Lignier, and I have had some excellent examples of this bottling under the Pierre Bourée label for that reason. The 1978 is just lovely out of magnum, offering up a pure and *à point* nose of desiccated red and black cherries, woodsmoke, coffee, gamebirds, lovely soil tones, an exotic touch of cardamom and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely tertiary in complexity, but with a sweet core of fruit, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully resolved finish. A lovely wine at its peak. 2010-2035+. **93.**

### **1978 Vosne-Romanée “Malconsorts”- Domaine André Cathiard**

The 1978 Malconsorts from Monsieur Cathiard is a very pretty wine on the nose, but this particular bottle was starting to lose a bit of structural integrity when I tasted it back at the end of 2009. The bouquet is lovely, offering up a pure and perfumed mix of cherries, dried raspberries, woodsmoke, *sous bois*, gamebird and fallen leaves. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely plump on the attack, but dipping just a bit in the mid-palate and starting to fade a bit on the long, silky and laid back finish. Perhaps there are more vibrant bottles out there, but this very pretty middleweight wanted drinking up when we tried it a few years ago. 2009-2015+? **88.**

### **1978 Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti**

I love the 1978 vintage at Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, as this predates the domaine adopting a policy of one hundred percent new oak for all of their wines (which began with the 1985s) and I have always found the wines raised in less new wood every more beautifully representative of their underlying *terroirs*. The 1978 Echézeaux is a beautiful bottle of wine at its apogee of peak maturity, wafting from the glass in a blend of raspberries, beetroot, *sous bois*, delicate notes of venison, woodsmoke, blood orange and a marvelously complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very intensely flavored, with fine mid-palate depth, impressive complexity and a very long, tangy and meltingly tannic finish. A really lovely, *à point* vintage of DRC Echézeaux for drinking over the next thirty years! 2011-2040. **93.**

### **1978 Beaune “Grèves” l’Enfant Jésus- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils**

I was hoping for just a bit more from the 1978 l’Enfant Jésus from Bouchard Père et Fils, but the wine falls into the good, but not great category of quality. The bouquet is really very lovely (and the best part of the wine today), offering up a fine blend of red berries, cherries, vinessmoke, *sous bois*, coffee, venison and a topnote of fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex, but a bit fatiguing structurally, with a solid core, quite tertiary flavors and respectable length on the laid back and totally resolved finish. This is not bad, but given the quality of both the vintage and this cuvée, it would have been nice to see the wine just a touch more vigorous. If this bottle was fully representative, then it is time to drink up. 2012-2020? **87+?**

### **1978 Beaune “Clos des Mouches”- Maison Joseph Drouhin (served from double magnum)**

The 1978 vintage produced one of the top vintages of Clos des Mouches in the last forty years and out of double magnum, the wine is drinking beautifully. The deep, complex and utterly classic nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of cherries, red plums, venison, coffee, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a beautifully complex base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still young in this format, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature, tangy acids and a very long, gently tannic and very complex finish. A great vintage of Clos des Mouches that has reached its apogee, but has tons of life still in it. 2009-2030+. **94.**

### ***The 1976 Vintage- Ranking: C***

*1976 is not my favorite vintage for older red Burgundy, as this was a drought year which produced wines with high tannin content and sometimes questionable balance. The vines went through a period of prolonged shutdown during the maturation process, due to hydric stress, and it was only in the last few weeks that sugars started to mount properly and tannins began to ripen up, and the wines have often remained rather stubbornly chewy from these less than ideally ripe tannins. The vintage was reportedly fairly highly-touted by the wine trade at the time, as there had not been a truly first rate vintage since 1971 (which itself was not consistent in quality, due to hail damage in the Côte de Beaune) and the 1976s were probably quite overrated at the time. However, there can still be some good surprises to be found from this vintage today, as some producers, particularly those who tended to harvest a bit later back in this era, have produced perfectly fine wines, with the inherent sturdiness of the vintage giving the wines longevity, without dominating the other elements in the wines. Others are always going to be a bit chewy and rustic in character and are a bit charmless, so one has to pick and choose.*

### **1976 Nuits St. Georges “Murgers”- Domaine Henri Mayer**

The 1976 Murgers from Henri Mayer is a very good example of this drought vintage, with the sturdiness of the wines in general nicely complemented by the suave and velvety signature of Monsieur Mayer’s winemaking. The excellent nose is a red fruity blend of cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a touch of venison, fresh herb tones, a complex base of autumnal soil nuances and a topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively pure on the attack, with a fine core, superb soil signature, excellent focus and grip and just a whisper of remaining tannin perking up the long and complex finish. A lovely wine. 2013-2030. **92.**

### ***The 1972 Vintage- Ranking: B***

*I bought and drank a fairly good spread of 1972 red Burgundies back in the 1990s, as this was another vintage that was largely forgotten for the first two decades of its life in bottle.*

*The wines hailed from one of the coldest summers on record, and though the spring had been early and agreeable, allowing for an early budbreak, the sun really took the growing season off and it was cool and grey for much of the summer. Happily, there was very little rain. The weather did not really brighten up until the 10<sup>th</sup> of September in 1972, so that sugars eventually started to accumulate and the grapes began to move towards maturity at the start of October and the harvest was consummated around the middle of the month, making it a vintage with one of the longest “hang times” in recent memory. The fruit was clean and reasonably ripe when brought in, with the resulting wines structured and notably high in acidity. They were not well received in the market, as their release coincided with the “market collapse” of 1974, and the wines were shut down, tannic and shrill, with plenty of green notes to the moderately ripe tannins. They took forever to start to blossom, but blossom they eventually did, and by the 1990s, they were really surprisingly excellent wines for drinking at that time, with lovely expressions of terroir, very pure and vibrant fruit tones and plenty of intensity of flavor and complexity, if not a lot of weight or extra flesh on the bones. I was fortunate to be a merchant at the time that the wines were really starting to blossom, and as the reputation of the vintage was not particularly fine, I was able to hunt around and really find some pretty special wines from the vintage, from producers such as Pousse d’Or, Roumier, Rousseau, Maison Drouhin, DRC, Comte de Vogüé, Domaine Dujac, Michel Gaunoux, Louis Trapet, Marquis d’Angerville and many more. Consequently, I was able to really enjoy this vintage in its prime, despite having been far too young when the wines were first released to have had a reasonable opportunity to drink them if the vintage had been more popular at the outset (as these wines would have all disappeared into cellars long before I came along if the vintage had shown much charm or real promise in its youth). Twenty years on, the vintage still continues to cruise along and offer up some pretty good drinking, though the plateau of this year was not as long as one usually sees in a top vintage, and many of the 1972s today are not as fine as they were in the 1990s, as the high acidity of the vintage can sometimes come across as a bit volatile these days, depending on the bottle and the wine. But, there are still plenty of very pleasant surprises to be found out there from the 1972 red Burgundies, with these more medium-weight wines still offering excellent complexity, purity of fruit and fidelity to their underlying terroirs when still in their plateaus of maturity.*

### **1972 Musigny- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 1972 Drouhin Musigny is a really lovely example of the vintage that has not lost any of the charm that it had back in the 1990s, when I first had the good fortune to cross paths with a bottle. This most recent bottle was drunk with great pleasure at the end of 2012, with the wine offering up a bright and complex bouquet of cherries, orange zest, gamebird, *sous bois*, mustard seed, iron soil tones, rose petals and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is today medium-full, bright and still beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of red fruit, great transparency, impeccable focus and intensity of flavor and a long, tangy and very complex finish. The acids here remain beautifully embedded in the body of the wine, and though this is a leaner example of this iconic wine, it possesses all of the complexity and elegance of a top-notch Musigny. 2012-2025+. **93.**

### ***The 1971 Vintage- Ranking A-***

*The 1971 vintage was a bit less consistent in quality than the top red Burgundy vintages of the 1960s, but I have had some lovely examples over the years. There was quite a bit of hail damage, particularly in the Côte de Beaune, and one had to pick and choose a bit back in the*

*day. The yields were tiny, as flowering again took place under quite unsettled conditions in the month of June, and yields were further impacted in the communes hit by the hail on August 19<sup>th</sup>. There were actually three distinct storms on the 19<sup>th</sup>, so a vigneron's plots might have been only partially hit with the first and then get tagged with the second or third wave of hail! As is so often the case, Volnay and Pommard bore the brunt of the storms' wrath in '71, though there was also hail damage as far north as Nuits St. Georges and Vosne-Romanée. After the hail, the weather was excellent and the harvest began in mid-September in the Côte de Beaune, with everyone collecting their grapes before the first of October. Nevertheless, the good examples of the vintage are very good indeed, with plush fruit components, lovely terroir and good length and grip on the rather velvety textured finishes. The wines have been mature for decades, as they were plush, complex and velvety very early on in their evolutions, but the top wines still have plenty of grip and show no signs of slowing down anytime soon.*

### **1971 Gevrey-Chambertin “les Corbeaux”- Domaine Louis Trapet**

This parcel of vines was owned by the Marchand family, who owned the Rotisserie du Chambertin restaurant in the heart of Gevrey for many, many years. Back in the 1970s, they had Louis Trapet make their wines for them. The Corbeaux bottling was all sold through the restaurant, with a Marchand Père et Fils label on the wine, but with the Trapet family credited as the *vignerons* on the wine list. I have had the pleasure to drink this wine on several occasions while dining at this old landmark restaurant (which Jeremy Seysses informs me has been opened again by new owners recently and is really turning out excellent cuisine again). This most recent bottle was drunk in July of 2011, just a couple of days before Monsieur Marchand retired and subsequently sold the restaurant. It is a great bottle of mature Corbeaux and fully shows how special is this *terroir*, as it offers up a superb bouquet of dried black cherries, sweet dark berries, heather, Cuban cigars, summer truffles, *sous bois*, woodsmoke and a faint touch of honey in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and marvelously complex, with melted tannins, beautiful focus and grip and a very, very long, velvety and perfectly resolved finish. A stellar wine with years of life still ahead of it. 2011-2030+. **93.**

### **1971 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

This particular bottle of '71 Drouhin Bonnes-Mares was a bit volatile, with the VA elevating the aromatics on the nose quite a bit, but also showing up in a more derogatory way on the backend of the palate. The truly outstanding bouquet jumps from the glass in a blaze of cherries, heather, coffee, venison, sweet nutty tones, forest floor and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and complex on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a very long, meltingly tannic and fairly volatile finish. I am sure that pristine bottles of this wine are sublime, but it really depended on one's tolerance for VA on just how much pleasure could be derived from this particular bottle. 2013-2035+. **87-94.**

### **1971 Corton “Bressandes”- Domaine Prince de Merode**

The 1971 Bressandes from Prince de Merode is drinking beautifully and offers up a lovely example of a very transparent, tertiary and autumnal middleweight that is the quintessence of pretty, fully mature red Burgundy. The very transparent nose offers up scents of cherries, orange peel, *sous bois*, venison, bonfires and iron filings. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very much defined by its beautiful soil component, with an elegant profile, melted tannins, nice acidity and excellent length and grip on the intensely flavored, complex and classy finish. This is not a blockbuster, but it offers up plenty of depth and excellent complexity. The elegance



that eventually arrives when red Corton is fully mature is now very much in evidence in this very pretty wine. 2014-2025+. 92.



***The 1969 Vintage- Ranking: A-***

*1969 is a very interesting vintage for red Burgundy, as the vintage's profile has gone through several stages over the years. When I first really began to drink and sell red Burgundy back when the 1985 vintage was being released, the 1969s were one of my favorite mature vintages for drinking, as they offered beautiful depth of fruit, fine terroir and lovely balances and grip. They later went through a stage where they got quite roasted in character, with the freshness of fruit seeming to dissipate markedly, and they were a bit more sauvage in profile and much less interesting to drink in the latter half of the 1990s than they had been a decade earlier. However, as is so often the case, the cycle continued to turn for the vintage and today, the vintage is far more enjoyable again than it was a ten or fifteen years ago, and I have very much enjoyed the most recent 1969s with which I have crossed paths. It was a small crop, as weather during the flowering was not ideal, and the first half of the summer was pretty cool. But the backend of the growing season was hot and sunny and the ripeness caught up quite well, with the harvest taking place pretty late in September under fine conditions. The wines have never been the most elegant of top vintages of the 1960s, as the '61s, '62s, '64s and '66s all eclipse 1969 on that score. But the wines have depth, fine structure, are very true to their underlying terroirs*

*and still offer plenty of vigor and complexity. They are still very enjoyable to drink more than forty-five years on, and what more can we really ask of a top Burgundy vintage?*

**1969 Griotte-Chambertin- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 1969 Griotte-Chambertin from Maison Drouhin is a terrific wine at its absolute apogee. The gorgeous nose soars from the glass in a pure and complex blend of cherries, gamebirds, woodsmoke, mustard seed, a nice touch of clove, *sous bois*, an exotic touch of dried eucalyptus and a deft base of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of red fruit, modest remaining tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the fully mature complex and classy finish. Fine, fine juice with decades of life still in it. 2013-2040. **94.**

**1969 Corton “Clos du Roi”- Domaine Prince de Merode**

The 1969 Clos du Roi from Prince de Merode is a bit more vigorous today than their very pretty, but more high-toned 1971 Bressandes. The beautifully *à point* bouquet wafts from the glass in a fully mature and classy blend of cherries, *fraises du bois*, fresh nutmeg, a touch of mocha, a very refined base of soil, a dash of cinnamon, coffee and fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and silky on the attack, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex, pure and tangy finish. Just a beautiful example of the vintage at its peak, but still with years and years ahead of it. 2013-2035. **94.**

**1969 Auxey-Duresses “la Chapelle”- Domaine Pierre Lafouge**

I have had the pleasure to drink this lovely old bottle of Auxey-Duresses on a couple of occasions in the past year and a half, as a restaurant in the region still has a few bottles on the list at a fair price. The wine has certainly been fully mature for decades, but it continues to hold onto the further side of its plateau and has not yet start its descent. The bouquet is complex and tertiary in its autumnal mix of desiccated cherries, summer truffles, *sous bois*, porcini, gamebirds, coffee and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely balanced, with an old Burgundy autumnal personality, still a good core, sound acids and fine length and grip on the complex and still perfectly extant finish. I do not know how much longer this wine will continue to drink so well, but it has not yet gotten fragile and seems still to have some years of life in it. A lovely old bottle of Auxey-Duresses from my favorite family domaine in the village. 2013-2025+? **89.**

## BUILDING A WINE CELLAR TODAY WITH A 1980s' ERA BUDGET



While wine did not seem particularly “cheap” when I first started building my wine cellar thirty years ago, by today’s standards, prices were absolute bargains. I was still in college when the 1982 Bordeaux futures were released and the dollar was very strong, and consequently, I cannot tell stories of buying 1982 Château Mouton-Rothschild at \$30 per bottle or 1982 Château Pétrus at \$50 per bottle, I did start to build my own collection not too long after that time and wine prices were far different than they are today. To give just some idea of how wines were priced back in the mid-to-late 1980s, when the foundation of my cellar was purchased and laid in, wines such as 1985 Château Lynch-Bages cost \$20 a bottle, 1985 Château Beaucastel was \$13.50, 1982 BV Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon was \$15 and 1985 Joseph Drouhin Echézeaux or 1985 Denis Bachelet Charmes-Chambertin V.V. were both \$40 per bottle. I was so green back in those early days that I thought 1982 Bruno Giacosa Barbaresco “Santa Stefano” Riserva (which I sold plenty of, by the way) was too expensive to lay down in my own cellar at \$35 per bottle! But, even back in those days, I had friends whose cellars had been built a decade or two previous, and had experienced the Bordeaux market collapse which brought down the price of virtually all wines in its wake, and where they had been buying cases of 1970 and 1971 Bordeaux at prices that were less than a quarter of what the 1985s were selling for at that time!

So, it just goes to show that perceptions of wine prices are always relative, and that what looks too pricey today may seem like it was a good deal down the road.

However, the point of this article is not to look back on the “good old days” of wine pricing- when so many of the world’s finest wines were far more accessible in terms of price to a far wider segment of the wine-drinking populace than is the case today- but, rather to try and see what a 1980s-era budget might be able to do today when trying to build a wine cellar for long-term aging. At first blush, it would seem that a wine drinker today interested in putting together a world class cellar of age-worthy wines would be faced with either laying down just a bottle or two of very top wines, and buying much less exalted bottles for everyday consumption while waiting for their cellar of twenty-five or thirty “trophy piece wines” to mature, but the reality is that if one is willing to look further afield than the traditional categories of Bordeaux, Burgundy, the trendiest California Cabernet Sauvignon bottlings and the best-known Italian wines to form the foundation of their cellar, there are still a wide variety of options of great wines to lay down in the cellar that would fall within the budgetary restraints of the mid-1980s. One is certainly not going to get a bottle of Lynch Bages for \$20 or a bottle of a recent top vintage of Giacosa Riserva for \$35, but there are still tons and tons of possibilities for purchasing wines in this same general price range that will age every bit as well as those great wines did in their day, and which can richly reward the savvy wine collector who lays those wines down now and gives them ten or twenty years in the cellar. If I were starting out my collection today, with the same budget I had back then, these are the types of wines I would focus on for long-term cellaring.

My first stop would be the Loire Valley, for both reds and whites. I am sure that the Cazes family might disagree with me, but it is pretty hard not to imagine that a very suitable replacement for that case of 1985 Lynch Bages could not be found amongst the top bottlings from some of my favorite producers in Chinon, Bourgueil or Saumur-Champigny. Take for example the simply superb bottling of Chinon “Petits Roches” from Domaine Charles Joguet in the 2011 vintage- right around the same price here in the US as the ’85 Lynch Bages was back in 1987, and it should offer up a superb twenty year window of fine drinking and will evolve beautifully with bottle age. Want something with even a bit more backbone from Domaine Joguet for longer-term keeping, then one can still find the 2010 Chinon “Varennes du Grand Clos” in the market and it will cost around \$30 per bottle and should last at least a couple of decades longer than the Petits Roches bottling. Or take another of the best-known Chinon *maestros*, Domaine Bernard Baudry. Their current release cuvées of La Grange or Les Grézeaux are both around \$20 per bottle and will age beautifully, and if you want to go for one of his longest distance runners for the cellar, the Le Clos Guillot will cost less than \$30 per bottles and the La Croix Boissée from the same vintage is just over the \$30 price point. These are all superb wines that have a great track record already for longevity and their 2009s or 2010s would be great cornerstones of any cellar. Want a less well-known producer also making great Chinon for the cellar, try the 2009 Chinon “Les Perruches”- Béatrice et Pascal Lambert, which also be in the low-twenties in price. In Bourgueil, Catherine and Pierre Breton are probably the best-known producers, and they have a number of fine bottlings that will age twenty to thirty years. I also love wines from Yannick Amirault in this appellation, which these days I find to be the reference point wines of the commune and his Bourgueil “les Quartiers” Vieilles Vignes or “La Coudraye” bottlings are both in the mid-twenties in price and will age splendidly well. A wine like the superb 2009 Bourgueil “Cuvée Prétige”- Domaine des Chesnaies (Lamé Delisle

Boucard) would also be outstanding in the cellar, as this is an estate that routinely holds back a percentage of their top vintages to dole out in the marketplace, and that one can still be found for under twenty dollars a bottle! I have also always liked the Saumur-Champigny bottling of “La Grande Vignolle” from Domaine Filliatreau, which ages beautifully (I am just starting to drink the 2005 out of my own cellar) and this too sells here in the states for around \$20. I have also loved the recent vintages of the Domaine des Coutures Saumur-Champigny (the 2012 may well be the finest red wine value to be found in the marketplace today!) and this is another estate that I would not hesitate to lay in by the case in a well-structured vintage such as 2009 or 2012.

So, you can see, there are no real shortages of superb wines for the cellar that harken back to those prices of the 1980s- as long as one is willing to look a little further afield these days than I was prepared to do in my formative days in the wine trade. We will touch upon the equally find white wine values to be found in the Loire a bit later in the article. I would treat the top red wines of the Loire Valley, from Bourgueil, Saumur-Champigny or Chinon as my primary replacements for most of the claret that I bought and cellared, but there are still some noteworthy Bordeaux values to be found from the region. However, in a Bordeaux age of über consultants plying their trade, there are plenty of top ranked estates from the magical decade of the 1980s on the Gironde that are not worth buying at any price these days, so their loss because of high prices (partially to pay the hefty fees of their über consultants that have been brought in to mess with the wines) is nowhere near as painful as it might be if the estates continued to make wines at the very high levels they did in the 1980s. I know that readers like it when I name names, so to mention just a few properties that were “go to” producers for value in the 1980s and now are not worthy buying at any price, I would mention a few such as Pape Clément, Domaine de Chevalier, Leoville-Poyferré and Pousseys. However, there are still some great classic claret producers who make affordable wines that would easily fit into our 1980s era budget and age long and gracefully. Amongst these, I would include Cantemerle, La Lagune, Chasse-Spleen, Laujac, La Tour de By, d’Issan, Rauzan-Gassies, Prieuré-Lichine, Haut-Bailly and Corbin. The vintages I would pay most attention to that are still out on the market would include 2005, 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2012. The 2009s can be very good (particularly on the Left Bank), but are pricier and I would rather own any estate’s 2005 over their 2009 counterpart if stepping up for a highly praised vintage; however, 2008 is still the vintage I would look for most often today.

In the Rhône Valley, things are more problematic, as this is one of the region’s that really has to be ranked as one of the profound losers in the global warming sweepstakes. But, there are still some great options from a handful of producers, beginning with Éric Texier, Château Mont-Redon and Pierre Gonon’s glorious St. Joseph’s. Back in the 1980s, twenty-five or thirty dollars would still buy you a bottle of most top examples of Côte-Rôtie, Hermitage or Cornas, but those days are now gone forever and one simply has to look at other appellations to hit those price points. However, I am not persuaded that a ten or fifteen year-old bottle of Gonon or Éric Texier’s glorious Domaine Pergault Brézème “Vieilles Vignes” will not provide nearly as much pleasure at their apogees. And of course, in Châteauneuf du Pape, one can still buy at very fair prices Château Mont-Redon’s classic examples of the appellation. Not too much further afield, on the other side of Lyon, one can always lay in a fine selection of Cru Beaujolais from the myriad of old and new producers who are embracing their changed fortunes (as climate change has been far kinder to the *vignerons* here than further south in the Rhône valley). The list of top flight producers is growing seemingly with every vintage in Beaujolais, but some of the names I



would not hesitate to add to my cellar as a cornerstone for drinking ten to twenty years out would include Jean-Pierre Chermette, Jean-Paul Brun, Michel Guignier, Daniel Bouland, Domaine des Billards, Château Thivin, Clos de la Roilette, Nicole Chanrion, Château des Jacques, Julien Sunier, Georges Descombes, Joseph Drouhin, Louis et Claude Desvignes, Château Grange Cochard and Domaine de la Roche Pilée. Many of these still have their beautifully structured 2011s kicking around in the marketplace, which is the best long-term aging Beaujolais vintage (alongside 2005) that I have tasted in twenty years. Top crus from these producers will easily last twenty to forty years in a vintage such as 2005 or 2011, and this is a segment of the market where some of the very finest values can be found today.



Red Burgundy was not cheap back in the late 1980s, but in comparison to prices that have skyrocketed since the release of the 2005s, they were far more accessible even to folks on a budget. Today, a lot of the toniest appellations and villages are far out of reach if we are trying to build a cellar with a 1980s budget, but there are still some communes that are noteworthy for the value that they offer and would still make our list. Villages such as Savigny-lès-Beaune, Pernand-Vergelesses, Beaune, Auxey-Duresses, Marsannay and Nuits St. Georges can still offer outstanding values, in the context of today's badly overheated Burgundy market, and these wines will last very well in the cellar and are still worthy of consideration. Producers such as Simon Bize et Fils, Chandon de Briailles, Camus-Bruchon, Antonin Guyon, Hugues Pavelot, Henri Gouges, Alain Michelot, Robert Chevillon, Domaine Rollin, Gilles Lafouge and Domaine Bart

all make outstanding red Burgundies that are relatively affordable (to varying degrees) and will age long and gracefully. Also, one of the least recognized category for cellar-worthy red Burgundies are the village wine bottlings from top producers, which today are made far better than was the case thirty years ago (part of this having to do with climate change and part of it having to do with the more meticulous care taken by *vignerons* with these wines today), and one can get some stellar village wines for the cellar from more famous producers. Just as a case in point, I have cases of the Mugneret sisters beautiful Vosne-Romanée *villages* and Christophe Roumier's Chambolle AC in my cellar that are aging slowly, gracefully and really offer up beautiful bottles of red Burgundy at age ten to twenty-five. If one is willing to "bottom feed" a bit at the toniest addresses and buy village wines or things such as Louis Boillot's or Denis Bachelet's Côte de Nuits Villages bottlings, one can still get some serious red Burgundies for the cellar that are not priced completely insane.

In Italy, the days when one could buy almost all of the very best producers in Piemonte for between twenty and thirty-five dollars a bottle, as was the case in 1989, are now long gone, but there remain still a handful of producers whose wines offer up very, very good value in the context of today's almost Burgundian price points, and producers such as Marcarini, Burlotto, Cantine Rizzi in Barbaresco and, of course, the Produttori del Barbaresco remain "go to" estates for value for classically styled wines from Piemonte's two most famous DOCGs. However, beyond Barolo and Barbaresco, there are still plenty of very, very good values for the cellar in this region, as many of the finest estates continue to produce a very, very good Nebbiolo d'Alba bottling from younger vines in their crus, and I also love the potential for top producers Barbera to age and evolve nicely in the cellar, so these are two other options for those who want to drink fine, mature wine from the heart and soul of Piemonte and do not want to pay a king's ransom for a case. A specialist worth mentioning for Barbera is Trinchero in Asti, whose wines age beautifully. Further up the mountains, there are also a myriad of outstanding producers (who have again benefitted immeasurably from global warming in their high altitude vineyards) in communes such as Ghemme, Valtellina, Bramaterra, Lessona, Grumello and Gattinara. While the most famous producer in Valtellina, Arturo Pellizzatti Perego (or Ar. Pe. Pe.) have gotten pretty pricey in the last few years, many other producers in these Alpine vineyard towns are still very good values. A few of my favorites worth looking for include Petterino, Tenute Sella and Antichi Vigneti di Cantalupo. Even further up the mountains, in Trentino and Alto Adige, one can find some excellent and very cellar-worthy red wines. I particularly like the Teroldego bottlings from Foradori and the Lagreins from Heinrich Mayr Nusserhof. I will be doing a complete feature on some of these wines in the late spring, handicapping current releases from some of the top producers in these mountainous regions.

Further afield in Italy, Tuscany seems to my palate to be one of the losers in the global warming sweepstakes, though how much is climate change and how much is market shift is uncertain, but beyond Monte Vertine and Selvapiana, there is not a lot of producers here who I have kept up with in recent years, as the wines do not seem anywhere near as ageworthy as they were in the mid-1980s. There are probably dozens of producers who I do not know here that are still producing wines that will cellar well, but I have not crossed paths with any of them and cannot make any strong recommendations. However, further south in Campania, one can still get absolutely great red and white wines for the cellar at very reasonable prices. For reds, Taurasi is still the wine to look for from this region, with the brilliant examples from Donnachiara and

Cantine Lonardo offering excellent value. At full maturity, these wines will rival some of the very best Baroli and Barbaresci and eclipse most of what is made in Brunello di Montalcino these days. And while they are not really in the price range, they deserve to be in a thoughtfully stocked cellar these days are the beautiful Trebbianos and Montepulcianos from Emidio Pepe. I also love the red wines from Calabretta on the slopes of Mount Etna in Sicily, which are serious wines for the cellar as well and fit nicely into a 1980s era budget.

In Spain, there are still loads of good values to be found, if one can sift through all of the modern, high octane and over-oaked wines that are also produced in the region. Many of these values can be found listed in the article on Spain in this issue or in the big feature on Galicia from a couple of issues back. Beyond that, in Rioja, great values can be found from Bodegas Lecea and Señorío de P. Pedro Peciña, as well as the more basic bottlings from Cuné and López de Heredia. In Ribera del Duero, the utterly brilliant wines of Goyo Garcia are a must addition to any well-stocked cellar today. In Cataluña, I particularly like the prospects for long-term cellaring for the wines from Huguet Can Feixes. I also loved what I tasted from the young winemakers at Envínate, which are produced from old vines from several diverse regions from Tenerife to Ribeira Sacra. And as the article on Spain will demonstrate, one does not have to stay in Rioja to find great wines for the cellar these days. If I were building my cellar today, I would probably focus quite a bit of attention on the top producers in Ribeira Sacra for my red wines, as my gut feeling is that these unique and compelling wines offer up the same kind of value opportunities today as fifteen dollar bottles of Cornas or Côte-Rôtie did thirty years ago! In Portugal, there are some amazing values to be found from the Alentejo (if one picks the lower alcohol bottlings- say fourteen percent and down), with a great many of the red wines here clearly built to handle at least mid-term cellaring.

And in California, which is not often cited as one of the good places to look for value, there continues to be some truly brilliant and world class wines produced that do indeed offer superb “bang for the buck.” First and foremost amongst these wineries has to be Kalin Cellars, which continues to age all of their wines until they are approaching maturity before they even release them into the marketplace. Twenty year-old, pristine chardonnays for under forty dollars (look for the recently-released 1995 Cuvée LD chardonnay to get some idea of just how brilliant a bargain these wines are today!) or fifteen year-old Sémillon that is pure, vibrant and just starting to drink at its peak are just some of the great wines one can find from Kalin these days. The husband and wife team of Terry and Frances Leighton are equally gifted in making both red and white wines and my general advice would be to stock up on whatever they choose to release over the next several years. Beyond Kalin Cellars, producers such as Joseph Swan Vineyards, Edmunds St. John, Stony Hill Vineyards and Heitz Wine Cellar (for their non-Martha’s Vineyard bottlings) are also still excellent values. I also like very much Ridge Vineyards Santa Cruz Mountain cabernets for value (their zinfandels are less interesting these days), and the Mount Eden Vineyards cabernets and pinot noirs. The Andrew Will Winery in Washington state is also making superb, cellar-worthy wines in a St. Émilion style of blends that are very fairly priced.

When one turns one attention to cellaring white wines that offer outstanding value, the beautiful wines of Germany stand front and center as must additions to a new collection for long-term aging. Like several other regions, global warming has been very good to Germany and this is one of the great winners since climate change began to take root in the 1990s. Other than a



very small handful of the most famous producers in Germany, every top estate is making cellar-worthy wines that fall into our 1980s era budget, and these days, one can buy either dry Rieslings or traditional off-dry wines and do equally well. With dry wines, the Grosses Gewächs bottlings from top estates such as Klaus-Peter Keller are a bit out of our budget criteria, but his non-grand cru bottlings such as Riesling “R” or von der Fels are very good options (both produced from younger vines and non-grand cru sections of his top vineyards) and will age very long and beautifully. Regular dry Riesling bottlings from Hanno Zilliken, Reinhold Haart, Willi Schaefer, Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch, Schloss Lieser, Karthäuserhof, Falkenstein, Weiser-Kunstler, Emrich-Schönleber, Schafer-Fröhlich and Helmut Dönnhoff would all fit beautifully in the budget and be very welcome bottles to be pulling out of the cellar ten or twenty years down the road. One can also buy plenty of topflight Kabinetten, Spätlesen and regular Auslesen in these same price points from these same producers.



The Loire Valley also offers a myriad of top options for cellaring, but with premo starting to show up in regions such as Savennières and Vouvray with some regularity, I would focus my purchases here more for wines that I am intending to drink a bit sooner, from the likes of the top producers in Sancerre. The exceptions of course would be the long-distance runners from Edmond Vatan, Gérard Boulay and François Cotat. So far, it seems that Muscadet has been aloof from premo issues, so here one can look at top producers such as Mark Ollivier, Luneau-Papin, J.J. et Rémi Bonnet and Domaine de l'Écu for long-term cellaring possibilities. With

sweeter-styled wines, Montlouis and Vouvray still seem quite safe bets for the cellar, with Domaines Huët and Chidaine at the top of my list. In Burgundy, long-term cellaring is still fraught with peril because of premature oxidation concerns, so drinking these wines up in the first five years is the best strategy after they are released. Here I would concentrate mostly on Chablis to hit the value points for a 1980s era cellar, and village wines from top producers are a very good way to go in this regard. Auxey-Duresses is another village where the white wines are better today than they were a generation ago and still hit our price points, with Gilles Lafouge the finest producer in the village. I also like St. Aubin very, very much for value in white Burgundy these days, with Olivier Lamy, Henri Prudhon and Domaine Bernard Moreau the finest producers.

The other major addition to a well-stocked cellar these days would be Grower-Récoltant Champagne bottlings, as many of these (particularly outside of the three tier system in the US) are priced very reasonably and will age long and gracefully. Most of the Grandes Marques' wines these days are too expensive to fit in our budget, with the exception of Piper-Heidsieck and Bruno Paillard (both of which is very quietly making stunning wines at the present time), but there are a long and growing list of smaller producers who are making great wines for the cellar these days, as Champagne is another region that is a winner in the climate change lottery. There are really too many top flight Grower-Récoltants these days in Champagne to mention all, but a good start would be to consider the wines from Benoit Marguet, Bernard Brémont, Marie-Noëlle Ledru, Champagne Tarlant, Vincent Charlot, Bérèche Père et Fils, Ployez-Jacquemart, Godmé Père et Fils, Camille Savès, Pierre Gerbais, Vazart-Coquart, Nicolas Maillart, J. L. Vergnon, José Dhondt, Barnaut, Bruno Gobillard, R. H. Coutier, Gatinois, Demièrre-Ansiot, Laherte Frères, Pierre Moncuit, Aurélien Suenen and Chartogne-Taillet. Any of these producers would be just superb building blocks for a well-stocked cellar today, and this is a category that did not even really exist in a meaningful way back in the late 1980s.

The above listing of where I would start today to build a young cellar with a similar budget to what I devoted to my own cellar back in the mid to late 1980s, is not meant to be exhaustive by any means, but simply to serve as food for thought. It is not particularly long on "big names" or "trophy wines", but it is very deep in terms of ageworthy wines that will improve immeasurably with bottle age and which will provide immense enjoyment if drunk ten, twenty or even thirty years down the road. Almost all of the most famous wines from the most famous regions have become very expensive in the last decade and would absolutely cripple a 1980s era budget for building a cellar. However, this emphatically does not equate to it being impossible to build an absolutely brilliant wine cellar today from other regions outside of the most famous, or of opting for the more value conscious, traditional producers from the well-known regions. One simply has to do some research to see what one likes (opening bottles of young wines one is thinking about committing a case to the cellar is a very good idea) the best and then start piling up cases in a cool, dark corner of the basement. I was very fortunate to have started building my own cellar when I did, but one has to realize that I would today be thrilled to also have tucked away cases of Loire reds from vintages such as 1985 and 1989 when they crossed my path, and many others, but did not do so, as I focused on more well-known regions of the time. The thing to keep in mind is that the journey of wine loving involves both finding and losing favorites over time, as some become too expensive to continue to follow, some witness generational change in adverse directions, while new regions and domaines come to the fore with the passing of time.

**RECENTLY TASTED SPANISH WINES- FEBRUARY 2015  
AND MORE NOTES FROM OCTOBER 2014 VISIT TO SPAIN**



*The very stony, almost Châteauneuf-like vineyard soils of Cigales are very much in evidence in this photo.*

As readers will recall, I spent nearly half the month of October of 2014 in Spain and wrote extensively about my visit to some of the very top producers in the magical region of Galicia back in Issue 53. However, my fortnight in Spain was not exclusively spent in this breathtakingly beautiful northwestern corner of the country, as I managed to stop in at a handful of bodegas in several other regions over the course of my visit to the Iberian peninsula, but have not yet had the opportunity to write up the notes from these other visits. Several of the bodegas that I visited outside of Galicia were also very classically, old school producers, of which there sadly are such a small percentage of the overall number of wine producers in this beautiful country, as the modern wine bug has bitten this country as hard as any in the last twenty years and there are an awful lot of wines produced these days that are wildly popular within Spain and which I find absolutely undrinkable. Happily, for the most part, my Spanish sojourn managed to steer clear of virtually all of these, which is not that easy to do when one is dining in Madrid these days, and as I had a very good tour guide in Gerry Dawes, whose passion for old school Spanish wines probably burns even brighter than my own (though perhaps not so diplomatically ☺), so there were very few visitations by the over-oaked and high alcohol school of modern

Spanish wines during our trip. While the two primary purposes of my October trip were to spend an extended period of time in Galicia, which I think is quickly becoming one of Spain's very top regions and surpassing several far more famous D.O.s in wine quality, as well as visit Cuné and Contino and complete the necessary research for the historical feature on those two great Rioja estates, I did have time for several more days of tasting across the Iberian peninsula during the trip. This article primarily covers those other visits from October, with the exception of the great morning spent in Ribera del Duero with Goyo Garcia, whose utterly brilliant wines merit an estate feature on their own and which will appear in an upcoming issue of the newsletter. Suffice to say that Señor Garcia is currently making the very finest wines in all of the Ribera del Duero D.O. and it is simply a waste of time to be drinking anything else from this region- including the most famous names- if one has access to the wines of Goyo Garcia.

I have fleshed out this article with recent tasting notes on several various Spanish wines that I have sampled here in New York between November and February, as I returned to the states with a powerful thirst for more old school Spanish wines and sought out samples wherever I could find them over the course of the subsequent months. Not that I am opposed philosophically to more modern styles of Spanish wines, if they can be done well, and a few of these types of wines are also featured in the notes that follow in this article. The problem, at least to my palate, is that the vast, vast majority of the modern Spanish wines that I taste these days are really poorly balanced wines, with alcohol that is excessive for positive evolution in the bottle, and often the high octane is coupled with heavy-handed new oak treatments as well, and the combination of the two is usually highly detrimental over the long haul for the wine in question. I am well aware that this modern style of wine is far, far more popular in Spain itself than the more old school and elegant wines that I gravitate towards, and producers here for the most part are dependent on the domestic market for most of their sales, so it makes financial sense to craft wines from overripe grapes and lots of new oak, for that is what their clients primarily want these days. To my mind, while it is understandable that the market and their attendant taste makers dictate the style to a large extent in many bodegas across Spain these days, I find the situation a bit sad and emblematic of the greater malaise that affects businesses in general in the twenty-first century. There was a time when the landscape of commerce was sprinkled with innovators and visionaries who truly believed in their business models and sought to educate clients and expand their horizons, rather than simply following the herd so as to book a few orders as the parade rolled through town. In the world of wine, some regions have a stronger foundation of tradition to withstand the fickle fate of fashion, whereas in others, it is all too easy to join one's neighbors and simply make the same formulaic modern wines.

Happily, there remains a small percentage of wineries in Spain that are out of step with the modern trends in the world of wine, and I was very lucky to have the opportunity to visit several of these during my October trip. As many of these bodegas are starting to gain a reputation in their own country, finally, for the excellent quality of their wines, it seems pretty clear that an undercurrent of classicism in the world of Spanish wines is starting to stir and we may well be in an age where the cornerstone is being laid for a Spanish renaissance of more classically styled wines that will rise up and challenge the modern school in the decades to come. Given the gorgeously diverse and impressive range of *terroir* to be found throughout Spain, there will always be hope for the wines of this country, if the heavy hand of vinous modernism can be rolled back a bit in the coming years. One of the overriding issues of concern in the world of



Spanish wine in most regions is how widespread irrigation can be better utilized to return wine styles to their traditions, as irrigation has made it possible to grow enormous crops in some of the semi-arid regions where wine production is entrenched, and these huge crop loads almost demand a modern style of winemaking to cover up the inherent defects of too many grapes on too many hectares of vineyard land. The overly abundant yields simply eradicate expressions of *terroir* in wines, and this is an issue that will need to be confronted bravely for many of the decidedly second division modernists to start making wines that are truly worthy of connoisseurs' attention. Slick public relations, high profile consulting oenologists, attentive brand building and illicit generosity to market makers may be able to push the cases out the door of the bodega for a while, but in the long run, the vitality of a winery's business has to be founded on the true quality of the wines which they produce.

The following article is broken up into two sections, with the first dealing with my October visits to various wineries outside of Galicia, which I have not yet had the opportunity to write about. The second section covers recently tasted samples of Spanish wines tasted here in New York since my return from my autumn trip to the country, and these notes have been organized by region, starting in the northwest and working across the peninsula in an easterly fashion. Within each regional grouping, I have listed white wines first, followed by red wines, with the same categories of wines posted in alphabetical order by winery name. My notes on recently tasted Cava appear in the article on Champagne and Sparkling Wines, rather than here. I should mention that there was no attempt to organize samples from specific regions of Spain when I began contacting importers (or they reached out for me), as I was in the mood to taste anything of quality from Spain, and if an importer asked if I wanted to taste any of their producers from Galicia, I of course responded in the affirmative, even after just having written fifty pages on this beautiful region! I should note that one of the great unexpected pleasures of my October trip was to be introduced to yet another absolutely classic producer in Rioja, Bodegas Lecea, whose wines I had never even heard of before and which I found to be absolutely stellar. The family winery of Bodegas Lecea is currently owned and run by Luis Alberto Lecea and now ably assisted by his son, Jorge. Luis Alberto is interesting in that he is the very first head of the Rioja D.O. to actually be a *vigneron* and farmer, as all of the previous heads have been *négociants* or representatives from one of the very largest producers. His wines are utterly classic and a great new addition to the international Rioja scene, as they have just begun to be imported into the US. For importers in other markets, I strongly urge you to pay a visit to Bodegas Lecea pronto, as these are great wines that have been virtually unknown outside of the region.

### ***Bierzo Estates Visited***

*Though Bierzo lies just outside of the borders of Galicia, in the neighboring province of Castilla y León, in spirit and wine style, it really should be considered part of Galicia. The two most important grapes in Bierzo are Mencía for red wines and Godello for white wines, and with plenty of high altitude vineyards planted on a mix of clay, stone and slate soils, this region, on the eastern borders of Ribeira Sacra and Valdeorras should probably be included in Galicia if the provinces of Spain could be re-written along wine-producing lines. However, the climate here does tend to be a touch more “continental” than a bit further west in Galicia, with warmer days in the summer and less rainfall, so that the resulting wines can be a bit more concentrated in style than the slightly more filigreed examples across the border in Galicia proper. Many of*

*the top vineyards in Bierzo are up in the foothills of this mountainous country, scattered amongst the timbered ridges, where the evening temperatures plunge sufficiently in summer to keep the resulting wines fresh and focused. This is a ruggedly rural wine-producing region, but with excellent terroirs and lots of old vines and the potential to produce some of Spain's most interesting wines.*

### ***Bodegas Mengoba- Grégory Pérez (Cacebellós)***

Grégory Pérez is one of the top consulting winemakers in Bierzo, and in addition to making his own wines at Bodegas Mengoba, he is the man behind the wines at several other top estates in Bierzo, with Godello his particular specialty for his client wineries. Señor Pérez was not born and raised in Bierzo however, as his home *payee* is actually Bordeaux, and he graduated from the University of Bordeaux in 2001 with his degree in oenology. One of his classmates at the university was Eduardo Garcia, one of the sons of Mariano Garcia (formerly cellar master at Vega Sicilia and now the producer of Mauro and Aalto in Ribera del Duero), and after a couple of internships at well-known châteaux in Bordeaux, Grégory accepted a job in Bierzo at a winery where Mariano Garcia was consulting at the time. His first few years in Bierzo were spent producing oaky, high octane Ribera del Duero copies in Bierzo, out of Mencía primarily, but he eventually began to dislike those oaky and heady wines and began to yearn for a more classic expression of Bierzo's *terroir*. In 2007 he purchased five hectares of high altitude vineyard land and founded Bodegas Mengoba to pursue his vision of Bierzo wines, unadulterated with heavy doses of new wood. The vineyards that he purchased included plenty of old vines, with the vine range these days running anywhere from thirty years up to eighty years of age, with most of the vines pruned goblet style and scattered in small parcels amongst the wild, mountainous countryside of Bierzo. A few years later, he started a second line of wines, called "Brezo" and made from purchased grapes in the region. In the last couple of years, Señor Pérez has moved away a bit from using older barrels and stainless steel tanks, having purchased some large oak *foudres* for the raising of several of his cuvées, with a few of these holding two thousand liters and now being designated for his Mengoba Blanco bottling. There are some five thousand liter *foudres* as well, which are being used for the *elevage* of a few of the reds wines here. The wines are across the board excellent, with plenty of soil character, outstanding focus and balance and seemingly, plenty of capacity for aging in the bottle. Grégory Pérez is clearly one of the budding superstars in the Bierzo region and it is pretty easy to be persuaded that there are a lot more interesting projects going on in his cellars than in ninety percent of the cellars these days in his native Bordeaux.

### **2013 Brezo Blanco- Grégory Pérez**

Brezo Blanco is made from a blend of eighty percent Godello and twenty percent Doña Blanca (and indigenous white wine grape of Bierzo) and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. Grégory Pérez only uses natural yeasts for the fermentation of this bottling and it spends five months on its fine lees, with gentle *battonage*. The 2013 comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely nose of pear, white peach, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a juicy core of fruit, fine soli signature and a long, zesty finish. Good juice. 2015-2020. **88.**

### **2013 Madai Blanco- Grégory Pérez**

The 2013 Madai Blanco from Grégory Pérez offers up a lovely nose of peach, fresh almond, white soils, a touch of beeswax and a nice touch of spring flowers in the upper register.

On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and shows excellent mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, sound acids and blossoming complexity on the long finish. Classy juice. 2015-2020. **90**.

#### **2012 Mengoba Blanco- Grégory Pérez**

The 2012 vintage was the first for the Mengoba Blanco to be raised in the two thousand liter *foudres* that Grégory Pérez has purchased in recent years and the wine has turned out very well indeed. The wine is produced entirely from Godello, with the vineyards for this bottling ranging from thirty to forty years of age. The bouquet on the 2012 is young and promising, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of pear, peach, fresh almonds, white soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in personality, with a good core, a fine girdle of acidity and lovely focus and grip on the nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This needs another year of bottle age to really start to blossom and should age very well indeed. 2016-2025. **90+**.

#### **2011 Madai “Godello Sobre Lias” Blanco- Grégory Pérez**

The 2011 Madai “Sobre Lias” is comprised of one hundred percent Godello and was raised entirely a one year-old *demi-muid*. The bouquet offers up a very pretty blend that recalls white Hermitage a bit in its blend of pear, beeswax, chalky stones, dried flowers and a discreet vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with broad shoulders, good bounce and fine length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is good juice, but the extended period on its lees may have sacrificed a bit of precision in exchange for more stuffing. However, the wine is still on the young side and it may more fully snap into better focus with a bit more bottle age. If so, my score will seem unduly conservative. 2016-2020+. **89+**.

#### **2013 Brezo “La Vie en Rose” Rosado- Grégory Pérez**

The Brezo Rosado is made entirely from Mencía and is a lovely dry rosé. The bouquet is bright and zesty, wafting from the glass in a mix of strawberries, wild fennel, orange peel, dried flowers and a nice touch of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and succulent, with fine depth, bright acids and lovely length and focus on the well-balanced and classy finish. 2015-2017. **88**.

#### **2013 Brezo Tinto- Grégory Pérez**

The 2013 Brezo Tinto from Grégory Pérez is comprised of eighty percent Mencía and twenty percent a field blend of old vine Garnacha and Alicante. The wine is fermented with wild yeasts in stainless steel tanks and is ninety percent de-stemmed. The vintage had only been bottled a bit more than two weeks before my visit, but was still showing well, as it offers up a deep nose of black cherries, dark berries, pepper, a bit of autumnal leafiness (from the Alicante) and coffee bean. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, suave tannins and lovely balance on the long and classy finish. This is really a fine bottle and will be an excellent value. 2015-2025. **89+**.

#### **2013 Flor de Brezo Tinto- Grégory Pérez**

The Flor de Brezo Tinto from Grégory Pérez is produced from the same vineyards and same fermentation methods as the regular bottling of Brezo, but it is raised in old, five thousand liter wooden *foudres*, rather than stainless steel tanks. The 2013 Flor de Brezo was really showing well, as it offers up a pure and complex nose of cassis, sweet dark berries, espresso, a fine base of soil tones, pepper and a nice topnote of Alicante leafiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with outstanding focus and grip, a lovely core of black fruit, moderate tannins and a long, poised and quite soil-driven finish. This is a step up from the regular bottling in terms of precision and nascent complexity. 2015-2030+. **91+**.



*Grégory Pérez in front of a couple of his two thousand liter wood foudres in his winery of Mengoba.*

### **2013 Mengoba Tinto- Grégory Pérez**

The Mengoba Tinto bottling from Monsieur Pérez is made up of a slightly different blend than the Brezo bottlings, as this wine is eighty percent Mencía, fifteen percent Garnacha and five percent a field blend that includes both Alicante and Godello. The 2013 was still resting comfortably in five thousand liter *foudre* at the time of my visit, with bottling to be done in the spring. The bouquet is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a classy constellation of dark berries, coffee grounds, gamebirds, slate, pepper and a nice topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, blossoming complexity, fine-grained tannins and excellent balance on the long and quite refined finish. This is going to be a dynamite bottle of wine in the fullness of time. 2018-2035+. **93.**

### **2013 Madai Tinto- Grégory Pérez**

The 2013 Madai Tinto from Grégory Pérez is made up of a blend of ninety percent Mencía and ten percent Alicante Bouschet. The wine is quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, woodsmoke, espresso, slate and again, that lovely topnote of leafiness from the Alicante that I simply adore in wines with this varietal in the blend. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance and a long, moderately tannic finish. The acids are a bit lower in the 2013 Madai bottling than in the



Mengoba Tintos, but this seems likely to just make the wine accessible a bit sooner in its development. Good juice. 2016-2025+. **90.**

**2012 Mengoba Tinto- Grégory Pérez**

The 2012 Mengoba Tinto seems to be just a smidgeon riper than the 2013 version (this is 13.5 percent alcohol, but I did not take note of the octane on the 2013 still in *foudre*), but shares the same similarly serious structural elements and great depth. The bouquet is a very promising blend of sweet dark berries, espresso, pepper, a touch of game, slate soil tones, a bit of Alicante leafiness and a very discreet whisper of cedar (as the large *foudre* the wine is raised in is fairly new). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the black fruity, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. Very serious juice in the making. 2016-2035. **92+.**

**2012 Mengoba “la Vigne de Sancho Martin” Tinto- Grégory Pérez**

The 2012 Mengoba “la Vigne de Sancho Martin” from Grégory Pérez is comprised of a different blend, with only sixty-five percent of the *cépages* dedicated to Mencía, twenty-five percent Alicante Bouschet and ten percent old vine Godello. This is a touch riper than the 2012 Mengoba regular bottling, coming in at fourteen percent alcohol, but shows no signs of heat on the backend and is very nicely balanced. The wine was raised entirely in new *demi-muids*, so it shows a touch more oak influence than the regular bottling raised in *foudre*. The bouquet is a ripe and slightly jammy blend of dark berries, bitter chocolate, hung game, coffee grounds and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with broad shoulders, good balance and very good length and grip on the still very primary finish. This does not seem to possess quite the same focus as the regular bottling of 2012 Mengoba Tinto, but it is still a good wine in the making. 2020-2035+. **89+.**

**2010 Madai “Mencías Sobre Lias” Tinto- Grégory Pérez**

Grégory Pérez’s 2010 Madai “Mencías Sobre Lias” Tinto is a dynamite bottle of wine that truly shows the potential inherent in these old vines scattered around the foothills of Bierzo. This cuvée was raised entirely in “one wine” barrels and came in at fourteen percent octane, but is absolutely cool and precise in the mouth. The pure and blossoming bouquet jumps from the glass in a blaze of cassis, dark chocolate, incipient notes of venison, espresso, slate, a touch of vanillin oak and a lovely topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent balance and focus, ripe, suave tannins and a very long, poised and palate-staining finish. This is really a high class bottle in the making, but I would still keep it tucked away in the cellar for at least another five years and really let it blossom completely. 2020-2040+. **93.**

***Bodegas Adriá (Villafranca del Bierzo)***

Bodegas Adriá is located in the small town of Villafranca del Bierzo, which is the first sign of civilization after one descends out of the mountains between Galicia and Bierzo. The estate specializes in inexpensive wines that offer good quality and value for their price points, and until quite recently, Grégory Pérez was the consultant here. The winery was founded all the way back in 1940 by Señor Francisco Pérez Adriá, and the estate continues to be run to this day by his family. The Adriá family owns twenty-five hectares of Godello vines and has long term contracts with local growers around Villafranca del Bierzo for an equal amount of Mencía vines, as well as a small amount of Tempranillo. These are vineyards up in the hills above Villafranca, with no irrigation and good stony soils that are a mix of clay and fractured slate. The winery bottles wines under two labels, Viña Barroca and Vega Montán. They seem to offer good depth

and stuffing, in a slightly rustic pattern, and much to my surprise, my favorite wine here was one that they raise in oak barrels, called Silk (at least in the Spanish market). The first bottling of Silk was produced in the 2008 vintage, for which Grégory Pérez ordered three hundred liter French barrels to raise the wine, and these same barrels are still used for the bottling and were now four years of age when the 2012 was produced. It is the intention of the estate to not use new wood for this bottling and just allow the barrels to become older and deliver a more discreet expression of wood in the wine with each passing vintage, and the two vintages I tasted of this wine were truly well-made and great bargains!

### **2013 Godello “Vega Montán”- Bodegas Adriá**

This is a perfectly sound bottle of Godello and it is quite affordable. The surprisingly complex bouquet is a classic blend of pear, white peach, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and fairly complex, but a bit chunky in personality, with good acids and varietal character. The finish is fairly long and shows some soil tones, but this is essentially a fruit-driven example of Godello. Not bad. 2015-2020. **87.**

### **2013 Viña Barroca Tinto- Bodegas Adriá**

The 2013 Viña Barroca Tinto from Bodegas Adriá is comprised of a blend of ninety percent Mencía and ten percent Tempranillo, with the wine raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. It really is quite pretty, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of dark berries, espresso, a bit of bonfire, a nice base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit rustic in structure, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, fairly complex finish. This is a good, solid “country wine” that may gain a bit more polish with bottle age, but delivers plenty of depth and Mencía character for a low price. 2015-2020. **87+.**

### **2013 Mencía “Vega Montán” Joven- Bodegas Adriá**

The Vega Montán bottling from Bodegas Adriá is comprised entirely of Mencía, with the vines averaging between twenty-five and fifty years of age. This too is produced entirely in stainless steel tanks and offers up a lovely varietal character on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is deep and really quite classy, offering up notes of cassis, dark berries, graphite, coffee grounds and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and gently chewy, with good focus and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is more refined than the Viña Barroca Tinto. 2015-2022+. **88+.**

### **2012 Silk “Vega Montán”- Bodegas Adriá**

The 2012 Silk “Vega Montán” bottling from Bodegas Adriá is made entirely from older vine Mencía and was raised in four year-old barrels. The marriage of the discreet new wood with the fine depth of Mencía fruit and soil tones is excellent, as the wine wafts from the glass in a classy blend of cassis, black cherries, pepper, woodsmoke, coffee, graphite and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and impressively elegant on the attack, with affine core, lovely length and grip and a poised, modestly tannic and classy finish. This is really a lovely bottle of Mencía, where the bit of barrel aging in older casks has nicely rounded off the slightly more rustic elements and produced a wine that is really a terrific value. 2015-2022+. **91.**

### **2010 Silk “Vega Montán”- Bodegas Adriá**

The 2010 Silk “Vega Montán” from Bodegas Adriá was made by Grégory Pérez when he was still consulting here, and though it is a bit more marked by its barrel component, as the barrels were two years younger then, it is still a very well-made bottle of Mencía and is drinking very well at the present time. The 2010 vintage was a touch warmer than 2012, so this wine

comes in at a full fourteen percent, as opposed to 13.5 percent for the 2012, but offers up the same elegant precision on both the nose and palate as its younger sibling. The bouquet is a fine blend of cassis, slate, espresso, woodsmoke, a touch of chicory and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, classy finish. Good juice. 2015-2020+. **90.**

### ***Rueda Estate Visited***

*Rueda is Verdejo country and one of Spain's most interesting and ageworthy white wine grapes reaches its apogee in this lovely region.*

### ***Bodegas José Pariente***

José Pariente was a grape-grower in Rueda in the 1960s and he began to produce a bit of Verdejo for himself, his family and his friends during this decade, convinced that the grapes that he was growing were of top quality and capable of producing outstanding wines. However, he never realized his dream to create a commercial winery prior to his passing away in 1997, but his daughter, Victoria Pariente, was able to found the family winery in his memory in 1998 and over the brief history of this bodegas, the wines have become reference point examples of Verdejo. Today, Victoria Pariente is joined in the running of the estate by her daughter, Martina Prieto Pariente and her son, Ignacio Preito and the two generations work side by side crafting some of the most distinctive wines to be found in the D.O. The winery today offers up five different cuvées: a regular bottling of Verdejo raised in stainless steel tanks, a Sauvignon Blanc also raised in stainless, a Verdejo “Cuvée Especial” whose *elevage* is done in concrete eggs, a barrel-raised Verdejo “Fermentado en Barrica” and a rare, Rueda dessert wine based on Sauvignon Blanc, called Apasionado de José Pariente”. The family was the very first to plant Sauvignon Blanc vines in Rueda, back in 1984, and the family used the grapes from their oldest Sauvignon Blanc vines to make this late-harvest bottling. In addition to the five commercially available wines produced here, the Pariente family is also experimenting with a solera of Verdejo that is developing into a Sherry-styled wine and which has been going since the 2008 vintage. Across the board, the quality of wines here is absolutely exceptional and these must represent some of the finest white wines values to be found anywhere in Spain today.

### **2013 Verdejo- Bodegas José Pariente**

The 2013 Verdejo from Bodegas José Pariente is an excellent bottle, jumping from the glass in a vibrant aromatic mélange of lime, pear, green olive, wild fennel and a nice touch of other exotic botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and zesty, with a beautiful signature of salty soil tones, excellent focus and grip, lovely complexity and a long, vibrant and classy finish. Really an excellent bottle of Verdejo and a great value. 2015-2020. **90.**

### **2013 Sauvignon Blanc- Bodegas José Pariente**

Sauvignon Blanc has been part of the vineyard patrimony in Rueda now for thirty years and the grape variety has taken beautifully to the stony *terroir* of the region. The 2013 example from Bodegas José Pariente is a first class example of this lovely varietal, delivering a classic bouquet of gooseberry, fresh-cut grass, a lovely base of soil tones, pink grapefruit and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and impressively complex, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent focus on the long and beautifully balanced finish. High class juice. 2015-2020. **91+.**

### **2012 Verdejo “Cuvée Especial”- Bodegas José Pariente**

The 2010 vintage was the first of Cuvée Especial produced by the estate, after four years of experiments working with Verdejo under several different aging protocols to finally arrive at the cellar methodologies now used for this lovely cuvée. Today, the wine is aged for eleven months on its fine lees, entirely in concrete eggs, with a bit of lees stirring in the early days of its *eleavage*. The 2012 is a touch riper than the 2013 regular bottling of Verdejo (13.5 percent versus thirteen), but the wine is impeccably balanced and cool in the mouth. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a blaze of pear, green olive, gentle leesy tones, dried flowers, a great signature of salty soil, wild fennel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with a youthfully snappy structure, outstanding focus and grip and stunning length on the pure and complex finish. This is reference point Verdejo that should age beautifully! 2015-2030+. **94.**



*Martina Prieto Pariente drawing off a sample of the family Verdejo “Barrica Solera” in the cellars.*

### **2012 Verdejo “Fermentado en Barrica”- Bodegas José Pariente**

The barrel-fermented and aged cuvée of Verdejo from Bodegas José Pariente is also outstanding. The wine is aged for six months in barrel, of which one-third are new casks, prior to assembly in tank and bottling. The 2013 is outstanding, offering up a deep, complex and gently oaky bouquet of pear, wild fennel, a lovely base of soil, green olives, vanillin oak and just a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully

balanced, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and complex finish. The oak here is done very discreetly and this too is exemplary Verdejo. 2015-2025+. **94.**

**2013 Apasionado de José Pariente- Bodegas José Pariente (500 ml.)**

The 2013 Apasionado de José Pariente is a lovely example of late harvest Sauvignon Blanc. Botrytis is not a possibility in the dry region of Rueda, so the grapes here are left out on the vine to ripen as much as the autumn will allow, and then fermented at cool temperatures to maintain the aromatic purity of the wine. The 2013 Apasionado de José Pariente carries eighty grams per liter of residual sugar and offers up a very pretty bouquet of gooseberry, currant leaf, tangerine, a lovely base of soil and gentle grassiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with fine focus, length and grip, great acids and a fairly modest impression of sweetness on the palate for its percentage of residual sugar. This is a lovely wine. 2015-2025. **92.**

**Verdejo “Barrica Solera”- Bodegas José Pariente**

This wine is an experiment that is basically being made for family consumption and events at the winery, but Martina Prieto Pariente was kind enough to allow us to taste the wine. I would assume that this one hundred percent Verdejo wine is still very early on in this its evolution and that the plan is to allow this solera to go on for decades and decades, eventually producing a very distinctive, oxidative wine that will be used for special events at the bodegas. The wine is really very lovely already, offering up aromatic notes of lemon peel, a salty base of soil, nutty overtones and Verdejo’s telltale smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and already quite Sherry-like in profile, with lovely focus, length and grip. Fun stuff. 2015-2065+? **89.**

***Cigales Estate Visited***

*To my palate, some of Spain’s most interesting dry Rosados hail from Cigales, with the stony soils here perfectly suited to producing deep and classy rosés from grapes such as Tempranillo and Garnacha. There are some good, solid, everyday reds also produced in Cigales, but I have a soft spot in my heart for the Rosados from this rugged countryside.*

***Bodegas Hermanos Merino***

Bodegas Hermanos Merino is run by the Merino brothers, Eugenio and Alberto. The estate owns fifteen hectares of vines in the stony soils of Cigales, with eighty percent of the vineyards planted to Tempranillo, ten percent to Verdejo and five percent each to Garnacha and Alvillo. The Merinos focus almost exclusively on Rosado sold under their Viña Catajarros label, for which the region of Cigales is rightly famous. The Merino brothers only produce a small amount of red wine here to augment their production of great Rosado. They have lots of old vines here, goblet-trained and sticking up out of the Chateaufort du Pape-like stony soils like wizened old hands. Twenty percent of their vines are over fifty years of age and they have more than a thousand plants in excess of one hundred years old! Their Rosado is fermented in stainless steel at cool temperatures and bottled the following May after the harvest, with ten percent of the blend made up of the white grapes of Verdejo and Alvillo. It is a darker-colored Rosado and ages very well indeed, as Eugenio Merino was happy to show us when we stopped by on a sunny October morning during my trip to Spain. While I am a fan of Spanish Rosado when it is first released, I like it even better with a bit of bottle age, as like so many other traditionally-styled wines on the Iberian peninsula, good Rosado from Cigales is clearly capable of gaining in complexity with some bottle age.

### **2013 Rosado “Viña Catajarros”- Bodegas Hermanos Merino**

The 2013 Rosado “Viña Catajarros” from the Merino brothers is a lovely bottle in the making, but probably still a tad on the young side and will offer up even better drinking come springtime. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of cranberries, pomegranate, lovely spice tones and a fine base of salty soil nuances. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine focus and a nice touch of spices meats adding complexity on the long finish. Good juice. 2015-2019. **88+**.

### **2012 Rosado “Viña Catajarros”- Bodegas Hermanos Merino**

The 2012 vintage was a top recent year for Bodegas Hermanos Merino and their Rosado is really showing well, but with the structure to also carry it for several more years. The bouquet is a youthfully complex mélange of pomegranate, tangerine, rose petals, salty soil tones and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more complex than the 2013, with a lovely core, crisp acids and really impressive length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This wine is coiled to spring and will be drinking beautifully in the next six months and should prove to be one of the longer-lived recent vintages of the Merino brothers’ excellent Rosado. 2015-2020+. **92.**

### **2011 Rosado “Viña Catajarros”- Bodegas Hermanos Merino**

The 2011 vintage of Viña Catajarros Rosado is drinking very nicely and is showing some fine secondary layers of development on both the nose and palate, while still retaining lovely freshness. The evolving bouquet is a blend of dried cherries, a touch of orange peel, lovely smokiness, salty soil tones and just a touch of dried rose in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and lively , with good complexity, a moderate core and fine length and grip on the *à point* finish. Good juice, but ready to drink up in the next few years. 2015-2017. **89.**

### **2009 Rosado “Viña Catajarros”- Bodegas Hermanos Merino**

The 2009 vintage in Cigales was quite warm and this is a riper-styled wine than the three vintages that preceded it in the tasting. The bouquet is consequently more evolved, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, a bit of new leather, orange peel and more deeply-pitched soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit heavy-handed stylistically (particularly in comparison to the 2012 and 2011 versions), with a good core, fine complexity and fairly discreet acids today. The finish still has good length, but it is time to drink this vintage up. 2015-2016. **87.**

### **2008 Rosado “Viña Catajarros”- Bodegas Hermanos Merino**

The 2008 vintage of Viña Catajarros Rosado is excellent and is still cruising along beautifully, with bright acids, lovely complexity and impressive refinement on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a blend of cherries, violets, orange peel, a lovely base of salty soil, gentle spice tones and a lovely topnote of meatiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core, fine complexity and lovely bounce on the long and classy finish. Very impressive for a six year-old Rosado and today, a perfect wine for *Paella*. 2015-2017+. **90.**

### ***Ribera del Duero Estates Visited***

*As I noted above, my primary reason for visiting estates in Ribera del Duero was to finally have the opportunity to meet Goyo Garcia and taste at his winery in the village of Olmedillo de Roa, but I did manage to squeeze in two other tastings at good bodegas in the region, as well as drop by for a visit and meet Mariano Garcia, the long-time Technical Director*

*at Vega Sicilia and now the producer of wines such as Mauro and Alto. Señor Garcia was in the midst of crushing grapes that were just coming in and he handed us off a bottle to taste over dinner, so that he could get to the crush.*

### ***Bodegas Carmelo Rodero***

*Carmelo Rodero and his daughter, María Rodero Oña, who is Director of Sales for the winery, graciously took time out from harvest to visit with us during my early October visit to the region. Señor Rodero is making very good wines in Ribera del Duero, but, not surprisingly, the higher level wines are oakier and higher in octane than I would normally drink and I would love to see him one day try his hand at crafting wines that are more in the style of the 1980s in Ribera del Duero. But, that said, the one vintage of Reserva that I tasted here, though new oaky and fairly ripe, was far better balanced than many of the wines I cross paths with from this region. His Joven bottling is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks, the Crianza in one-third new oak for fifteen months and his Reserva bottlings, happily, also are raised in one-third new wood, for a period of twenty-one months. By today's standards in Ribera del Duero, these are quite modestly oaky wines, though with the rest of the barrel rotation comprised of one and two-wine barrels, there is still plenty of vanillin oakiness in evidence.*

### **2013 Tinto Joven- Bodegas Carmelo Rodero**

The 2013 Joven bottling from Carmelo Rodero is a very pretty wine that is made for early drinking and offers up a vibrant nose of black raspberries, black cherries, violets, a touch of meatiness and a nice base of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a nice core of juicy fruit, a touch of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is fully fourteen percent alcohol, but shows virtually no signs of backend heat. Good juice. 2015-2025. **88.**

### **2011 Tinto Crianza- Bodegas Carmelo Rodero**

The 2011 Crianza from Carmelo Rodero is pretty new oaky for only having been raised in one-third new wood, but this is the effect of using one wine and two wine barrels for the other two-thirds of the *elevage*. This too is fourteen percent alcohol, but seems a touch warmer on the backend than the 2013 Joven bottling. The bouquet is well done in the modern Ribera del Duero idiom, wafting from the glass in a blend of plums, black cherries, cocoa powder, a nice touch of soil and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tangy on the attack, with a fine core and a bit of backend heat poking out on the long and chewy finish. The wood tannins have not yet fully integrated here, so there is a bit of oak tannin on the finish that keeps the score down a bit, as well as the uncovered alcohol. This is okay, but I would drink the 2013 Joven over this in a heartbeat, despite the two probably being qualitatively equivalent. If this bottling was raised in older wood and a touch less ripe, it would be stellar, rather than not bad. 2015-2020+. **88.**

### **2004 Tinto Joven- Bodegas Carmelo Rodero**

At our request, Señor Rodero found this bottle of 2004 Joven, so we could see how this bottling evolves with a bit of age. The wine is cruising along nicely and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon, as it offers up scents of black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, new leather, raw cocoa and a nice topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely structured, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant and classy finish. It has not really developed more complexity as it has aged, but it has not lost any depth or structural integrity either and is quite a tasty glass of wine. 2015-2020+. **88.**

### **2010 Tinto Reserva- Bodegas Carmelo Rodero**

The 2010 Tinto Reserva from Carmelo Rodero is a very good bottle of modern-styled Ribera del Duero, with its one-third new wood better supported than in the 2011 Crianza. The deep and classy nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of plums, black cherries, chocolate, violets, vanillin oak and incipient notes of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in profile, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely focus and balance and a long, pure and ripely tannic finish. This too is fourteen percent alcohol, but better balanced than the 2011 Crianza and a very tasty bottle of wine in the making. 2016-2040. **92+**.

### ***Viña Pedrosa- Familia Pérez Pascuas***

I have always enjoyed the wines that I have tasted in the past from Bodegas Viña Pedrosa, which was founded in 1980 by the three Pérez Pascuas brothers, Benjamin, Manuel and Adolfo. Their father, Mauro Pérez Pascuas was already an importer grape grower in Ribera del Duero, but 1980 was the seminal year when the family decided to being producing their own wines from the family vineyards. Today, the family owns 135 hectares of vines, planted to ninety percent Tempranillo and ten percent Cabernet Sauvignon and produces a half million bottle per year. The winery uses all French wood for their casks and practices a three year barrel rotation, so that in any given year one-third new oak is used for most cuvées, though a few of the higher end bottlings are aged in a higher percentage of new wood. The Pérez Pascuas family is now in the process of handing over the reins of the winery to a third generation of brothers, who will continue on the tradition started with the first bottlings in the 1980 vintage. The estate offers up a pair of Crianza bottlings, a Viña Pedrosa Reserva and Gran Reserva, a single vineyard bottling from the Finca la Navilla and a Pérez Pascuas Gran Selección, which is only made in top vintages and is their top reserve wine. Viña Pedrosa is also a tourist destination in Ribera del Duero, as they do a nice job catering events and welcoming visitors, as was witnessed by our joining a group of forty ladies for a tasting and then a late lunch during our visit to the winery.

### **2010 Viña Pedrosa Reserva**

The Viña Pedrosa Reserva bottling is reflective of the planting pattern in the family's vineyards, as the wine is comprised of a blend of ninety percent Tempranillo and ten percent Cabernet Sauvignon. The 2010 comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a pretty nose of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a bit of graphite and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with a good core, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and still pretty youthful finish. I would give this a couple more years of bottle age to allow it to soften up a bit. A good example. 2017-2040. **89**.

### **2009 Viña Pedrosa Reserva**

The 2009 Viña Pedrosa Reserva is the same octane as the 2010 (fourteen percent) and neither wines shows any signs of backend heat on the palate, but the 2009 is quite a bit more forward in personality and is already drinking very well. The fine nose wafts from the glass in a wide open constellation of plums, red cherries, chocolate, fresh nutmeg and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite classy in style, with a sappy core, moderate, well-integrated tannins and lovely length and grip on the pure and velvety finish. This is a lovely vintage for this bottling and the wine was showing every bit as well at the bodegas in October as it did in New York in the spring. 2015-2035. **92**.



### **2005 “Pérez Pascuas Gran Selección” Gran Reserva- Viña Pedrosa**

The 2005 “Pérez Pascuas Gran Selección” was certainly very new oaky in its youth, but as it nears its tenth birthday, it is starting to subsume the new wood in its other elements and is really a very fine bottle. The bouquet is a deep and complex mélange of black plums, dark berries, cigar ash, a nice touch of soil, lead pencil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a good core of fruit, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the reasonably complex and quite stylish finish. The Pérez Pascuas Gran Selección is made up entirely of Tempranillo, and though it is not the most complex of Ribera del Duero bottlings, the wine is very well-balanced and hits all of the right notes. 2015-2030. **92.**

### ***Rioja Estates Visited***

*I was primarily in Haro in October to visit and work on the historical feature on Cuné and Contino that appeared in Issue 54, but had the time to visit a couple of other very small producers in the region who are making excellent wines. Given my long-running love affair with the wines of Rioja, I am embarrassed to say that this was my first visit to the region. But, I’ll be back!*



*Luis Alberto Lecea, President of the Rioja DO, sitting on the edge of a lagar used for the Corazón de Lago.*

### ***Bodegas Lecea***

Luis Alberto Lecea is making totally classic, outstanding examples of Rioja from his family bodegas in the small village of San Ansensio, which is located in the La Rioja Alta sector, about halfway between the cities of Haro and Logrono. The village sits at an elevation of 535 kilometers above sea level, and the bodegas is found towards the very top of the hilly village center. This is an old-fashioned winery, with caves cut into the hillside and small wandering galleries outfitted here and there with a couple of cement tanks and plenty of old American oak barrels for raising the wines. Luis Alberto took over as the head of the small family domaine from his father, Rufino Lecea more than a quarter of a century ago, but his father is still cruising along nicely at age eighty-seven and was still to be seen out dancing frequently with Luis Alberto's mother until only a few months ago. In addition to running the family winery and turning out utterly classic, old school Rioja for the last twenty-seven years, Luis Alberto Lecea has also been the President of the Rioja D.O. since July of 2013, being the very first *vigneron* to occupy the top position in the history of Rioja. Señor Lecea likes to start his fermentations in stainless steel tanks for each wine, "so that I can make sure that I have good, clean juice to start with" and then does quite a bit of aging in old cement tanks for his wines, as he loves the way the cement protects the expressions of both fruit and soil in the finished wines. However, there are a couple of large old stone *Lagars* that are used for the fermentation of one of his bottlings, the Corazón de Lago, which is made in a very individualistic style, with whole clusters, foot trodding and carbonic maceration. One might think that this style leads to an earlier drinking wine, but it was just a different approach that Luis Alberto's father devised for one of his wines and it has been popular with the family's clients since it was first crafted in 1970s and so the bodegas continues to produce this bottling. As the notes below will attest, the Corazón de Lago cuvée is also quite capable of aging long and gracefully.

The Lecea estate also produces a full range of classic, old school Rioja bottlings, with a fine Rioja Rosado produced from a blend of seventy-five percent Garnacha and twenty-five percent Viura, a Rioja Blanco from a fifty-fifty blend of Chardonnay and Viura, and a full range of Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva Rioja Tinto bottlings. As the harvest was in full swing at the time of my early October visit here, Señor Lecea very kindly agreed to see us in the evening and he was clearly quite exhausted from all the work of the previous days, as he had been up before dawn to harvest and was still working in the cellars until only a few minutes before our arrival. Consequently, we did not taste the entire range of his current bottlings, but jumped around a bit amongst his various cuvées and a range of ages of wines. Señor Lecea likes to age his red Rioja bottlings in a combination of both French and American oak casks, with about eight percent new in any given vintage. In traditional Rioja fashion, the new casks are most often seasoned for a few months with his white wines, prior to being introduced into the rotation for the various red bottlings, so that it is quite rare for the Bodegas Lecea Rioja Tinto bottlings to see any completely new wood. On the occasion when the size of the harvest might require a new barrel to be used directly for one of the red wines, the wine will only stay in a new barrel three or four months prior to be racked into a significantly older cask. Luis Alberto also likes to rack his red wines out of barrel and into one of the varying-sized cement tanks that he also has in his cellars, and it is quite typical for one of his Reservas or Gran Reservas to spend a year of its *elevage* in cement, in addition to its requisite years in cask. He is a big fan of using cement for at least part of the aging process of his red wines, as he finds the wines retain their freshness and *terroir* very nicely in these vats. While he does use a mix of French and American barrels, the

vast, vast majority of his casks here are American oak. The age of the barrels used here ranges generally up to fourteen years of age at the present time, before the casks are rotated out of the cellars. Señor Lecea noted that he is not a fan of wood that is too old, but does not want any flavors or aromatics in his wines from new oak, and consequently finds that the current rotation of changing around eight percent of the barrels each year gives him good quality wood to work with that will not overly mark the wines. These are really outstanding, classically-styled Rioja bottlings- red, white or rosé, and it was a great, great pleasure to be introduced to Señor Lecea and his son, Jorge, who works alongside of his father and will continue on the fine tradition at Bodegas Lecea in the decades to come. I look forward to my next visit and further exploring the range of old school Rioja here at Bodegas Lecea.

### **2013 Rioja Rosado- Bodegas Lecea**

The 2013 Rioja Rosado from Bodegas Lecea is a lovely wine in the making, and seems likely to be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age. The wine is quite pale salmon in color (notably lighter than most Rioja Rosados) and offers up a lovely, nascently complex nose of melon, orange, salty soil tones, a touch of smokiness and a nice topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, crisp acids and a long, focused and youthfully complex finish. This is very tasty today, but as the next two notes will attest, this is still very early days for this wine and it will be better with more bottle age. 2015-2030+. **88+**.

### **2010 Rioja Rosado- Bodegas Lecea**

Luis Alberto Lecea's 2010 Rioja Rosado is starting to really blossom and is drinking with great style and class at the present time. Like the 2013, this is still a very pale colored example, with a glints of orange starting to streak through the salmon color in the glass. The bouquet is really lovely, offering up notes of wild strawberries, clementines, smoky tones, an exotic touch of chorizo, white soil tones, dried roses, orange peel and a hint of walnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open, with lovely acidity, excellent focus and balance and a long, zesty and very classy finish. 2015-2030+. **90**.

### **1990 Rioja Rosado- Bodegas Lecea**

The 1990 Rosado was opened as a bit of a curiosity, as Gerry Dawes is a huge proponent of aging Spain's best Rioja bottlings. The wine turned out to be truly stunning and was a great accompaniment to the tapas on the table, as it remains complex and vigorous at age twenty-four and shows no signs of imminent collapse. The beautifully complex and tertiary nose offers up scents of dried strawberries, new leather, lavender, nutskins, a beautiful base of salty soil tones, nutmeg, white cherries, hints of cloves and a very exotic topnote of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a still quite vibrant personality, a good core and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and long finish that closes with a note of fruit skin. Lovely juice and still with some life ahead of it! The 2010 Rosado here could well end up similar to this wine with sufficient bottle age. 2015-2020. **92**.

### **2011 Rioja Blanco Crianza - Bodegas Lecea**

This was the only vintage of Rioja Blanco that I had a chance to try from Luis Alberto Lecea, but it certainly seems, based on this excellent 2011, that this is one of the specialties of the bodegas. The wine seems quite classic in aromatic and flavor profile, which came as a bit of a surprise, given that it is a fifty percent chardonnay these days! The superb nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, coconut, a lovely base of white soil tones, spring flowers and vanilla bean. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core,

excellent focus and balance and a long, zesty and very elegant finish. Classy juice. 2015-2025+. **92.**

**2013 Rioja “Corazón de Lago”- Bodegas Lecea**

The 2013 Corazón de Lago is a bit heady in style for my palate, as the wine came in at 14.3 percent alcohol. Señor Lecea commented that fermenting in *lagar* always produces a wine with more alcohol in it, so this bottling is always a bit higher in octane than the other reds in the cellar. The bouquet offers up a deep and ripe constellation of black cherries, pepper, woodsmoke, chocolate and black raspberries. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core and fine focus, but with some uncovered alcohol poking out on the long and moderately tannic finish. Perhaps this will be more interesting with a bit of bottle age, but out of the blocks, it is just a bit too hot for its own good. 2015-2020+? **85+?**

**2011 Rioja Crianza- Bodegas Lecea**

The 2011 Crianza from Bodegas Lecea is much more up my alley, as the wine came in just over thirteen percent alcohol and is an absolutely classic example of old school Rioja. The stellar nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of black cherries, plums, lovely soil tones, cigar smoke, fresh nutmeg and toasted coconut aromas from older American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, tangy acids, modest tannins and a long, ripe and focused finish. This is a lovely bottle of Rioja that is approachable today, but is built to age and will be even better with some bottle age. 2015-2040. **91+.**

**2009 Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Lecea**

2009 is one of the riper vintages of late in the Rioja region, and this wine came in at a full 13.5 percent alcohol as a result and at this early stage, reminds me a bit of the 1982s when they were first released back in the day. The bouquet is ripe, but also deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, nutmeg, toasted coconut, Rioja spice tones, cigar ash and a bit of pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a generous core of fruit, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced and classy finish. This is a very high class example in the making, and given how well this bottling has turned out in a hot vintage, I would love to see one from a cooler and utterly classic growing season! 2015-2050. **93+.**

**2006 Rioja Crianza- Bodegas Lecea**

Señor Lecea opened this bottle of 2006 Crianza just to show how his wines evolve with a bit of bottle age and it was handy in the busy cellars with the harvest in high gear. The wine is absolutely beautiful, soaring from the glass in a complex blaze of black cherries, raw cocoa, Rioja spice tones, cigar wrapper, fresh nutmeg, toasted coconut and just a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off gorgeous fruit purity in the mid-palate, with melting tannins, excellent focus and balance and a long, refined and utterly classic finish. A beautiful Crianza! 2015-2030+. **93.**

**1977 Rioja “Corazón de Lago”- Bodegas Lecea**

The vintage on this bottling of Corazón de Lago was a bit speculative, as the wine was never labeled when it departed the winery the first time, “at least thirty-seven years ago” according to Luis Alberto Lecea. A private client had bought several cases for his restaurant, but had returned them a year later, finding them “too acidic” and the wine just laid about the winery for many years. However, out of curiosity, Señor Lecea popped a bottle almost twenty years ago and found it delicious and has been drinking it on occasion ever since! As he observed, “my father did not like the wine when it came back, as he found it too green when it was young, and

that is why it is still here to drink today!” The wine is absolutely stellar, offering up a deep and mature nose of fruitcake, spice meats, a stunningly complex base of soil, Rioja spice tones, cigar smoke and a bit of pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, spicy and very soil-driven in personality, with a superb core, tangy acids and great length and grip on the focused and tertiary finish. A beautiful bottle of Rioja at its apogee, and from a bottling that was made by carbonic maceration. Given its impeccable balance, this wine probably still has at least another twenty years of life in it, if not more! Great juice. 2015-2035. **94.**

### ***Bodegas Basilio Izquierdo***

The small label of “B de Basilio” from Bodegas Basilio Izquierdo is the current project of famed Rioja winemaker, Basilio Izquierdo, who is best known as the long-time Technical Director at Cuné- a position which he manned with great success from 1973 until 2004. Señor Izquierdo has worked on this small project since he retired from Cuné in 2004 and now produces both a red and a white Rioja from grapes he purchases from vineyards surrounding his home base of Haro. Basilio Izquierdo had originally come to the attention of Cuné back in the early 1970s at the suggestion of the famed Bordeaux oenologist, Emile Peynaud, as Basilio had spent the first five years of his winemaking career working throughout France (including on the Gironde), before returning to his native country to patrol the cellars at one of Rioja’s legendary estates and craft a legacy of simply outstanding wines during one of the golden eras at the great Rioja estate of Cuné. Today, Señor Izquierdo produces two wines, which are crafted in a more modern style and which are extremely popular in the Spanish market. Given my natural predilections to gravitate towards more old school styles of Rioja, I really wish he was interested in crafting wines in a similar bent to the great wines he produced at Cuné during his long career, but one does have to admit that these are as fine examples of modern-styled Rioja as I have ever had the pleasure to taste. His excellent Rioja Blanco is produced from a blend of sixty-five percent Garnacha Blanco and thirty-five percent Viura, with the wine aged in one-third new French barrels each vintage. Basilio likes to practice several weeks of *battonage* for his white Rioja, but rather than opening the casks and stirring the lees, he prefers to roll the barrels gently and minimize the introduction of oxygen into the wines during their *elevage*. He generally ferments with native yeasts, and if a fermentation is a bit sluggish, a touch of neutral Champagne yeasts are used to get things rolling. The grapes for his white wine all hail from vineyards located in the village of San Vicente in La Rioja Alta. His red wine, of which there is typically four thousand bottles produced each vintage, is comprised of a blend of sixty-two percent Tempranillo, thirty-four percent Garnacha and four percent Graciano. The wine is aged entirely in new French barrels each year, which gives it a bit more of a modern signature than one might intuitively expect from the long-time cellar master at Cuné. Thirty-five percent of the red grapes hail from vineyards just outside of Haro in Rioja Alta, thirty percent from the village of Laguardia in Rioja Alavesa the remainder from the village of Tudelilla in Rioja Baja. During my short visit to Señor Izquierdo in October, we only had time to taste two vintages of his Rioja Blanco and one of his Rioja Tinto and I look forward to tasting more of his wines in the years to come, as they seem very well-built for the cellar and I would love to see a few of these with some bottle age on them already.

### **2013 “B de Basilio” Rioja Blanco- Bodegas Basilio Izquierdo**

The 2013 Rioja Blanco from Basilio Izquierdo is one of the finest young white Rioja bottlings I have ever had the pleasure to taste. This was a classic vintage for Señor Izquierdo,

with the white wine coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. The pure and very complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of peach tangerine, salty soil tones, orange blossoms, incipient notes of wild fennel and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very refined, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and cut and a very long, complex and superb finish. This is quite drinkable today, but is so well-balanced that it will clearly age for many, many years, and I suspect that its best days are still well in front of it. 2015-2030+. **95.**



*Basilio Izquierdo in his personal wine cellar in his home in Haro.*

### **2010 “B de Basilio” Rioja Blanco- Bodegas Basilio Izquierdo**

2010 was a far hotter year in Rioja than 2013 and the B de Basilio Blanco has come in decidedly riper in this vintage, tipping the scales at a very hefty 14.8 percent alcohol. Much to my surprise, I actually liked this wine pretty well for its heady octane, though there was some backend heat on the finish that kept the score down a bit. The bouquet is very ripe, but also complex, as it offers up scents of melon, peach, honeysuckle, saffron, vanillin oak and a musky topnote of very, very ripe fruit. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and



surprisingly rock solid at the core, with good framing acids and impressive length and grip on the heady finish. At 14.8 percent, I would have expected this wine to be blowsy and rather ponderous, but it is impressively focused and structured, albeit, a bit hot. There is no way it will age anywhere near as long as the stunning 2013, but it is surprisingly good for its octane. 2015-2020. **89.**

**2008 “B de Basilio” Rioja- Bodegas Basilio Izquierdo**

The 2008 Rioja Tinto from Basilio Izquierdo is also a pretty ripe wine, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol, but it manages its ripeness very well indeed and is one of the most serious modern-styled Rioja bottlings that I have tasted in a long time. The deep and complex nose is a still a bit marked by its French new wood, but offers up scents of black cherries, plums, chocolate, a bit of pepper, lovely Rioja spice tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively pure on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, suave tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced and still quite youthful finish. This very promising bottle still needs plenty of bottle age. 2020-2050+. **93+.**

***Wines Tasted in Bottle in New York***

***White Wines of Galicia (and Close Neighbors)***

**2013 Albariño- Paco y Lola (Rías Baixas)**

The 2013 Albariño from Paco & Lola is a very pretty example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a mix of fresh lime, pear, ocean breeze, a nice base of soil, orange zest and a bit of wheat chaff from some aging on the lees. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and focused, with good mid-palate intensity, bright acids and very good length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This is a well-made bottle of Albariño. 2015-2017. **88.**

**2013 Adrás Godello- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribeira Sacra)**

The Adrás Godello from Isaac Fernandez hails from forty year-old vines in the superb Amandi section of Ribera Sacra, with the wine aged entirely in stainless steel and not undergoing malolactic fermentation. The 2013 version comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a pretty and high-toned nose of lime blossoms, green apple, a touch of beeswax, white flowers and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and zesty, with a solid core, fine acids and good length and grip on the succulent finish. This is a pretty easygoing style of Godello, without the usual mid-palate amplitude of top examples, but it is fairly complex and nicely light on its feet on the moderately long finish. A very pretty wine, but not in the league of the Adrás Mencía, which is stellar. 2015-2020. **87.**

**2013 Godello- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)**

The 2013 Godello from Bodegas Luna Beberide is a fairly new addition to the winery's stable, as Alejandro Luna had been looking around Bierzo for a good Godello vineyard to augment his range of red wines here. He found this hillside vineyard, at an elevation of 600 to 750 meters, planted with sixty year-old vines on a mix of *argilo-calcaire* and decomposing slate a few years ago and he has been off and running with this varietal ever since. The 2013, which is from a fairly cool vintage, comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a ripe and pure nose of melon, pear, acacia blossom, a bit of coriander seed and a lovely base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and grip and a long, youthful finish. Like so many high quality examples of Godello in Bierzo, the 2013 Luna Beberide version is quite accessible out of the blocks, but I get the sense that a couple

of years' worth of bottle age will repay one handsomely with a more complex and complete wine. Good juice and a fine value. 2015-2025. **89+**.

**2012 Albariño “Gran Vinum”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)**

The 2012 Albariño from Adegas Gran Vinum is an excellent example of the vintage, hailing from pergola-trained, old vines overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, with the wine spending six to eight months nurturing on its fine lees prior to bottling, which allows it to deepen, gain in complexity and seriousness. The bouquet is a superb blend of pear, lime peel, a complex base of soil tones laced with *fleur de sel*, discreet leesy tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, exquisite balance and impressive length on the pure and wide open finish. This wine is only 12.5 percent alcohol, but the old vines and extended aging on the lees give it a depth and palate authority of a wine that might hail from riper grapes. Excellent Albariño! 2015-2023+. **91**.

***Red Wines of Ribeira Sacra***

**2013 Adrás Mencía- Isaac Fernandez Selección**

The 2013 Adrás Mencía from Isaac Fernandez is outstanding. It is produced from classically terraced, fifty year-old vineyards towering up from the Miño River and spent five months in a mixture of new and old casks prior to bottling. The bouquet is deep, pure and very refined in its mélange of cassis, pomegranate, graphite, espresso, slate, cigar smoke, hints of the meatiness to come and a discreet touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced, intensely flavored and impressively long finish. This is lovely juice. 2015-2035+. **92**.

***Valdeorras***

*As the notes below will attest, there are some awfully good things going on in Valdeorras these days, for both white wines made from Godello and reds based on Mencía. Of all the wines I tasted from the peripatetic Telmo Rodriguez, it is quite clear that his greatest wines today are being produced from the rugged hillsides and plateau vineyards in Valdeorras.*

**2012 Gaba do Xil Mencía - Telmo Rodriguez**

The Gaba do Xil bottling of Mencía from Telmo Rodriguez is his workhorse example of this varietal, raised entirely in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling and designed for early drinking. The 2012 is a lovely wine, coming in at a cool thirteen percent, but as it was raised all in stainless, it is a touch reductive when first poured and really benefits nicely from a bit of air. With aeration the wine offers up a lovely bouquet of sweet dark berries, tree bark, stony soil tones, lovely botanicals, woodsmoke and a touch of juniper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely complexity, a bit of tannin and fine length and grip on the focused finish. This is really a lovely wine, which despite being crafted to drink on the young side, shows the structure to also age quite nicely and I would have no problems keeping this around in the cellar for another fifteen years. High class juice and a fine value. 2015-2030+. **90**.

**2011 Mencía “As Caborcas” - Telmo Rodriguez**

The As Caborcas vineyard is a two hectare parcel of fifty to seventy year-old Mencía vines that are planted on granite soils in terraces sitting at two thousand feet of elevation, overlooking the Bibei River. The wine is fermented entirely with indigenous yeasts and is aged



in two thousand liter French oak *foudres* for twelve months prior to bottling. The 2011 is pretty ripe for high altitude Mencía, coming in at an even fourteen percent, but it is impeccably balanced and truly an exceptional example of this varietal. The deep and very complex nose wafts from the glass in a very classy blend of dark berries, chicory, French roast, a touch of Hermitage-like medicinal tones, graphite, incipient notes of bonfire, a complex base of stony soil tones and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a beautiful core of fruit, excellent soil signature, superb focus and balance and a long, moderately tannic and classy finish. There is still a bit of oak tannins on the backend that need to be integrated into the wine, but this is only a question of age, rather than balance, and there is no question that they will be absorbed nicely with a bit more bottle age. Other than the need for a bit more oak integration, the wine is already quite accessible, despite it being still quite youthful, and it is quite tasty to drink already. That said, it will clearly be far better with four to six years of bottle age and should easily last thirty-plus years in a cool cellar. Great juice. 2019-2045+. **94.**

### ***Red Wines of Bierzo***

#### **2013 Mencía- Bodegas Luna Beberide**

The 2013 Mencía from Bodegas Luna Beberide is made from thirty year-old vines planted on south-facing hillside vineyards planted on a fine base of chalky clay. It is raised entirely in stainless steel and sees no new wood during its *élevage*. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a fine and impressively complex bouquet of dark berries, graphite, black pepper, bonfire, a touch of licorice, chicory and incipient notes of roasted meats to come with a bit of bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and bouncy, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature and a bit of chewy tannin perking up the long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This wine is quite approachable today with a bit of aeration, but it is nicely built to age as well and I would love to tuck it away in the cellar for another four or five years and let its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. This is very, very well-made wine and a superb value! 2015-2035. **90.**

#### **2011 Pétalos del Bierzo Mencía- Descendientes de J. Palacios**

This wine is produced by Alvaro Palacios (of Priorat fame) and his brother, Ricardo Perez Palacios, in Bierzo, where the brothers currently own fifteen hectares of vines. Their vineyards include a tiny, tiny percentage of ancient indigenous grapes, to agument the probable ninety-nine percent Mencía planted here, so this is essentially a straight Mencía bottling. The 2011 tips the scales at a buxom 14.5 percent, and though the wine is not particularly hot on the backend, the wine does not carry its alcohol particularly well. The ripe nose offers up surprising complexity in its blend of black cherries, cassis, coffee grounds, chicory and nutskins. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, round on the attack and rather dulled from ripeness, with no brightness or bounce on the long, flat finish. The tannins here are modest, and though the alcohol is not sticking out on the backend, the wine seems muddled and completely devoid of focus and vibrancy from its octane level. This really seems quite pedestrian to my palate. 2015-2016. **83.**

### ***Tierra de León***

#### **2012 Pricum- Bodegas Margón**

The Pricum bottling from Bodegas Margón is produced under the consultancy of Raúl Pérez from a vineyard planted with sixty to one hundred year-old, Prieto Picudo vines. The 2012 comes in at 13.5 percent octane, was fermented with indigenous yeasts from hand-harvested fruit, with malolactic fermentation taking place in barrel and the wines spending an additional

three months after malo is completed aging in casks. The bouquet is quite complex, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of dark berries, chicory, woodsmoke, balsam bough, a touch of tree bark and a topnote of botanicals quite similar to aged Montepulciano d'Abruzzo. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a good core, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and youthful finish. I very much like this wine, which marries sweetness of fruit and a bit of bitter elements that I find fairly often in certain Italian wines, but which I seldom come across from Spain. Quite individual in style and very well-made juice. 2017-2030+. **89+**.



### ***Toro***

#### **20103 Dehesa Gago- Telmo Rodriguez**

The Dehesa Gago bottling Telmo Rodriguez is made up of one hundred percent Tempranillo and is fermented in a combination of cement and stainless steel tanks and then aged for four to six months in cement prior to bottling. The 2013 Dehesa Gago came in at fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a lovely nose of red and black cherries, cigar ash, nice spice tones, a fine base of soil and a topnote of coriander seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary in personality, with a good core of fruit, plenty of firm, chewy tannins and just a bit of heat poking out on the long and youthful finish. The tannins here are obviously all skin tannins, which gives the wine sound balance, but it is still pretty structured and in need of a

at least several years in the cellar to soften up. I suspect it will blossom with some bottle age, but it seems likely to always be a bit on the rustic side. 2019-2035. **87+**.

#### **2011 Gago- Telmo Rodriguez**

The 2011 Gago from Telmo Rodriguez is, like all of his Toro bottlings, comprised entirely of Tempranillo. It is fermented in cement tanks and aged in a combination of French oak *foudres* and regular-sized casks (not all of which are new). The 2011 Gago is plenty ripe, coming in at a hefty 14.5 percent alcohol and offers up a nose of baked black cherries and plums, chocolate, a touch of pepper, woodsmoke, cigar wrapper and nutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with a good core of fruit, some backend heat and a long, dry-edged, chewy and muddled finish. This is just too ripe for its own good, as the dry backend and lack of focus are the bi-products of overripe grapes. Hard to see how this wine is going to come in to balance with the combination of overripe fruit, excessive alcohol and bitter, dry tannins. 2018-2025+? **81**.

#### **2010 Pago la Jara- Telmo Rodriguez**

The 2010 Pago la Jara from Telmo Rodriguez is comprised entirely of Tempranillo and is aged in seventy percent new French oak. It is produced from fifty year-old vines, foot-trodden and fermented with indigenous yeasts in open top wooden tanks. The wine is 14.5 percent alcohol, but manages its ripeness quite well and shows only moderate oak tannins on the backend and little signs of uncovered alcohol. The ripe nose offers up a deep blend of dark berries, black cherries, coffee grounds, a bit of chicory, lead pencil, gentle balsamic notes and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and reasonably complex, with a fine core, and a rather dense backend from skin and wood tannins, which give a bit of a dry edge to the wine at the present time. I suspect that the wine will always have just a touch of oak tannin that sticks out on the long finish, and this seems to be a wine that would really sing if raised entirely in older casks, as the octane one is going to have to deal with in Toro in most vintages is going to leech wood tannins out of new barrels awfully easily, and two, three or four wine barrels might be the ticket to take this wine from the realm of “pretty good” to truly “outstanding”, as clearly the old vines here have excellent potential. But, the 2010 is merely okay and should be drunk with fatty red meats, to help cover up some of the backend tannin. 2015-2025? **88**.

#### ***Ribera del Duero***

*In this age of global warming, it seems that there really should be two distinct D.O.s for Ribera del Duero, as the difference in wines produced from higher elevation vineyards and those down lower is so dramatic that they really should not be called by the same name. I really wonder if it is even possible to make good wine from the hottest vineyard sections of Ribera del Duero these days, but as most producers in the region are bent on making ripe, heady and buxom examples in any case, the point is probably mute. However, it seems to me utterly insane for producers who have access to good quality grapes from the higher elevation vineyards (a significant section of vineyards up on the plateau in Ribera del Duero can rise to 3,000 feet above sea level in elevation) to blend them with grapes from the torrid lower elevation vineyards, which produce inherently inferior raw materials these days, but that is what most of them seem to do. I fully understand the argument of producers whose wines are in such demand that they need to source more grapes beyond what they happen to have in their own vineyard holdings, but if one is going to blend in decidedly inferior grapes and bastardize the brand in the process, is there any real justification for doing so beyond banal greed? Some producers will suggest that they are “just trying to take care of my family”, but if the wine world will not touch*

*a bottle of their wine a decade down the road, is this really providing a sound foundation for future generations? Anyway, to my palate, there are not a lot of wine-producing regions in Spain as sad as Ribera del Duero these days and the prices some of these wines sell for is absolutely criminal, based on the unsavory quality of the wines on the other side of the corks.*

### **2013 Rios de Tinta- Isaac Fernandez Selección**

The 2013 Rios de Tinta from Isaac Fernandez (who is the nephew of Mariano Garcia and worked with him at Mauro for two decades) is comprised entirely of Tempranillo and tips the scales at an even fourteen percent alcohol, which is quite good by contemporary Ribera del Duero standards. The wine is made from fifteen to twenty year-old vines planted at higher altitudes and fermented with indigenous yeasts and is not aged in new oak. The bouquet on the 2013 is youthfully pretty, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, lovely spice tones, a bit of chocolate, a really quite a nice touch of soil for a Ribera del Duero and a *soupçon* of black pepper. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, a bit of chewy tannin and just a touch of backend heat poking out on the long and still quite primary finish. I very much like the depth here, the nice dollop of soil signature and the good structure, and though it is a tad on the hot side for my palate, it seems well enough balanced to blossom with a few years of cellaring and be quite interesting once it has a chance to emerge a bit more from behind its structure. 2016-2030. **89.**

### **2013 Finca La Mata- Isaac Fernandez Selección**

The 2013 Finca La Mata from Isaac Fernandez is produced entirely from Tempranillo and hails from a vineyard that ranges from sixty to eighty years of age, with the grapes hand-harvested. It is fermented with indigenous yeasts and is aged in is raised for twelve months in a combination of eighty percent French barrels and twenty percent American oak casks. The 2013 comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a black fruity nose of cassis, black cherries, bitter chocolate, a nice touch of gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and lead pencil new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a good core, but some dry backend tannins poking out (from the casks) on the long finish. This is not the most concentrated style of Ribera del Duero, which I really like, but it is a bit overoaked to my palate and I do not have a strong sense of just how much of the oak tannins on the backend are going to be absorbed with further bottle age. My tech sheet did not say what percentage of the barrels were new, but I have to assume that most were, and I would much rather see this bottling aged in a low percentage of new wood, with more one, two and three wine casks utilized, so that the inherent elegance here could be front and center, instead of struggling against the tannins from the new wood. Not bad, but with such high quality raw materials, this could be even better with the oak regimen more thoughtfully adapted to the style of the fruit. 2015-2025+? **83-87** (depending on how the oak integrates with bottle age).

### **2012 Mauro- Bodegas Mariano Garcia**

The 2012 Mauro from Mariano Garcia is a pretty ripe wine, coming in at 14.5 percent octane on the label, and the wine is a bit hot on the finish as a result from uncovered alcohol. The bouquet is pretty and fairly complex for such a young wine, offering up scents of baked black cherries, sweet cassis, dark chocolate, a bit of road tar, cigar wrapper and suave, nutty new luxury oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit overripe in flavor profile, with a good core, surprisingly coarse and un-integrated tannins and a long, slightly hot finish. Based on the previous vintages of Mauro that I have tasted, I was not expecting much more, but this is still pretty disappointing for all of the hype that surrounds it in some circles. 2017-2025+? **84.**

### **2010 M2 de Matallana- Telmo Rodriguez**

As I had been so impressed with the two Valdeorras bottlings from Señor Rodriguez, I was a bit surprised to find his two Ribera del Duero wines to be entirely modern in style. Of the two, I preferred the second wine, M2 de Matallana over the *grand vin* bottling, as it was a bit better balanced and less marked by wood tannins on the finish, but this wine is still 14.5 percent in alcohol, a bit hot and dry from uncovered oak tannins on the backend. The nose is reasonably inviting, with only moderate overripeness in evidence, as it offers up scents of backed black cherries and plums, mocha, a bit of nutmeg and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, hot and four-square, with a good core, but quite modest complexity and uncovered wood tannins and alcohol defining the fairly long finish. Señor Rodriguez has the good sense to source quite a bit of his fruit from higher elevation vineyards (and therefore cooler) around the village of Pardilla, but, for the M2, he is blending in fruit from Fuentemolinos, planted on a former riverbed (which is clearly a much hotter microclimate) and the wine is ending up jammy and probably less interesting as a result. I assume the second wine is aged in less than one hundred percent new wood, which makes the uncovered wood tannins on the backend a bit less aggressive than in the Matallana proper, but this is not a whole lot better. 2015-2025. **84.**

### **2009 Matallana- Telmo Rodriguez**

The 2009 Matallana from Telmo Rodriguez is a typically ripe example of Ribera del Duero, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol. Señor Rodriguez uses native yeasts for the fermentation of this wine and has the grapes foot-trodden, seeking for gentle extraction and fermentations, but really, I cannot see the point when one starts with overripe grapes and is going to age the wine in any case in one hundred percent new French wood. The nose on the 2009 Matallana offers up a ripe blend of black cherries, chocolate, a bit of balsam bough, gentle spice tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit heady, with a glossy attack, a fine core, a fair bit of backend heat and some uncovered wood tannins poking out on the fairly long, slightly coarse and high octane finish. I like this wine well enough on the nose and attack, but it really is a bit muddled on the backend today, with the combination of high alcohol and uncovered wood tannins making for a rather discordant close. Maybe it will get better balanced with some bottle age? But, when there are utterly spectacular wines like the 2011 Mencía “As Caborcas” made by Telmo Rodriguez, why would one want this heavy-handed and poorly balanced wine in their cellar, particularly when this Pingus-wannabe costs more than twice the price of that utterly stellar bottling of Mencía! 2017-2025+? **82-87+?**

### ***Valtiendas***

*Valtiendas is a tiny new D.O. located just to the southwest of Ribera del Duero, in the foothills of the Sierra de Guadarrama mountains in the northeast corner of the province of Segovia. The soils here are quite similar to Ribera del Duero, but these vineyards lie at elevations of nine hundred meters and above, so that the region is decidedly cooler than almost all of the vineyards in Ribera del Duero. The primary grape here is also Tempranillo, and this new D.O. only has five bodegas currently producing wines here from the one hundred hectares of vines under cultivation in the region.*

### **2009 Vivencias- Pago el Almendro (Oscar Hernando)**

The 2009 Vivencias from Oscar Hernando’s Pago el Almendro winery was produced from his 1.4 hectare vineyard, located at nearly a thousand meters above sea level and planted twenty years ago entirely to Tempranillo. The wine is fermented in stainless steel tanks and then

undergoes malo in barrel, with one-third of the casks new in any given vintage. The 2009 comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol, but manages its ripeness brilliantly and shows great freshness to both the nose and palate and virtually no signs of backend heat. The very stylish nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of plums, black cherries, mocha, fresh nutmeg, a bit of Tempranillo spice tones, cigar wrapper, a touch of lead pencil and a fairly discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, ripe, firm tannins and outstanding balance for aging. The finish is long, moderately chewy and quite complex, with great management of ripeness to ensure a fairly cool mouthfeel and virtually no issues with extraction of uncovered wood tannins on the backend. This needs a few years in the cellar to soften up a bit on the finish, but it is quite nicely balanced and will be an excellent wine with a bit of bottle age. The remainder of the barrels used for the *elevage* of this wine are one and two wine casks, and it seems to me that this could be even better if these older casks were retained for a longer period of time and the one-third new oak was augmented by more neutral barrels, to give even more elegance and food friendliness to the finished wine. But, that said, this is really a well-made bottling and head and shoulders over an awful lot of far more famous wines from neighboring Ribera del Duero! 2019-2040. **91+**.



*Some of the higher altitude, wind-swept sections of Ribera del Duero- this is where the good grapes are to be found.*



## ***Rioja Blanco***

### **2013 Rioja Blanco- Señorío de P. de Peciña**

The 2013 Rioja Blanco from Señorío de Pedro de Peciña is really a beautiful young wine, offering up a bright and classy bouquet of lime, green apple, white soil tones, a touch of fresh coconut and incipient notes of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a lovey core, sound framing acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This is still a puppy and will age long and gracefully, but it is already a compelling glass of white Rioja. Like everything from this winery, this is impeccably well-made and shows off old school sensibilities. 2015-2035. **90.**

### **2004 Viña Gravonia Rioja Blanco- López de Heredia**

The 2004 Viña Gravonia Rioja Blanco from López de Heredia is drinking splendidly at age ten and has to be one of the very best white wines values to be found in the world of wine today. The deep and classy nose offers up a mix of lemon, orange peel, beeswax, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of citrus oil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent cut and grip on the long and classy finish. A beautiful bottle that is now drinking at its plateau of peak maturity, but which should continue to cruise along for many years to come. 2014-2030. **90.**

### **1991 Viña Tondonia Rioja Reserva Blanco- López de Heredia**

It is still fairly early days for the 1991 Viña Tondonia Reserva Blanco from López de Heredia, but at age twenty-three, it is starting to look like this may well be the second coming of the legendary 1964 bottling of this great white wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and impressively complex, as it wafts from the glass in a blaze of tangerine, beeswax, a complex base of white soil tones, orange peel, a touch of toasted coconut and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with outstanding mid-palate depth, great balance and grip and a very, very long, vibrant and beautifully complex finish. A classic. 2014-2040. **94+.**

## ***Rioja Tinto***

### **2013 Rioja- Bodegas Pingao (Isaac Fernandez Selección)**

The Bodegas Pingao bottling of Rioja is produced from old vines in Rioja Alta, fermented in stainless steel tanks and aged for a few months in (French?) barrels prior to bottling, so this is in essence what many producers would call their “Joven” bottling. The 2013 tips the scales at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a youthful bouquet of red and black cherries, Rioja spice tones, gentle notes of pepper, a nice touch of soil and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and displays good intensity of flavor, with fine focus and grip and a bit of chewy tannin on the backend that deserves a year or two in the cellar to allow the wine to more fully blossom. This is quite tasty and a fine value. 2016-2026+. **88.**

### **2013 Rioja “LZ” Viñedos de Lanziego- Telmo Rodriguez**

The 2013 Rioja “LZ” Viñedos de Lanziego from Telmo Rodriguez is the most accessible bottling that he produces from Rioja. Señor Rodriguez sources all of his fruit for this bottling from the village of Lanciego in Rioja Alavesa, with the wine fermented in a combination of stainless steel and cement tanks and then aged entirely in cement prior to bottling. It is comprised of a blend of Tempranillo, Garnacha and Graciano, with most of the vineyards a field blend of the three and harvested together. The 2013 is a lovely bottle, offering up a deep, ripe and complex nose of dark berries, woodsmoke, a bit of roasted game, pepper, Rioja spice tones and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is fairly ripe in profile, with its full-bodied format nicely



structured, with a good core, fine focus and grip and an impressively long, moderately tannic finish. The wine does not have the more refined personality of a Rioja Alta bottling, but there is depth, complexity and plenty of promise here. It is still early days for this impressive bottle, and I would tuck it away in the cellar for at least another three or four years and let the tannins soften up a bit and the wine more fully blossom. It is going to be a very good bottle of Rioja with a bit of bottle age. 2019-2040. **89+**.

**2010 Rioja “Altos de Lanzaga”- Telmo Rodriguez**

The 2010 Rioja “Altos de Lanzaga” from Telmo Rodriguez is also all sourced from vineyards in Rioja Alavesa, from old vines that average seventy years of age. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in open top wooden tanks and aged in a mix of larger *foudres* and new, small French casks. The 2010 is plenty ripe, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol and shows some uncovered heat on the backend. The ripe and jammy nose offers up scents of baked black cherries, chocolate, a hint of Rioja soil tones and a generous serving of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and muddled, with a fat core, some dry wood tannins on the finish, a bit of backend heat and a bitter finish from oak tannins and high octane. Given how brilliant Señor Rodriguez’s Mencía bottlings are from Valdeorras, I find wines like this incomprehensible- perhaps there are two different Telmo Rodriguezes out there? Disappointing. 2017-2025+? **83**.

**2009 Rioja Crianza- Señorío de P. de Peciña**

The 2009 Rioja Crianza from Señorío de P. Pedro Peciña is a fine follow-up to the stellar 2007 version, but this is a wine that is firmly based in its vintage’s character. The wine already offers up an outstanding bouquet red cherries, plums, toasted coconut, a fine base of soil tones, Rioja spices and a touch of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty ripe for a Peciña wine (this is the ’09 vintage), with a plush core of fruit, tangy acids, moderate tannins and lovely focus and grip on the complex, moderately tannic finish. Aromatically, this wine is already outstanding, but it is still a bit too young on the palate, with the tannins poking out a bit and the wine showing just a touch of the vintage’s heat on the backend, so I would be inclined to give this a few years in the cellar to blossom. At 13.5 percent alcohol on the label (and perhaps just a touch higher in the bottle?) this is one of the ripest Peciña bottlings I have tasted, but the hot summer of 2009 has produced plenty of wines that are a bit riper than normal. Still, I have yet to taste a wine from this bodegas that has not aged immaculately well and there is little reason that the 2009 Crianza will be the first, so I would just give this wine a few years in the cellar to fully integrate its elements and start to drink with more distinction. 2017-2035. **88+**.

**2009 Viña Otano Rioja “Reserva”- Union de Viticultores Riojanos**

The 2009 Viña Otano Rioja “Reserva” from the Union de Viticultores Riojanos is comprised of a blend of purchased fruit and estate-grown grapes, with everything hand-picked and hailing from Rioja Alta vineyards. The wine is aged in a combination of French and American oak for twenty-four months prior to bottling, with the blend on the 2009 Reserva being eighty-five percent Tempranillo, ten percent Graciano and five percent Mazuelo. The wine offers up a fine, youthful nose of red and black cherries, a bit of venison, lovely soil tones, a touch of pepper and a discreet base of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and pretty well-balanced, with a good core, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the moderately complex finish. There is just a touch of backend greenness here that seems to indicate imperfect ripeness to the fruit or imperfectly cured new barrels. This is okay and maybe a bit more bottle age will improve it, but not top division juice. 2017-2030+? **84+**?

### **2007 Rioja “Reserva”- Señorío de P. de Peciña**

The 2007 Rioja “Reserva” from Bodegas Pedro de Peciña comes in at an octane of 13.5 percent alcohol and is absolutely classic on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a very fine constellation of red plums, sweet raspberries, toasted coconut, lovely soil tones, Rioja spices and hints of the nutskin to come. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a velvety attack, a sappy core, outstanding focus and balance, moderate tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the beautifully balanced and complex finish. This is still a tad on the young side, but this is a simply beautiful bottle of old school Rioja. I had no difficulty drinking this wine today, but it will be even better with another four or five years of bottle age. 2015-2055. **93+**.

### **2006 Rioja “Vendimia Seleccionada”- Señorío de P. de Peciña**

The 2006 Rioja “Vendimia Seleccionada” from Señorío de P. de Peciña is excellent, with depth and complexity on both the nose and palate and great structure for long-term and stellar evolution in the bottle. The bouquet is pure, refined and a tad younger in its evolution than the 2007 Reserva, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, red plums, cigar ash, excellent soil tones, cloves, a bit of bonfire, toasted coconut and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite youthful at age nine, with a lovely core of fruit, great soil signature, moderate tannins and excellent complexity and grip on the very long, pure and classic finish. I would tuck this away for at least another three or four years before starting to drink it in earnest, for though it is quite approachable already, it is still very clearly climbing and its true apogee is many years in the future. Great juice! 2018-2060. **94+**.

### **2003 Viña Bosconia Rioja “Reserva”- López de Heredia**

The 2003 Viña Bosconia Rioja “Reserva” from López de Heredia may well be the absolutely finest red wine that I have tasted from all of Europe from this very hot summer. The wine is deep, complex and stunningly pure and classic on both the nose and palate, utterly belying the torrid conditions of this most difficult of growing conditions across the continent. The beautiful bouquet jumps from the glass in a blaze of cherries, red plums, toasted coconut, Rioja spice tones, nutskin, a touch of cigar wrapper and a beautiful base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fairly broad shoulders for Viña Bosconia, but great refinement and polish as well. The wine is very long on the backend, with excellent focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, tangy and very suave finish. For parents with children born in 2003 who are looking for a serious red wine to tuck away for their children’s wine-drinking years, this is a great option. A beautiful bottle of young Bosconia! 2015-2050. **93**.

### **2002 Viña Otano Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Union de Viticultores Riojanos**

The 2002 Viña Otano Gran Reserva is a bit different from the 2009 Reserva, in that the wine is aged entirely in American oak casks, rather than a blend of French and US wood. The *cépages* is also slightly different with eighty percent Tempranillo, fifteen percent Graciano and five percent Mazuelo. This is a step up from the 2009 Reserva, as it wafts from the glass in a complex and nicely maturing constellation of red and black cherries, Rioja spice tones, cigar ash, lovely soil tones, a bit of nutskin and a bit of spicy oak (indicating that some of the American barrels were new). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus, bright acids and very good length and grip on the still moderately tannic finish. Some of the tannins here are from the oak, but there is sufficient stuffing to absorb it fully with more bottle age, and with red meat dishes, it is already not a bad drink. I would love to see this wine aged entirely in older casks, as the new American oak really does not add anything (but

tannin) to the equation. But, that said, this is really a tasty bottle of Rioja and a fine value. 2015-2035+. **89.**

**2001 Viña Tondonia Rioja “Reserva”- López de Heredia (served from magnum)**

Out of magnum, the 2001 Viña Tondonia Reserva is still a fairly young wine, and while it is certainly approachable today, its true plateau of maturity remains well in the future. The deep and pure nose offers up a youthful blend of cherries, raspberries, Rioja spice tones, coffee, sandy soil nuance, coconutty oak s and a touch of turmeric in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and velvety, with lovely purity on the attack, a fine core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This will be a really lovely magnum down the road, but give it time. 2020-2050+. **93.**

**2001 Rioja “Reserva”- Señorío P. de Peciña**

The wines of Pedro Peciña are some of my absolute favorites in all of Rioja, and this 2001 Reserva is going to be an excellent wine with a few more years’ worth of bottle age. The bouquet is bright, pure and utterly classic in its mélange of cherries, strawberries, coconut, Roja spice tones, a beautifully complex base of soil and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary in profile, with a lovely core of red fruit, fine-grained tannins, lovely focus and grip and a very long, modestly tannic and very pure finish. This is a very serious bottle of young Rioja that just needs a few more years in the cellar to really start to blossom. 2017-2040. **92+.**



*Tempranillo grapes ready for picking in Rioja Alavesa in October of 2014.*

### **1989 Rioja “Gran Reserva 904”- La Rioja Alta**

I have had some great recent bottlings from La Rioja Alta, but this 1989 Gran Reserva “904” was quite new oaky in personality and not really up to the customary high standards of this great old bodega. From what I have been told, the estate had some TCA contamination issues in the cellars in the late 1980s and early 1990s (much like Contino) and had to swap out all of its old barrels and fermentation tanks for clean wood around this time, so perhaps that is the reason the wine is still so marked by new wood fifteen years out from the vintage. The bouquet, other than the fairly strong note of new wood, offers up a lovely blend of cherries, raspberries, Rioja spice tones and a nice dollop of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite solid at the core, with fine focus and good fruit and soil complexity, but all of this is subservient to the vanillin oak. The finish is long and complex, with the wood a bit obtrusive on the backend and probably not going to ever completely integrate into the wine. There is a good, classic 904 underneath the veneer of new wood, but this is a bit too new oaky to ever rank amongst the top vintages of this iconic bottling. 2014-2025+. **87+?**

### **1976 Viña Bosconia Rioja “Gran Reserva”- López de Heredia**

The 1976 Viña Bosconia Gran Reserva is a terrific example of the vintage, jumping from the glass in a complex and vibrant mélange of baked cherries, cloves, a touch of venison, nutskin, a complex base of salty soil tones, woodsmoke and fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classy, with a lovely core of fruit, just a whisper of tannin, tangy acids and a very long, precise and complex finish. Beautiful juice at its apogee, but with decades of life still ahead of it. 2014-2035. **94.**

### **1970 Viña Tondonia Rioja “Gran Reserva”- López de Heredia**

The 1970 Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva is a beautiful example of the vintage that is now at its apogee of peak drinkability, with a glorious synthesis of vibrant fruit, complex soil tones and a myriad of Rioja spice elements to be found on both the nose and palate. The utterly classic bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of cherries, raspberries, toasted coconut, woodsmoke, cloves and a marvelous base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with tangy acids, great focus and grip, a sappy core of fruit and outstanding length on the meltingly tannic and beautifully focused finish. Just a gorgeous vintage of Viña Tondonia at its peak, but with decades of life still ahead of it. 2015-2040. **94.**

### **1970 Monte Real Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas**

I have had the good fortune to drink the 1970 Monte Real on many occasions in the past, but this most recent bottle, tasted over the summer of 2014, was at its absolute zenith and a brilliant glass of Rioja. The deep, pure and utterly stunning nose offers up a constellation of cherries, blood orange, cloves, spicy soil nuances, smoke, fresh herbs and Rioja nutskin. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly silky on the attack, with a sappy core, excellent soil inflection, tangy acids and laser-like focus on the very long, poised and complex finish. Rioja simply does not get much better than this brilliant vintage of Monte Real Gran Reserva. 2014-235. **95.**

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

#### **2013 Garnacha “Legado del Moncayo”- Isaac Fernandez Selección**

The 2013 Legado del Moncayo from Isaac Fernandez is produced from forty year-old Garnacha vines that grow in the iron-infused, clay foothills of the Moncayo Mountains at seven hundred meters above sea level. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks and sees no wood. The 2013 vintage tips the scales at an even fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a

fine bouquet of red and black raspberries, a fine base of soil, green peppercorns, a bit of game, botanicals and a smoky topnote redolent of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. I really like the style of this wine, which strikes me as a cross between mid-1980s Châteauneuf du Pape and Emidio Pepe's Montepulciano, as the wine closes with a lovely blend of sweet fruit and discreet bitterness that really reminds me of some of my favorite Italian wines. This clearly has the structure to age well and will probably be even a better drink with a couple of years' worth of bottle age. This is the first wine I have ever tasted from the D.O. of Campo de Borja, which lies due south of Navarra, and it is a superb bargain. 2015-2025+. **89.**

### **Castilla la Mancha**

*Pago del Ama is the family vineyard of the famous culinary family of Adolfo Munoz, whose Grupo Adolfo runs highly acclaimed restaurants in the city of Toledo and also in Madrid. The vineyards actually lie within the city of Toledo- the only ones that still remain- and the wines are made in small quantities and are extremely popular in Spain. They are pretty ripe wines, but two of the three that I had to taste at the family's beautiful rooftop restaurant in Madrid were excellent, and one way too ripe for my tender palate.*

### **2010 Merlot- Pago del Ama**

The 2010 Merlot from Pago del Ama is the coolest of the three wines I tasted from this tiny winery in Toledo, coming in at 14.2 percent and having been raised in seventy-five percent new French casks. The bouquet is quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of dark berries, a bit of tariness, coffee bean, dark soil tones, a nice touch of fresh herbs and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and balance, nascent complexity and a long, moderately tannic finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to fully blossom, but will be a very good example. 2018-2040. **91.**

### **2010 Syrah- Pago del Ama**

Pago del Ama is most famous for its syrah bottling, and its 2010 version is quite good. This too is fairly low in alcohol for the warm environs of Toledo, coming in at 14.3 percent, and like the 2010 Merlot, it was raised in seventy-five percent new wood. The bouquet is youthfully complex, offering up a vibrant blend of black raspberries, cassis, pepper, a touch of chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, ripe and quite suave on the attack, with a good core, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is a very good example. 2016-2030+. **90.**

### **2010 Cabernet Sauvignon- Pago del Ama**

The 2010 cabernet sauvignon from Pago del Ama was the ripest of the three wines I tasted from this estate, and at fifteen percent alcohol, it is too high in octane for its own good. The wine has managed to retain a bit of freshness on the nose, offering up notes of black cherries, a touch of bell pepper, cigar ash, damp soil and vanillin oak. However, on the palate, the wine is dulled from alcohol and has soaked up some bitter wood tannins on the backend, spoiling the balance of the wine. It is full-bodied and deep, with some overt backend heat to go along with the raw oak tannins. It is quite clear that the family was aiming for a fairly elegant expression of cabernet, and perhaps at 13.5 percent alcohol, they would have attained this in a ageworthy wine, but at fifteen percent, this is just too high in alcohol to be successful. ??? **83.**

## *Almansa*

### **2013 Garnacha Tintorera “Altitude 1.100”- Bodegas Santa Quiteria**

Garnacha Tintorera is the native name for Alicante Bouschet, which is produced here from chalky vineyards that lie at an altitude of eleven hundred meters above sea level- hence the name of this particular cuvée from Bodegas Santa Quiteria. The wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks and the 2013 vintage came in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a bright and quite complex nose of red and black cherries, chicory, a touch of nutskin, woodsmoke, gentle autumnal leafy tones (so typical of Alicante Bouschet) and an impressive base of chalky soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a succulent core of fruit, just a touch of tannin and very good length and grip on the complex and well-balanced finish. There is just a touch of backend bitterness here that I really like, as it reminds me a bit of Emidio Pepe’s Montepulciano. This is really a very serious bottle of wine, and as it retails for ten dollars here in the US, just an amazing value! 2015-2020+. **89.**

### **2013 Tintoralba- Bodegas Santa Quiteria**

The Tintoralba bottling from Bodegas Santa Quiteria hails from the oldest Garnacha Tintorera vines that the estate owns, which are planted at a slightly lower elevation than those for their Altitude 1.100 bottling (nine hundred to a thousand meters above sea level), but which are fully ninety years of age. This wine is also fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel, with between three and five percent of the bunches retained as whole clusters and undergoing carbonic maceration. This too is outstanding for its price (which is only twelve dollars here in the states), jumping from the glass in a classic Alicante Bouschet aromatic blend of black cherries, espresso, a touch of tree bark, lovely leafy elements, woodsmoke and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent transparency and complexity, moderate, beautifully integrated tannins and a long, focused and quite elegant finish. This has a bit more mid-palate stuffing than the Altitude 1.100 bottling and better structure for cellaring, though the wine is eminently drinkable today. Another very, very impressive bottle from Bodegas Santa Quiteria and once again, a stunning bargain! 2015-2025+. **91.**

## *Alicante*

### **2013 Monastrell “Al Muvedre”- Telmo Rodriguez**

The 2013 Monastrell “Al Muvedre” from Telmo Rodriguez is fermented in a combination of cement and stainless steel tanks, with indigenous yeasts and aged without spending any time in cask. The wine is quite impressively low octane in 2013, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offering up an impressively complex bouquet of dark berries, tree bark, a bit of roasted venison, gentle leafy tones, a touch of red curry, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, outstanding balance and a long, tangy and fairly youthful finish. The tannins here are so nicely integrated that the wine is a good drink right out of the blocks, but there is clearly a fine layer of secondary complexity waiting to emerge with a bit of bottle age and I would be inclined to tuck this in the cellar for three or four more years and really let it start to blossom. This is a very, very impressive bottle of Mourvèdre and a superb value, as this very serious wine retails for only fifteen dollars a bottle here in the US! 2015-2030+. **91.**



As readers will recall from about this time last year, a poll of subscribers to View From the Cellar about whether or not to continue coverage of Bordeaux *En Primeur* in these pages or devote the travel time and pages to another region found a great many readers wanting to see the *En Primeur* allocation of time and resources turned towards Champagne. As this is currently one of the most dynamic and quickly changing regions in the world of wine, I was happy to receive a mandate to spend more time here each year and will be in the region again in April for close to a fortnight, visiting more producers and working my way through the upcoming releases and older vintages from the capital of the sparkling wine world. As those spring reports tend to focus primarily on the houses that I have time to visit during my stay in Champagne, and I am intent on spreading out my first few years of expanded coverage of the region visiting a wide array of different estates and getting a better feel for vineyard and cellar philosophies from a wide variety of producers, I am planning this year to augment the article on the extended tasting trip in Champagne with at least a couple of additional reports that can focus on wines in the bottle from estates that I do not have a chance to visit during my couple of weeks in the region. As it takes time to get to know producers in Champagne well, I hope that as the coming years unfold that the information and depth of tasting notes will continue to improve from these trips, but one has



to invest the time and get to know the people behind the wines better to really get a stronger sense of what is the house philosophy at each important address in the region.

From my experience visiting wine-producing regions in France since the late 1980s, it seems to me that the *Champenois* are philosophically a bit like a cross between the *Bordelais* and the Burgundians, with a natural reticence to volunteer too much information too quickly (*à la* Bordeaux) to visiting journalists that is a bit historically ingrained, but also very much aware that the dynamic and exciting changes afoot in the region in the last decade or so need to be explained to wine lovers everywhere, if Champagne is going to rise above the rather stale concept of brand positioning in the market and start to spread the word about their very serious *terroirs* and the current blossoming of regard for their vineyard patrimony. But, given that this was a region that for so long was ruled by the *négociants* and bigger houses, such a willingness to volunteer information and amplify answers to technical and viticultural questions will take some time to develop fully in this region, as for centuries, the centerpiece of great winemaking in Champagne was the art of blending at the *Grandes Marques* and where the grapes originated from (or how the vineyards were treated) was not considered of paramount importance in determining the ultimate quality of the wines. But, things are changing here and one can sense a bit more openness to questions than was the case here a dozen years ago, and I imagine that this trend will continue to blossom over the coming decades and one day in the not too distant future, it will be possible to receive more expansive answers to more technically inclined questions and the long spring trips will yield even more elaborate detail about cellar techniques, vineyard sources and the like.

A fair number of the wine tasting notes that follow below were sampled during my two and a half weeks in Burgundy in December of 2014, as several new releases from some of my favorite Grower-Récoltants had been assembled in Beaune for shipping to my offices in New York at the end of the year, but as I was already there, it simply did not seem logical to incur the expenses of shipping the wines, and the bottles would not have to settle in from travel before I could start to work my way through them. Given the brutally cold and snowy winter we have had during the first couple of months of 2015 here in New York, it seems that the choice to taste these samples in Beaune was well-merited, as we have not really had particularly friendly temperatures for shipping wines in the northeast of the US so far this year. I augmented the couple dozen of new releases that I sampled in Beaune from the fine brokerage team of Champagne et Villages, with several small producers whose wines I do not see regularly here in the states, including Ambonnay's patron saint, Marie-Noëlle Ledru and the outstanding house of Champagne Tarlant and their superb wines from the Côte de Bars. I further augmented the notes on these samples by contacting some of the importers here in New York whose wines I had not reviewed in the last piece on Champagne a few issues back, to see if they had any new releases that I could include in this feature. I have not made any effort to be encyclopedic in this regard, as I wanted to keep the size of the report manageable (particularly given how many pages are already completed in some of the other features for this issue) and also try to be a bit sensitive to importers' sample budgets, as this time of year is not typically an important time in the states for Champagne and sparkling wine sales.

However, one of my continued goals in writing two or three pieces on sparkling wines per year is to try and remind subscribers that we really should treat bubbly like any other top

quality wine in the market, and think more about cellaring these wines in our own collections, rather than simply buying bottles as we have need of them throughout the course of the year. Champagne in particular, and many other sparkling wines from other regions around the globe, tend to be released in their relative youth and the vast, vast majority of serious sparklers improve with bottle age. To my mind, it makes no sense to not have a corner of the cellar devoted to aging Champagne and other sparkling wines, buying the wines soon after their release and tucking them away for some extended bottle aging in the cellar. This is true for all levels, as the non-vintage blends, particularly from the top Grower-Récoltants and the most serious *Grandes Marques* in Champagne, dramatically improve with a bit of cellaring, and it strikes me as crazy not to lay some bottles down for at least a few years and witness how dramatically the wines blossom and improve with cellaring. This is even more interesting in this day and age of premature oxidation for other dry white wines, as Champagne and other more long-lived sparkling wines remain one of the best options for long-term aging in the realm of white wines these days, as I have yet to see an example of a prematurely oxidized bottle of sparkling wine. At my own table, Champagne and sparkling wines have been taking the places of properly aged, dry white wines for several years now, and my own portion of the cellar of bubbly for medium to long-term aging has been growing in direct proportion to the diminishing space devoted to white wines from regions that have struggled with premox.

I should note that though the above comments are concerned primarily with using sparkling wines as a cellar substitute for dry white wines from regions currently suffering from the scourge of premature oxidation, I do not mean to exclude Rosé Champagne or sparkling wines from the category of wines that should be cellared. The current fashion prevalent in Champagne in particular, is to downplay the capability of Rosé Champagne to age gracefully, as a great many of the *Champenois* will argue that Rosé Champagne is not really built for the cellar the same way as white bubbly, and this is not a serious category for bottle aging. The arguments are usually centered around two issues when *vignerons* discuss aging Rosés, with the first being that the addition of a bit of dry red wine to the blends (which is the most frequent method for adding the bit of color to Rosé Champagne) does not structurally harmonize with the sparkling wine, and consequently, the two components do not always age along the same evolutionary curve over time. The second is simply that producers are aware that most Rosé Champagne is drunk very early on after release (particularly in France, which is the most important Champagne market in the world by quite some measure), due to the current popularity amongst younger wine drinkers with Rosés of all kinds, and consequently, most blends of Rosé Champagne are meant for earlier consumption and will not reward aging. However, this has never been my experience and I have a fair supply of Rosé Champagne aging in my cellar and I have had very good results over the five to seven year period (so far) with these wines developing further aromatic and flavor complexity with bottle age, and I have been quite happy to have these bottles aging. Certainly, one of the potential issues concerning cellaring is that so many examples of Rosé Champagne (not to mention Rosés from other regions producing sparkling wines) are bottled in clear glass bottles, which do not protect the wines from ultraviolet rays. I certainly understand the marketing rationale for doing so, as the wines sell far more easily when customers can see the beautiful color of the wines, but I hope that we will see more green glass used in the future for Rosé Champagne. In any case, I have not had any difficulties aging these wines even in clear glass, as long as the bottles are purchased early on after release (hence

not languishing on merchants' shelves) and are stored in cardboard case boxes, to protect the wines while aging them.

I should take a moment to mention one of the absolute vinous highlights so far this year for me, which was the inaugural tasting of Champagne Henriot's new *Tête de Cuvée* bottling called "Cuve 38". This wine is produced from a solera that the Henriot family started in the 1990 vintage, and which was first used to produce a bottling of Cuve 38 in 2007 (which is the current release). In the excellent 1990 vintage, Joseph Henriot took the decision to set aside one stainless steel tank of grand cru chardonnay from the Côte des Blancs to start this solera in the cellars, with the tank holding 467 hectoliters of wine. The grapes for the original solera hailed from the four grand cru villages of Mesnil-sur-Oger, Chouilly, Oger and Avize, and every year since that time, the cellar team at Henriot has convened in the spring to add a small percentage from the current harvest for inclusion in the solera (all from these same four villages), with the corresponding number of liters drawn off from the tank used as reserve wine in the blends of the house's non-vintage bottlings of Brut Souverain or Blanc de Blancs. The idea has been to augment the solera with a bit of wine from each year, while not materially affecting the personality of the wine in tank, so that the percentage that has been added each year has varied depending on both the quality of the vintage in question and how the addition would affect the overall aromatic and flavor profile of the wine. Finally, in 2007, the Henriot family decided the time was right to draw off a portion of the solera and make a Champagne from it, so that one thousand magnums' worth of *vin clair* from the tank were bottled up and aged seven years on its fine lees prior until disgorgement in 2014 and preparation for release this coming spring. The one thousand magnums represents 1.5 percent of the total volume of the solera, so that the overall personality of the wine resting in tank should not be dramatically altered by starting to create this new cuvée in bottle.

As Thomas Henriot, who was in New York to show the first edition of Cuve 38 to a few lucky invitees, quipped, "this is the first new cuvée from Champagne Henriot in one hundred and fifty years, so we do like to take our time with things!" In each year since 2007, the house has taken an additional 1.5 percent of the tank and allocated it to a thousand magnums, so that this is the start of an extraordinary new bottling from the *maison* that will fill a niche above the Henriot "Cuvée des Enchanteleurs", which has been their flagship *Tête de Cuvée* for more than half a century. I was very much struck by the stunning freshness and structural snap of the first release of Cuve 38, not to mention its brilliant quality, as I fully expected a wine produced from a solera of *vins clairs* begun in 1990 would show far more evolutionary elements on both the nose and palate than the wine actually delivered. The wine is fresh as a daisy, beautifully complex and really seems to have developed a brilliance of depth from the many, many vintages of *vins clairs* that have gone into the solera since 1990. As Thomas Henriot so eloquently described the wine, "what we have sought, and I hope found to some degree, is a 'verticality' of complexity from the solera, without sacrificing any of the freshness that is the Henriot house style." The wine is stunningly young, vibrant and structured for continued aging, and I have no doubt, that though it was absolutely a magical glass of bubbly at the unveiling, it will also age long and gracefully. As the note below will demonstrate, it is truly an extraordinary new addition to the firmament of top end Champagne bottlings, and though it will be priced accordingly, due to both its rarity and the long time the solera has been developing in the Henriot cellars, for well-heeled Champagne lovers, this is a new bottling that will be very much worth the effort to track down a few

magnums and add them to the cellar. As Thomas Henriot commented, “the perfect way to buy the wine would be to source three magnums- one to drink upon release, one to open alongside the next iteration when it is released and compare the two cuvées, and one to leave in the cellar for ten to twenty years and allow it to age properly.” The expected price tag will not make that possible for the vast majority of wine lovers, but for those with the requisite disposable income, this is most assuredly a new bottling of Champagne that is a must addition to the cellar!

### ***Sparkling Wines***

#### **Cava 1 + 1 = 3 Brut NV (Cataluña) Disgorged December 2014**

I wrote very favorably about several of the organic-farmed bottlings from Cava 1+1=3 back in the article on the “Six Percent Club”, as this is one of the top producers in Cataluña for high quality Cava. This was my first chance to try their straight non-vintage Brut bottling (from two different disgorgement dates), as I had tasted three of their Brut Nature cuvées previously. Their Brut bottling is finished with a *dosage* of 7.5 grams per liter. The release disgorged in December of 2014 is bright and very pretty on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of pear, salty soil tones, lime peel, gentle smokiness and a delicate topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and brisk, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced young finish. This is a terrific bottle of Cava, but after tasting the wine disgorged fifteen months earlier, I would now be inclined to let this release age a year or two in the cellar and really start to blossom. Cava 1 + 1 = 3 is one of the very finest producers of sparkling wine in Cataluña, and both these releases are excellent. 2016-2025+. **91+**.

#### **Cava 1 + 1 = 3 Brut NV (Cataluña) Disgorged October 2013**

The non-vintage Brut bottling of Cava 1+1=3 that was disgorged back in October of 2013 shows how well this estate’s wines evolve with bottle age. As is the case with the above wine, the *cépage* is a blend of forty-five percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent Parellada and twenty-five percent each and Macabeo and the wine spends a minimum of eighteen months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. This classic Brut Cava now offers up a complex and blossoming nose of green apple, tart orange, a touch of menthol, beautiful soil tones, dried flowers, a touch of Catalan *garrigue* and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and really well-balanced, with a lovely core, impressive complexity, crisp acids, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. This is aging beautifully and is a stunning value! 2015-2025. **92**.

#### **Maria Casanovas “Glaç” Brut Nature NV (Cataluña) Disgorged October 2011**

The Maria Casanovas Glaç Brut Nature is made from a blend of forty percent pinot noir and sixty percent of the “Big Three” grapes of Cava: Parellada, Macabeo and Xarel-lo. The winery is based in the heart and soul of Cava country in the town of Sant Sadurní d’Anoia, with their Glaç bottling spending eighteen months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The winery does not own its own vineyards, but sources from the same nine hectares of vines owned by a small handful of growers who they have worked with since opening their doors in 1984. The current release is very strong, offering up a pure and vibrant nose of lemon, salty soil tones, tart orange, a dollop of smokiness and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully snappy, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. As Maria Casanovas does not own their own vineyards, they are not officially part of the “Six Percent Club”, but given the high quality here, they deserve honorary membership in that august grouping of Cava producers. Though, this was disgorged

back in October of 2011, it is still a puppy and will be even better with further bottle age. Good juice. 2015-2025. 91+.



### ***Extra Brut and Brut Nature***

#### **Vincent Charlot “le Fruit de Ma Passion” Extra Brut NV (Mardeuil) Disg: March 2014**

Vincent Charlot is based in the small village of Mardeuil, just west of Epernay, where his family domaine is comprised of four hectares of vines. He presently bottles wines under two labels, the family estate name of Charlot-Tanneux for the blended wines, and Champagne Vincent Charlot for his small lot, single vineyard bottlings. He farms his vineyards through a combination of organic and *biodynamique* methods, with a strong emphasis on cover crops and a dislike for plowing. His *vins clairs* are barrel fermented in older casks, using indigenous yeasts and do not undergo malolactic fermentation, to retain as fine a spine of acidity for long-term cellaring. The family vineyards have quite a bit of pinot meunier planted. The “le Fruit de Ma Passion” bottling hails from two vineyards, la Genette and les Chapottes and is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent pinot meunier, twenty percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay, with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine offers up a stunning, pinot meunier nose of white peach, bread dough, chalky soil tones, discreet notes of lavender, gentle smokiness, white lilies and touch of sweet fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, refined *mousse*, bright,

seamless acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and complex finish. I love the pinot meunier influence here. 2015-2035. **93+**.

**Charlot-Tanneux “Expression” Extra Brut NV (Mardeuil) Disgorged March 2014**

The current release of Charlot-Tanneux “Expression” Extra Brut NV from Vincent Charlot is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot meunier, twenty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir and is from the base year of 2010. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter, and like all of the wines from Monsieur Charlot, it was fermented with indigenous yeasts, did not undergo malo and the *vins clairs* were aged for eight months in older casks prior to *assemblage*. The bouquet is bright and extremely stylish, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, fresh almond, chalky minerality, brioche and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and brisk, with outstanding mid-palate depth, impeccable focus and balance, elegant *mousse* and a very long, vibrant and classy finish. This is still very early days for this excellent non-vintage Brut, and I would love to see this wine again in five or six years, when it has really had a chance to blossom with bottle age. This is a stunning value! 2015-2030+. **92+**.

**Champagne La Closserie “Les Beguines” Extra Brut- Jérôme Prévost (Gueux)**

The current release of Les Beguines Extra Brut from Jérôme Prévost is from the 2012 vintage, which can be discerned by the small code on the front label “LC12”. This wine is always made entirely from pinot meunier from Monsieur Prévost’s two hectare vineyard of Les Beguines, with the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts in a combination of older burgundy barrels and *demi-muids*. It spends eighteen months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The 2012 is simply beautiful, offering up a pure and very complex bouquet of pear, apple, brioche, gorgeously complex soil tones, delicate meunier floral tones and just a whisper of vanillin from the older barrels. On the palate the wine is pure and full-bodied, with extremely elegant *mousse*, beautiful mid-palate depth, nascent complexity and a very long, refined and utterly seamless finish. The 2012 Les Beguines from Monsieur Prévost is drinking beautifully out of the blocks, but clearly has the structure to age very gracefully as well. 2015-2035. **93+**.

**Champagne Colin “Cuvée Parallèle” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Vertus)**

The current release of Champagne Colin’s “Cuvée Parallèle” Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Extra Brut is comprised of a combination of base years 2009 and 2010 and was disgorged in November of 2013. The wine is really quite good, offering up a classic nose of pear, delicious apple, bread dough, a nice base of chalky soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the complex finish. There is lovey energy here on the palate, but the finish is not completely clean, and this slight lack of precision on the backend keeps the score down a bit, but there are some fine raw materials here. 2015-2025. **89**.

**François Diligent “Pinot Blanc” Brut Nature NV (Buxeuil) Disgorged May 2014**

This particular bottling of non-vintage Brut Nature from Champagne François Diligent is produced from one hundred percent pinot blanc and is a quite unique and well-made bottle. The wine offers up as bright and classy bouquet of tart orange, lime, *pain grillé*, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with pinpoint bubbles, bright, well-integrated acids and fine length and grip on the focused and elegant finish. This is not the most complex bottle of bubbly, but as a pure expression of pinot blanc Champagne, it is very intriguing and is beautifully made. 2015-2025.

**91.**

### **Drappier Brut Nature NV (Reims)**

The Drappier Brut Nature is a Blanc de Noirs that is comprised entirely of pinot noir. The current release offers up a fine bouquet of apple, tangerine, wheat toast, a superb base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with beautifully buffered acids, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and complex finish. With no *dosage*, the wine displays a very seamless palate impression and no austerity- quite impressive. 2015-2025+. **92.**

### **Nathalie Falmet Brut Nature NV (Rouvres les Vignes) Disgorged May 2014**

As readers may recall, Nathalie Falmet's non-vintage bottling of Brut Nature is made entirely from pinot noir and spends two years on the lees prior to disgorgement, making the current release from the base year of 2011. The house style here is for high-toned and racy wines of great elegance and transparency, and though I have not tasted older examples, I suspect that Madame Falmet's wines age very gracefully indeed. The current release of Brut Nature is lovely here, wafting from the glass in a focused and vibrant nose of tart orange, apple, a beautifully complex base of soil, fresh-baked bread and a lovely smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, nascently complex and intensely flavored, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and lovely mineral drive on the focused and youthful finish. I would be inclined to tuck this wine away in the cellar for a few years and allow it to emerge from behind its girdle of acidity, as there is no buffering *dosage* here and the wine is a pretty snappy affair at the present time. But, all of the constituent components are here for a superb bottle of bubbly with just a bit of bottle age. 2017-2030. **91.**

### **Pierre Gerbais "l'Originale" Extra Brut NV (Celles-sur-Ource) Disgorged April 2013**

The cuvée l'Originale" from Pierre Gerbais is comprised entirely of Pinot Blanc Vrai, from vines that average thirty years of age and are planted on Chablis-like, Kimmeridgian limestone in the village of Celles-sur-Ource; the wine undergoes full malolactic fermentation. The most recent release is based primarily on the 2009 vintage and spent thirty months on the lees prior to disgorgement, with a finishing *dosage* of between five and six grams per liter. The wine is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex aromatic constellation of apple, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine mineral drive, a good core, pinpoint bubbles and lovely focus and balance on the long finish. This is not the most complex of bubblied (at least out of the blocks), but there is serious depth and dimension here and perfect balance for aging. 2015-2025+. **92.**

### **Pierre Gerbais "Prestige" Extra Brut NV (Celles-sur-Ource) Disgorged February 2014**

The Pierre Gerbais "Prestige" Extra Brut bottling is a Blanc de Blancs, but it does not state this anywhere on the labeling. The wine is a lovely bottle of chardonnay-based Champagne, finished off with a *dosage* of only three grams per liter, after having undergone full malo and spending forty-eight months on its lees. The complex bouquet jumps from the glass in a lovely blend of apple, tart orange, stony minerality, bread dough, citrus peel and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, very refined *mousse*, nascent complexity and superb length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. I would not touch a bottle of this outstanding wine for at least another two or three years, as it is still a very young wine, but it will be outstanding in the fullness of time. 2017-2030+. **92+.**



### **Godmé Père et Fils “Grand Cru” Extra Brut NV (Verzenay) Disgorged January 2014**

The current release of Godmé Père et Fils “Grand Cru” Extra Brut was aged four years on the lees, making this base year 2009, and was finished with four grams per liter of *dosage*. However, Hugues Godmé likes to use plenty of reserve wines in this bottling, so the base year of 2009 only comprised thirty percent of the blend, with thirty percent from 2008, twenty percent from 2007, ten percent 2006 and five percent each from 2005 and 2004 vintages, so this is truly a serious multi-vintage bottling. Despite is luxuriant spread of reserve wines in the blend, this is still a young and absolutely beautiful wine in the making, offering up a deep and very classy bouquet of apple, touch of tangerine, plenty of smokiness, sourdough and a very complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with great depth at the core, very elegant *mousse*, crisp, beautifully buffered acids, outstanding complexity and a very long, intense and refined finish. This is an extraordinary bottle of Extra Brut! 2015-2035. **94.**



### **Huré Frères Extra Brut Réserve NV (Ludes) Disgorged January 2014**

The Huré Frères Extra Brut Réserve is comprised of a blend of fifteen percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot noir and forty-five percent pinot noir. It spends thirty-six months aging on its lees and includes thirty percent reserve wines. The current release is finished with four grams per liter of *dosage*, which balances the palate out perfectly. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of apple, a bit of tangerine, lovely minerality, warm bread, a touch of almond and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, elegant

*mousse*, crisp acids and excellent balance and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. Excellent juice. 2015-2030. **91.**

**Champagne Pierre Gerbais “Cuvée de Réserve” Extra Brut NV (Celles-sur-Ource)**

The Pierre Gerbais “Cuvée de Réserve” non-vintage Extra Brut was disgorged in February 2014, after having spent two and a half years aging on its lees. The wine offers up an excellent, youthful nose of apple, tart orange, bread dough, lovely soil tones and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with an excellent core, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the vibrant finish. Like many non-vintage Extra Bruts, this is still a tad on the young side and will round out nicely on the palate with another year or two of bottle age. Fine juice. 2015-2025+. **91+.**

**Champagne Pierre Gerbais “l’Audace” Brut Nature NV (Celles-sur-Ource)**

The current release of Pierre Gerbais l’Audace was disgorged in February 2014 and is comprised entirely of pinot noir. The wine offers up a pretty nose of apple, nectarine, brioche, meunier-like floral tones, a fine base of soil and a touch of top-end smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full and still quite youthful, with a fine core of fruit, very good focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and very fine length and grip on the brisk and still youthfully coarse finish. This needs some time to soften up against its structure, and will be even better a year from now. 2016-2025+. **91.**

**Marie-Noëlle Ledru Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Ambonnay)**

The current release of Marie-Noëlle Ledru’s non-vintage Extra Brut is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay. I do not know the precise date when this release was disgorged, but as Madame Ledru gives her wines a proper stay on the lees prior to *dégorgement*, I would guess this is primarily 2010 or 2009 base year fruit. The wine is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a bright and youthfully classy bouquet of apple, warm bread, beautifully complex soil tones, plenty of Ambonnay smokiness and a discreet topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with excellent buffered acidity, outstanding focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a very long, complex and still quite youthful finish. I would suspect that this is around four grams per liter *dosage*, as the wine is beautifully balanced and really shows great aging potential. High class juice from one of Champagne’s finest traditionalists. 2015-2030+. **92+.**

**Nicolas Maillart “Platine” Extra Brut Premier Cru NV (Écueil) Disgorged November 2013**

The Nicolas Maillart “Platine” non-vintage Extra Brut has a bit more pinot noir in the blend than chardonnay, with the wine spending three years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. This bottling receives between thirty and forty percent reserve wines each year and is finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The current release is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex and vibrant blend of delicious apple, brioche, lovely soil tones, a touch of smokiness and a gently floral topnote redolent of lilacs. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with an excellent core, elegant *mousse* and great focus and grip on the perfectly balanced, long and very classy finish. The three years *sur lattes* has given the wine a roundness on the attack that is pretty rare in Extra Brut, where there is so little buffering from the *dosage*, and makes this wine an outstanding drink right out of the blocks. Very impressive juice. 2015-2025+. **92.**

**Camille Savès Extra Brut Grand Cru NV (Bouzy) Disgorged November 2012**

The non-vintage Camille Savès Extra Brut is comprised of a blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of apple, brioche, a nice bit of smokiness, just a touch of pastry cream, lovely minerality and a

bit of warm bread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse* and a good, long, well-balanced and zesty finish. This is very well-balanced for an Extra Brut, with fine depth of fruit to buffer the bright acidity. 2015-2025+. **92.**

**Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Chouilly) Disgorged October 2013**

The Extra Brut bottling of Blanc de Blancs from the fine house of Vazart-Coquart was finished off with a *dosage* of four grams per liter and offers up a classically expressive Vazart bouquet of comice pears, delicious apples, brioche, complex, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of *crème patissière* and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with youthfully brisk acids, fine minerality, elegant *mousse* and very fine length and grip on the focused and very promising finish. This is very well-balanced, but to my palate, still a tad on the young side, and I would be inclined to tuck this away in the cellar for another year or two and really let it come out from behind its structural elements. But, it will be excellent in the fullness of time, and for low *dosage* fans, I imagine it is just fine right now. 2016-2030. **92.**

**J. L. Vergnon “Murmure” Blanc de Blancs 1er Cru Brut Nature NV (Mesnil sur Oger)**

The new release of J. L. Vergnon’s “Murmure” non-vintage Brut Nature bottling was disgorged in October of 2014. The wine offers up an excellent and quite open nose of white peach, pear, incipient notes of *crème patissière*, chalky minerality, warm biscuits and a touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with a good core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, beautifully balanced finish. I often find that young Blanc de Blancs without any *dosage* need some bottle age to really start to drink well, but this is emphatically not the case with the cuvée Murmure from the Vergnon family, as this wine is already singing. A really lovely middleweight Champagne. 2015-2025. **91.**

**J. L. Vergnon “Eloquence” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Mesnil sur Oger)**

The “Eloquence” bottling from J. L. Vergnon is comprised entirely from grand cru fruit and hence is a bit more youthfully structured than the house’s “Murmure” bottling above. The current release was disgorged in May of 2014 and offers up a serious and youthful nose of pear, delicious apple, superb chalky minerality, pastry cream, brioche and a discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied still quite tightly-knit, with an excellent core of fruit, bright, beautifully integrated acids, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and very classy finish. It is not that this wine is not eminently drinkable today, but there is still a great deal more complexity poised to spring and it only requires a bit of bottle age to really start singing on the palate, so I would opt for cellaring this superb Extra Brut for a couple of years and really let it start hitting on all cylinders. 2017-2030+. **92.**

***Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut***

**José Dhondt Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Oger) Disgorged December 2013**

The current release of José Dhondt non-vintage Blanc de Blancs was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is young, but pure and promising in its blend of delicious apple, lemon, bread dough, chalky minerality, citrus peel and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully tight, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, frothy *mousse* and a long, brisk and well-balanced finish. This needs still a year or two in the cellar to really blossom from behind its structural elements, but it will be lovely once it has a chance to come forward. 2016-2030+. **91.**

### **Champagne Marie-Hanze “Eaux Belle Brut” NV (Écueil)**

The Champagne Marie-Hanze “Eaux Belle Brut” non-vintage bottling is comprised from a blend of forty percent each of pinot noir and chardonnay and twenty percent pinot meunier. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and spends two years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The Brut is finished off with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The current release offers up a really lovely, high-toned bouquet of pear, delicious apple, a dollop of pastry cream, chalky soil tones, brioche and lemon blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very light on its feet, with elegant *mousse*, bright acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, pure and complex finish. A beautifully-balanced, *aperitif*-styled Champagne from Maillart. 2015-2025+. **91.**

### **Champagne de Saint Gall Blanc de Blancs “Premier Cru” Brut NV (Avize)**

This is a very pretty wine on both the nose and on the attack, but the wine seems a bit swamped by its *dosage* on the backend and the lingering sweetness from the sugar outlasts the lovely spine of minerality of this wine. The bouquet is first rate, offering up a complex blend of pear, *crème patissière*, brioche, chalky minerality, a touch of smokiness and a nice touch of almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and not quite as complex as the nose promises, but with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and good length and grip on the finish. This might be significantly better with a lighter hand with the *dosage*, as there are some good raw materials here. 2015-2025. **88.**

### **Champagne Henriot Blanc de Blancs NV (Reims) Current Release**

Like so many of the *Grandes Marques*, Champagne Henriot does not disclose the date of *dégorgement* on their non-vintage bottlings, and my tech sheet only states that this wine spent anywhere from three to five years on its fine lees and includes up to thirty percent reserve wines in the blend. This has always been one of the best non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottlings produced and the wine has a marvelous track record for aging, and this most recent release looks likely to be one of the finest in recent memory. The lovely bouquet is still quite youthful, but deep and promising, as it wafts from the glass in a pure blend of pear, tart apple, chalky minerality, white flowers, incipient notes of pastry cream and a touch of lemon zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a fine, core, a youthful girdle of acidity, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex finish. While this is already a very good glass of bubbly, I will put my bottles in the cellar for another three to five years and really let the wine blossom completely. 2018-2035+. **91+.**

### **Champagne Henriot “Blanc de Blancs” NV (Reims) Cellared from July 2011**

I have always felt that Henriot’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling was one of the top candidates amongst non-vintage bottlings from the *Grandes Marques* for mid-term cellaring, and I tucked a bit away from the summer release of 2011 to track its evolution with bottle age. This most recent bottle was really showing well, with the youthful girdle of acidity this wine had at release nicely relaxed and the wine fully blossomed on both the nose and palate, while still retaining plenty of zesty bounce and grip for further evolution in the bottle. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a classy and complex blend pear, delicious apple, a touch of *crème patissière*, lovely floral tones redolent of acacia blossoms, complex, chalky soil notes and a topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a lovely core, still excellent acidity, pinpoint bubbles and excellent length and grip on the bright and focused finish. This is drinking beautifully, but it is by no means at its apogee, and will

continue to deepen and gain in complexity over the coming fifteen to twenty years. A beautiful wine that has certainly repaid three and a half years in the cellar. 2015-2030+. **92.**

**Champagne Henriot “Cuve 38” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Reims)**

As noted above, the first release of Champagne Henriot’s “Cuve 38” is absolutely brilliant. The wine is comprised of a solera blend from the 1990 to the 2007 vintage, when the first thousand magnums’ worth of *vins clairs* were drawn out of the solera and bottled up for their seven years aging on the lees prior to disgorgement. The wine was disgorged sometime in 2014 and is set to be released in the spring of 2015. The *dosage* is quite low at only four grams per liter and the wine could have been labeled as an Extra Brut, but wears the Brut designation on its label. The wine is absolutely brilliant on both the nose and palate, soaring from the glass in a vibrant aromatic constellation of pear, delicious apple, lemon blossoms, very complex, chalky minerality, an elegant touch of *crème patissière* and brioche. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with beautiful mineral drive, great complexity, utterly refined *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the supremely elegant, dancing and still almost youthful finish. While this wine is an utter joy to drink today, it shows no oxidative elements of tertiary development and will unequivocally age and improve for decades to come. An utterly stunning new addition to the firmament of Champagne’s greatest bottlings! 2015-2040. **96.**

**Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs “Réserve” Brut NV (Chouilly) Disgorged Jan 2014**

Vazart-Coquart’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is one of the most personality-filled bottlings to be found amongst the top tier of Grower Champagne, and the new release is another lovely, albeit, still quite young, bottle in the making. The current release was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and offers up a promising bouquet of pear, *crème patissière*, a fine base of limestone, warm bread, a bit of fresh almond and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a fine core, elegant, frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and fine length and grip on the still quite primary finish. Tuck this lovely bottle away in the cellar for two or three years and it will be really singing. 2017-2030+. **91+.**

**J. L. Vergnon “Conversation” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil sur Oger)**

The new release of the Vergnon “Conversation” non-vintage Blanc de Blancs was disgorged in September of 2014. The wine offers up a really beautiful nose of pear, delicious apples, complex, chalky soil tones, brioche, a touch of citrus zest and a beautiful topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a fine core of fruit, brisk acids, lovely focus and grip, frothy *mousse* and a very long, still very young finish. This is going to be a terrific bottle of Blanc de Blancs, but it is still a puppy and a bit bound up behind its girdle of acidity. While drinkable today, the real fireworks are still a bit in the future, for when this wine blossoms from behind its structural elements, it is going to be very special and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a couple of years and let it come into its own. 2017-2030+. **91+.**

***Non-Vintage Blanc de Noirs Brut***

**Barnaut Blanc de Noirs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Bouzy) 2012 Release**

In contrast to the Barnaut Blanc de Blancs non-vintage bottling from this same release batch, the Blanc de Noirs is into its apogee and drinking very well at the present time. The wine is produced entirely from pinot noir grown in the family’s Bouzy vineyards. The bouquet shows just a touch of reduction (perhaps it is just this bottle?) and needs a bit of coaxing before it blossoms to offer up a fine mélange of apple, stony minerality bread dough, floral tones redolent of dried lilacs and a nice topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp

and complex, with a fine core, very elegant *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a long, classy and very elegant finish. If the reduction was only emblematic of this particular bottle, then my score is conservative. 2014-2025. **91+?**

**Godmé Père et Fils Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Verzenay) Disgorged December 2013**

The new release of Blanc de Noirs non-vintage from Godmé Père et Fils is excellent, offering up a bright and complex aromatic constellation of white peach, apple, plenty of smokiness, warm biscuits and a very classy base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a superb spine of minerality, frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and primary finish. This is young, and with only six grams per liter of *dosage*, it really needs to be tucked away in the cellar for a year or two to allow it to blossom from behind its structural elements. The balance here is exemplary and all this lovely bottle needs is some time alone in the cellar to start to drink with great style, but it is a bit tight out of the blocks. 2016-2035. **92.**

***Non-Vintage Brut***

**Barnaut “Grande Réserve” Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy) 2012 Release**

A couple of years’ worth of bottle age has allowed the Barnaut non-vintage Grande Réserve to begin to open up nicely on both the nose and palate, but the wine still seems a year or two away from drinking at its apogee. The wine is made up of a blend of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay and is finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The deep and complex bouquet offers up a superb blend of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, a lovely base of deep soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and crisp, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the poised and still quite zesty finish. I would still give this at least another year in the cellar to let it more fully relax its structural elements and fully blossom. 2016-2030+. **92.**

**Champagne Colin “Cuvée Alliance” Brut NV (Vertus) Disgorged September 2014**

The Cuvée Alliance non-vintage Brut from Champagne Colin si comprised of a blend of chardonnay and pinot meunier and offers up a respectable bouquet of apple, pear, bread dough and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and reasonably deep at the core, with frothy *mousse*, good focus and grip and a fairly long, modestly complex finish. This is a solid middleweight that is well-balanced, but ultimately a touch on the simple side. 2015-2020+. **87.**

**Champagne Drappier “Carte d’Or” Brut NV (Urville)**

The Carte d’Or bottling of Brut non-vintage from Drappier is comprised of a blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir, fifteen percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot meunier. The wine undergoes full malolactic fermentation, with five percent of the blend raised in Burgundy barrels. The current release offers up a quite complex and very vibrant bouquet of apple, orange zest, warm bread, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a gentle floral topnote redolent of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the fairly long, complex and wide open finish. This is a lovely bottle of non-vintage Brut for drinking over the next seven to ten years. 2015-2022+. **89+.**

**Domaine Bruno Gobillard “les Vieilles Vignes de Mon Grand-Père” Brut NV (Pierry)**

The new release of Bruno Gobillard’s “Vieilles Vignes de Mon Grand-Père” bottling is an utterly refined and elegant example of Champagne, with a pure, focused and vibrant bouquet of pear, delicious apple, brioche, lovely, chalky soil tones, a touch of lavender and gentle

smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and complex, with a fine core, an excellent spine of minerality, refined, pinpoint bubbles and outstanding length and grip on the poised and beautifully balanced finish. This has outstanding weight for an *aperitif* bottle of bubbly, but also has the structure to work very well at the table. High class juice. 2015-2035.

**93.**

### **Champagne Henriot “Brut Souverain” NV (Reims)**

The new release of the non-vintage Henriot Brut Souverain is excellent, and one of the finest I have tasted in several years from this consistently well-made bottling. The *maison* does not like to unveil specific information on *cépages* or disgorgement dates for their non-vintage blends, but Thomas Henriot did volunteer that the new release is based on the 2011 vintage and is quite consistent in terms of *cépages* with past releases, which means a bit more chardonnay than pinot noir in the blend, and just a touch of pinot meunier, so let us estimate that this is fifty-five percent chardonnay, fifty percent pinot noir and five percent pinot meunier. In any case, the wine is excellent, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, pear, orange zest, warm bread and chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, elegant and complex, with a fine core, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the zesty finish. There is a nice note of toastiness on the backend from the reserve wines in the blend, that typically will range from fifteen to twenty percent of the blend of the Brut Souverain. An excellent new release of this bottling- I only wish Champagne Henriot would follow the lead of some of their *Grandes Marques* brethren and supply a bit more information about disgorgement dates on the back labels, so that one could know which iteration of Brut Souverain one was purchasing. 2015-2030+. **91.**

### **Huré Frères “Invitation” Brut NV (Ludes) Disgorged January 2014**

The current release of Huré Frères “Invitation” non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of fifty percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay and was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. This is primarily composed of a base year of 2010. The wine offers up a superb and beautifully focused nose of apple, lemon, warm bread, a complex base of Montagne de Reims soil tones and a nice touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still fairly youthful, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, elegant, frothy *mousse* and a long, crisp and still snappy finish. I would opt for tucking this excellent Brut NV away in the cellar for a year or two and really let it blossom from behind its girdle of acidity, as the raw materials here are excellent. 2016-2030. **91+.**

### **Krug Grande Cuvée Brut NV (Reims) Cellared Five Years**

I am often impressed by how Krug’s flagship bottling of Grande Cuvée can taste so good upon release, given the fact that this is one of Champagne’s greatest bottlings for long-term cellaring and the wine improves immeasurably with cellaring. This particular bottle had been tucked away in the cellar for five years (and hence was released just before the Krug ID was added) and is just beginning to reach that level where the secondary aromatic and flavor elements start to vie with the original panoply of sensations. The bouquet is stellar, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, wheat toast, orange zest, a touch of toasted almond, a magnificent base of soil nuances and just a whiff of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully complex, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, superb acids and stunning length and grip on the complex and wide open finish. This still has the energy and cut of a young release of Grande Cuvée, but now coupled with secondary layers of complexity. It



is a beautiful moment to be drinking this wine, but it will continue to climb with the unfolding years and is still not even close to its true apogee. 2015-2040. **94+**.

**Marie-Noëlle Ledru Grand Cru Brut NV (Ambonnay)**

The current release of non-vintage Brut from Marie-Noëlle Ledru is young and absolutely outstanding, offering up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of apple, tart orange, a complex base of minerality, fresh-baked bread, a touch of citrus peel and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great mineral drive, refined *mousse*, brisk acids and outstanding depth and complexity on the very long, racy and youthful finish. While I had great pleasure drinking this bottle after a long day of tasting in Burgundy, the reality is that this wine is still three to five years away from fully blossoming and is built to age beautifully in the cellar. 2018-2040. **93**.



**Nicolas Maillart “Platine” Brut Premier Cru NV (Écueil) Disgorged November 2013**

The non-vintage Brut version of Platine from Nicolas Maillart has a bit different *cépages* than the Extra Brut bottling of the same name, as this wine is eighty percent pinot noir and only twenty percent chardonnay. In addition to grapes from Écueil, Monsieur Maillart also uses grapes from the villages of Bouzy and Villers Alleraud, with forty percent of the blend comprised of reserve wines. The wine spends a year less on its fine lees than the Extra Brut version and is finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is excellent, showing quite a bit of pinot noir personality in its blend of tangerine, white peach, plenty of smokiness, a

lovely base of soil tones, brioche, a touch of lavender and a topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, lovely focus and balance, impressive mineral drive, refined *mousse* and fine grip on the long and snappy finish. This is still a puppy, and though it is certainly quite approachable today, two or three years' worth of bottle age will really let this wine relax a bit structurally and dazzle on the palate. Lovely juice. 2017-2030. **91+**.

**Camille Savès “Carte Blanche” Brut Premier Cru NV (Bouzy) Disgorged September 2013**

The current iteration of the fine Camille Savès “Carte Blanche” non-vintage Brut is another absolutely lovely bottle, wafting from the glass in a bright and complex nose of apple, orange zest, warm bread, a fine base of soil tones and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite stylish, with perfect *aperitif* weight, bright acids, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the bouncy and nicely focused finish. The *dosage* here is nine grams per liter, which perfectly balances the wine and leaves one ready for a second glass. Lovely juice that is drinking with plenty of style right out of the blocks. 2015-2030+. **91**.

**Serveaux Fils “Carte Noire” Brut NV (Passy-sur-Marne) Disgorged November 2013**

The current release of Carte Noire from Serveaux Fils is a blend of fifty percent pinot noir and fifty percent pinot meunier and is excellent, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, brioche, chalky minerality, citrus zest and a touch of vanilla in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and complex, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This has a lovely attack and then a very good backend persistence, but it is a touch front-loaded stylistically. 2015-2025. **90**.

**Champagne Tarlant Brut Réserve NV (Oeuilly) Disgorged January 2013**

Benoît Tarlant's current release of his non-vintage Brut Réserve is from the base year of 2007, with a percentage of the blend from his solera of reserve wines. Monsieur Tarlant barrel ferments his *vins clairs* in a blend of new and older casks, with the wines not undergoing any malolactic fermentation. The bottling of Brut Réserve in the market now is a blend of one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier and spent nearly five years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The wine is deep and complex on both the nose and palate, offering up a superb bouquet of apple, peach, wheat toast, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of nuttiness and a stylish base of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, crisp acids, lovely soil signature, excellent *mousse* and a long, focused and quite intensely flavored finish. Many Grower-Récoltants have to release their wines several years before they are really ready for primetime drinking, so it is nice to cross paths with Monsieur Tarlant's Brut Réserve, which having spent five years on its lees, is drinking splendidly on release. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2025. **93**.

**Marie Weiss Brut NV (Ludes) Cellared May 2012**

This particular bottle of Marie Weiss was put in my cellar in the spring of 2012 and I pulled it out just before Christmas to see how it was progressing with a bit more than two and a half years in the cellar since its release here in the New York market. The wine is drinking just beautifully, with the palate having opened up nicely, but with the wine retaining lovely brightness and grip and plenty of vivacity on the nose. The excellent bouquet is a blend of apple, fresh-baked bread, lovely soil tones, a touch of vanilla custard, a discreet base of smokiness and a lovely, delicate topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still rock solid at the core, with lovely mineral drive, refined, vigorous *mousse*, a fine spine of acidity and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is now wide open, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. As most readers will recall, this is made by Ployez-

Jacquemart from purchased grapes, and though it is not quite as deep or complex as the estate bottling, it shares that house's great ability to age. 2015-2025+. **91.**

***Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut Rosé***

**Vincent Charlot "le Rubis de la Dune" Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut NV (Mardeuil)**

Vincent Charlot's la Dune vineyard is a small, .28 hectare vineyard that was planted by the family back in 1955 and is eighty percent pinot meunier and twenty percent pinot noir. The current release is base wine 2011 and was disgorged in March of 2014 with a finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. It is quite dark cherry red in color and offers up a superb and seriously complex bouquet of red berries, pomegranate, fresh-baked bread, a beautifully refined base of soil tones, cloves and dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with pinpoint bubbles, great focus and grip, impressive nascent complexity, zesty acids and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This is a terrific glass of bubbly today, but the wine is still a puppy and I would want to tuck this away for three or four more years in the cellar and really let it start to hit on all cylinders. A beautiful wine! 2018-2035. **92+.**

**Champagne Colin Brut Rosé NV (Vertus) Disgorged June 2013**

Champagne Colin's non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of chardonnay and pinot noir. The current release offers up a bouquet of cherries, blood orange, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and frothy, with good mid-palate concentration, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. This lacks just a touch of complexity, but is nicely made and really quite a good value. 2015-2020+. **88.**

**José Dhondt "Rosé de Saignée" Brut NV (Oger) Disgorged December 2013**

The new release of José Dhondt's non-vintage "Rosé de Saignée" Brut is a young wine that needs a couple of years in the cellar, but will be very good with sufficient bottle age. The wine is comprised entirely of pinot noir, and offers up a primary nose of cherries, blood orange, cloves, chalky soil, orange peel and wheat toast. On the palate is tight and young, with plenty of stuffing in the mid-palate, a fine blade of minerality, frothy, pinpoint bubbles and a long, brisk and still quite youthful finish. Today, this is a bit bound up in its structural elements for primetime drinking, but the constituent components are here for a fine bottle with a bit of bottle age. 2017-2025+. **89+.**

**Champagne Drappier Brut Rosé NV (Urville)**

The Champagne Drappier non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised entirely of pinot noir from the estate's own Côte des Bars vineyards and is produced by the *saignée* method, rather than by adding a bit of still red wine to the blend to give the wine its lovely cherry color. The wine spends approximately two and a half years on the lees prior to disgorgement and is finished with a *dosage* of 7.5 grams per liter. The new release offers up a fine nose of blood orange, cherries, wheat toast, a lovely base of soil and a touch of cinnamon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with a good core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This wine will certainly benefit from another year or two in the cellar. 2016-2030. **90+.**

**Domaine Bruno Gobillard "Mademoiselle Sophie" Brut Rosé NV (Pierry)**

The Domaine Bruno Gobillard "Mademoiselle Sophie" non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of fifty percent of pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot meunier, with fifteen percent of the red wines in the blend being still wine, to give the

bottle its beautiful, strawberry-salmon color. The most recent release was disgorged in December of 2013, the *vins clairs* do not go through malo and it was finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine offers up a vibrant and youthful bouquet of strawberries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, bread dough and orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, young and tightly-knit, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, bracing acids and fine focus and grip on the long and still very primary finish. All of the constituent components are in place here for this wine to be excellent down the road, but it is still a puppy and needs at least a few years in the cellar to blossom. 2016-2030. **90+**.

#### **Champagne Henriot Brut Rosé NV (Reims)**

The Champagne Henriot non-vintage Brut Rosé is made from a blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, with pinot noir more prevalent in the blend, but the house does not share the precise breakdown on varietals in the *cépages*. The wine is aged between two and three years on the fine lees and is a lovely, pale salmon color. The current release offers up a superb and complex nose of tangerine, a touch of red berry, woodsmoke, wheat toast, chalky minerality and a dollop of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite youthfully structured, with brisk acids, excellent focus and grip, a lovely core, frothy *mousse* and a long, minerally and well-balanced finish. Like so many of the Henriot non-vintage bottlings, this will age very well and the real fireworks will start once the wine has had three or four years in the cellar- though it is eminently drinkable today. 2017-2030+. **91**.

#### **Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Rosé NV (Ludes) Cellared Since May 2012**

I love how well the non-vintage bottlings from Ployez-Jacquemart evolve with bottle age. This particular bottle of their Extra Brut Rosé had been in my cellar for two and a half years and was absolutely singing when opened on Christmas Eve. The complex and utterly vibrant nose wafts from the glass in a blaze of white cherries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, rye toast, smoke and a touch of clove in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and absolutely wide open, with a lovely core, very refined *mousse*, excellent balance and grip and a very long, complex and focused finish. This bottling was lovely on release, but the extra bottle age has allowed it to blossom fully and the wine is drinking with great style today. Age your non-vintage bottlings! 2015-2020+. **92**.

#### **Serveaux Fils “Rosé de Saignée” Brut NV (Passy-sur-Marne) Disgorged September 2013**

The Serveaux Fils “Rosé de Saignée” non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot meunier and forty percent pinot noir. The current release was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter and offers up a truly beautiful ruby-salmon color in the glass. The bouquet is a bright and complex blend of sweet cranberry, blood orange, caraway seed, chalky minerality, rye bread, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows lovely mid-palate depth, with bright, well-buffered acids, frothy *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the long, beautifully balanced and still fairly youthful finish. I know the *Champenois* generally do not believe in the ageability of non-vintage Rosé, but the balance here strongly suggests that this wine will age very gracefully and I would love to drink it five or six years down the road. 2015-2030. **91+**.

#### **J. L. Vergnon “RosÉmotion” Extra Brut Rosé NV (Mesnil sur Oger) Disgorged July 2014**

The new release of the J. L. Vergnon “RosÉmotion” non-vintage Extra Brut Rosé is a lovely bottle that is very well-balanced out of the blocks and drinking very well, but with the structure to age nicely over the coming decade. The wine is comprised entirely of pinot noir and like of the Vergnon bottlings, does not undergo malolactic fermentation. The color is a pale salmon and the bouquet is a vibrant blend of strawberries, white peach, chalky soil tones, wheat

toast and a touch of rose petal in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a good core of fruit, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the tight, complex and bone-dry finish. This is lovely, but it could use a year in the cellar to blossom a bit on the backend. 2016-2030. **90+**.



### ***Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs***

#### **2009 Georges Laval “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Disgorged April 2014)**

The 2009 Georges Laval Blanc de Blancs “Les Chênes” Brut Nature is a young and outstanding example of the vintage. The bouquet shows some of the ripeness of the vintage, nicely buried in minerality, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of delicious apples, pears, complex minerality, a touch of *crème patissière* and a bit of almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, very refined *mousse*, a serious spine of acidity and a long, focused and still very primary finish. This needs at least three or four years in the cellar to really blossom, and though I have no doubt it will be a relatively forward vintage for this long-lived bottling from Vincent Laval, it is still a puppy and needs time to blossom from behind its girdle of acidity. 2019-2040+. **93+**.

#### **2008 J. L. Vergnon “Confidence” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Nature (Mesnil)**

The 2008 J. L. Vergnon “Confidence” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature was disgorged in December of 2013, after nearly five years on the lees. The wine offers up an outstanding bouquet of pear, delicious apple, *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones, brioche and a

nice touch of almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully pure, with a fine core of fruit, brisk acidity, excellent focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced and zesty finish. This is bone dry, as one would expect with a Brut Nature, but its five years on the lees has allowed the wine to blossom nicely from behind its structure and is drinking very well indeed, though with plenty of potential for further evolution in the cellar. 2015-2035. **92+**.

**2006 Champagne Colin “Cuvée Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Vertus)**

The 2006 Champagne Colin “Cuvée Grand Cru” is a good solid wine on both the nose and palate, with fine aromatic complexity, but a slightly four-square personality on the palate. The nose wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of pear, brioche, a touch of nuttiness, chalky minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chunky, with a good core, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and good length and grip on the slightly simple finish. This is fairly broad-shouldered for a Blanc de Blancs, and though there are some good things going on in the glass here, it is just a bit too four-square to place in the top division. 2015-2030+. **89.**

**2006 J. L. Vergnon “Expression” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut (Mesnil)**

The 2006 J. L. Vergnon “Expression” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut was disgorged in April of 2013, meaning this lovely wine spent six years on its fine lees. The wine is really beautifully structured for such a round and forward Champagne vintage, wafting from the glass in blossoming bouquet of pear, almond, a touch of tangerine, warm bread, beautifully complex, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core, refined *mousse*, still quite brisk acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and blossoming finish. I tasted this wine side by side with the 2008 Confidence, and the contrast was very interesting, as the ’08 Brut Nature bottling was more refined and less bound up in its structural elements than the ’06 Expression on the backend, despite being the younger of the two wines. In contrast, the 2006 is a bit more powerful in personality. While the two vintages are obviously quite different in character, I would suggest that Monsieur Vergnon is getting even better managing these lower or no *dosage* bottlings with each passing year. The 2006 Expression is a very good wine, but I have a slight preference for the more elegant and seamless 2008 Confidence. 2015-2030+. **91.**

**2004 Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims) Disgorged April 2013**

The 2004 Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is a stellar young bottle of bubbly, offering up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of pear, orange zest, fresh-baked bread, fresh almond, a touch of *crème patissière* and a fine base of chalky soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still fairly youthful, with a rock solid core, brisk acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, snappy finish. This is still a tad too young for primetime drinking, with the part of the blend that is barrel-fermented still giving a bit of toastiness to the wine’s primary personality. I would opt for tucking this away at least for another couple of years in the cellar and really allow it to blossom fully. It is a superb young bottle of Blanc de Blancs and should age very long and gracefully. 2017-2035+. **94.**

***Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut***

**2009 Georges Laval “Les Hautes Chêvres” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (Disg: April 2014)**

The 2009 Les Hautes Chêvres will be the very last vintage for this cuvée to be produced from the very old pinot noir vines that Vincent Laval tended at the top of the plateau in Cumières and which had been planted in 1930. At seventy-nine years of age, they finally needed



replanting, so the parcel was grubbed up after the 2009 vintage and the Les Hautes Chêvres bottling will continue on for the foreseeable future as a Blanc de Noirs produced entirely from Pinot Meunier, from a block of old vines that lie just down slope from the replanted parcel. The 2009 Les Hautes Chêvres is a suitably excellent last vintage for these seventy-nine year old vines, as it offers up a young and absolutely superb bouquet of apple, pear, fresh almond, brioche, a complex base of soil tones, gentle floral tones and an exotic topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a rock solid core, a fine spine of minerality, refined *mousse* and outstanding focus and grip on the youthfully complex and very promising finish. I would not touch this excellent wine for at least a few years, for though it is accessible today, it still has several layers of additional complexity to unwrap with a bit of bottle age. 2018-2040. **94.**

**2008 Camille Savès Brut Millésime Grand Cru NV (Bouzy) Disgorged September 2013**

The 2008 Camille Savès Brut Millésime is a blend of sixty-five percent chardonnay and thirty-five percent pinot noir and was aged nearly five years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is young and lovely, offering up a fine mélange of apple, tart orange, complex minerality, sourdough, incipient nuttiness and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, excellent focus and balance, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and very fine length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is a fine, fine bottle that is accessible today, but will be even better as its secondary layers of complexity are liberated with further bottle age. Lovely juice. 2015-2040+. **92+.**

**2007 Nicolas Maillart Brut Millésimé Premier Cru (Écueil) Disgorged July 2014**

The 2007 Nicolas Maillart Brut Millésimé is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay and spends five years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The 2007 was finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter, which makes it actually an Extra Brut, but the label simply states Brut. The youthfully complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a mélange of apple, tart orange, lovely smokiness, bread dough, stony minerality and a just a touch of white lilies in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite tightly-knit, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the focused and still quite primary finish. This still needs a handful of years in the cellar to blossom, but will be an excellent wine in the fullness of time. 2018-2033. **91+.**

**2006 Henriot Brut Millésimé (Reims) Disgorged February 2014**

The 2006 Henriot Brut Millésimé spent fully seven years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and release into the market. The wine is a blend of forty-five percent pinot noir from the Montagne de Reims and fifty-five percent chardonnay from the Côtes de Blancs and was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. 2006 is a more forward vintage and the Henriot vintage-dated bottling from this year perfectly captures the charm and earlier appeal of the year. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet that is starting to show some lovely secondary elements of complexity in its constellation of white peach, apple, brioche, a complex base of soil tones, orange zest, gentle notes of *crème patissière* and just a touch of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, refined *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, classy and wide open finish. The 2006 Henriot Brut Millésimé is drinking beautifully today, but will have little difficulty cruising along for the next ten to fifteen years. 2015-2030+. **92.**



**2006 Marie-Noëlle Ledru “Brut Nature Millésime” Grand Cru (Ambonnay)**

The 2006 Marie-Noëlle Ledru “Brut Nature Millésime” is a stellar young bottle of bubbly, with the depth, complexity and soil signature found in all of Madame Ledru’s wines, but to my palate, the wine’s low *dosage* makes it pretty snappy out of the blocks and I would love to give this some bottle age before really starting to drink it. The deep and utterly superb nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, tart orange, very complex minerality, fresh-baked bread, a bit of quinine, *fleur de sel* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and laser-like in its focus, with brisk acids, a great core, outstanding mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a very, very long, complex and youthful finish. Because there is very little buffering *dosage*, the wine is still pretty snappy on the palate, and for those who are not Extra Brut purists, this is a bottle of great wine that really could use a bit of time in the cellar to blossom a bit more structurally. It is a great bottle of Extra Brut, but it really depends on one’s palate whether it is ready to drink today or in need of more bottle age. It will keep for at least a couple of decades and perhaps longer. 2015-2035+. **94+**.