

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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- ❖ *A Bit More Detail On Champagne Krug To Accompany the Release of the 2002.*
(pages 1-25)
- ❖ *Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret- Old School Vosne-Romanée Excellence.*
(pages 26-53)
- ❖ *Domaine Gilles Barge- Another Below the Radar Côte-Rôtie Classicist.*
(pages 54-67)
- ❖ *A Mid-Terms' Piemonte Report- The 2009 Vintage Back to 1993.*
(pages 68-76)
- ❖ *Checking In On the 1995 Red Burgundies At Age Twenty-One.*
(pages 77-91)
- ❖ *Recently Tasted Spanish Wines.*
(pages 92-138)

Coming Attractions

- ❖ *Germany's Stupendous 2015 Vintage.*
- ❖ *Round Two of Kalin Cellars- America's Great Iconoclast Traditionalist.*
- ❖ *Mount Eden Vineyards' Brilliant Santa Cruz Mountain Wines.*
- ❖ *A Second Round of the Beautifully Elegant 2014 Burgundy Vintage.*
- ❖ *Château Latour à Pomerol's Exceptional Track Record From 1929 to Today.*
- ❖ *The Very Fine 1986 Bordeaux Vintage at Age Thirty.*
- ❖ *Another Round of Superb, Low Octane, Neo-Classical American Wines.*
- ❖ *Ric Forman, Great Old Right Bank Gems, Gérard Boulay's Lovely Chavignol Sancerres, The Grands Echézeaux of Joseph Drouhin, A Taste For Campania, Château La Lagune, François Cotat, The Hill of Corton, Who Are The Traditionalists In Bordeaux?, Cathy Corison, Château Ausone, More Off the Beaten-Path Italian Wines, Bruno Paillard, La Ragnaie Brunello di Montalcino, and Château Musar.*

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A BIT MORE DETAIL ON CHAMPAGNE KRUG



As readers know, I was at Champagne Krug for a couple of days during my trip to the region in the spring of last year, but I had been waiting to put together a proper article on the *Grande Marque*, rather than including the notes in the big reports on Champagne that I sent out last summer. Part of the reason I had been delaying sending out the notes from this visit was that I was in the midst of reworking my historical piece on the estate, which I originally sent out back in December of 2011, as it is to be the centerpiece of a new special edition on Champagne. As subscribers may or may not know, I compile regional special editions from past articles in the newsletter to offer to non-subscribers for sale through the website, as some customers prefer to buy articles grouped regionally, rather than specific back issues. None of these special editions include any new material that you have not already received in one of the past newsletters, but as I have visited Champagne Krug on a few occasions since I wrote the original article and I have been able to add a bit more depth to the history of the *maison*, I had decided to rework the historical section for the special edition compilation on the region and include the new material in the feature that this further research had uncovered. As I do not wish to offer anything for sale through the website that has not already been made available to subscribers, I have decided to finish up this reworked Krug historical feature for Issue 61, so that the additional details on the estate and its deep history are also part of your library. The timing for this feature seems to have

been perfect as well, as while I have been in the midst of writing this piece, the *maison* has finally decided to release the long-awaited 2002 Vintage Brut from their cellars, after a thirteen year wait, and which is destined to be one of the legendary wines from Krug in this generation. In fact, having tasted each new release of Krug Vintage since the launch of the 1981, I cannot recall ever having tasted a greater young Krug than the 2002!

Of the tasting notes themselves that follow, a few appeared in the last issue as part of the round-up of new releases of Champagne that arrived in the US market in the fall of 2015 and which needed to be tasted and written up while the wines were still in the market. I have added to this the myriad of recent notes I have on various releases of Krug Grande Cuvée, as readers will recall that I had begun working on a vertical report on this wine that focused on how beautifully it ages, as I find it is one of the most interesting bottlings of Champagne to cellar long-term and I have always felt that its ability to improve with bottle age is one of its most underappreciated attributes. Apparently I was not the only one who felt this way, as the *maison* was happily pouring various iterations of Grande Cuvée during my visit in April of 2015 and seems to have decided to put more emphasis on how beautifully this bottling ages over the long haul. I can vividly remember when the company line fifteen years ago was that Grande Cuvée was a “multi-vintage wine that was virtually identical year in and year out, due to the great skills of the cellar team here to blend various lots together to consistently turn out the same wine year after year.” As Maggie Henriquez, President of Maison Krug, commented during my last visit here in the spring of 2015, “this was of course ridiculous, as each year is a different growing season and there are always going to be variations in the different base years of Grande Cuvée and it makes far more sense to celebrate those differences, rather than imply they do not exist.” As the notes below will attest, the very talented team at Krug, led by *Chef de Cave*, Eric Bedel, makes it very hard to differentiate qualitative differences between various base years of Grande Cuvée, as they produce a blend each year that starts out its life remarkably similar to the previous iteration of this iconic wine. However, each year, the constituent components and the *cépages* are different, and though the blend will approach very exactly the previous release when it is first blended as a still wine, once time has a chance to work its magic, the wines start to take on their own personalities and this is one of the most interesting aspects of the wine as the decades roll by.

As I noted in the recent report on the region, Champagne Krug has just begun a program to hold back a small percentage of each base year of Grande Cuvée for release somewhere down the road, effectively instituting a “Krug Collection” program for Grande Cuvée, so it will be possible in the future to experience older bottles of Grande Cuvée directly from the *maison*’s cellars in Reims. While the program is still in its formative stage and it is unclear whether this will be done with every base year of Grande Cuvée, or for how long the wines will remain in the cellars, my expectation are that this will only be done in years where the team at Krug deems the base year is built for the extended long haul and it will not hold back every release. But, I could be wrong on this count and we will simply have to wait and see how this program unfolds over the course of the coming years. It may well be that the estate’s decision makers are not yet certain how this new collection program for Grande Cuvée will play out over time and the wines in the cellar will ultimately decide after how many years of bottle age they will be released to clients of the estate. However the program may ultimately take shape, the idea is excellent and long overdue, as the pleasures in the glass of a properly-matured example of Grande Cuvée cannot be overstated, and as good as this wine is on release each year, it is far more interesting to

my palate once it has spent another ten to twenty years evolving in the bottle after its release onto the market. While tasting the new release of the 2002 Vintage with Olivier Krug here in New York in January, I asked whether the *maison* has any bottles of older Krug Rosé in their cellars in Reims, as this is a wine that I have never tasted with significant bottle age on it, but always felt it would blossom beautifully with cellaring (if anyone had the self-restraint to tuck it away and not touch the bottles for a decade or two), but did not have any personal experience with older Rosé here. Oliver responded that “in the past, we did not have any bottles of the Rosé saved in the cellars, for the same reason that we always sold through all of the bottles of Grande Cuvée, but we have now begun to save some stocks and you will just have to have a little bit of patience to see how the Rosé evolves with long-term bottle age- as it ages excellently.” Always that element of time coming into play at Champagne Krug!

Updated History of Champagne Krug

I have been a huge admirer of Champagne Krug since my first glass of their exquisite Champagne crossed my palate many decades ago. Surprisingly, in what had already been a pretty long career in the wine trade, prior to my starting to write full time about wine a decade ago, I had never had the pleasure to actually visit the domaine in Reims until the first time in June of 2011, when the house very kindly invited me to participate in their *Voyage Assemblage*. This was a tutorial in the incomparable art of blending as it has been practiced at Champagne Krug since the estate’s founding by Joseph Krug in 1843. I was one of sixteen journalists to join the team at Krug for two fast-paced days of vineyard visits, still wine tastings, finished Champagne tastings and of course, a few wonderful meals and plenty of the world’s finest bubbly. It was a fascinating and utterly educational two days of tastings, and I left Reims after those two days with about as heavy a heart as one can have on the way to Paris for a night on the town. Since that total immersion class on Krug Grande Cuvée back in the summer of 2011, I have found my way to the lovely *maison* on Rue Coquebert in Reims on several more occasions during my visits to the region and was once again back here in the spring of 2015 for another blending seminar and two full days of *haute cuisine*, great wines and fine living in the manner of a proper Krug lifestyle. Believe me, it is not too hard to adjust to such luxury and pretty hard to give it up again and go back to being a simple wine journalist a couple of days later. However, on the positive side of the ledger, when Michelin three star meals and multiple vintages of Clos d’Ambonnay remain fairly rare events in one’s routine, it retains a freshness and magic sparkle that can be lost when such indulgence is just part of one’s daily life.

While the house of Krug is still very much a family affair, with sixth generation Olivier Krug the current Director of this great *maison*, Champagne Krug has been for several years now part of the luxury goods giant of Louis-Vuitton-Moët-Hennessy, or LVMH. Early on after LVMH acquired the house of Krug in 1999, fears were that this inimitable house style based on the great array of reserve wines that are routinely blended into the domaine’s flagship wine, Krug Grande Cuvée, might somehow be compromised by the corporate decision-making structure of LVMH. Happily, these fears have proven to be completely unfounded and Champagne Krug remains much as it has always been, with perhaps the commitment to excellence here having been deftly enhanced in several important facets by the LVMH takeover. For example, soon after taking over, LVMH provided the funding to double the stocks of reserve wines kept back in the cellars at Krug to ensure that potential vintage variations would never compromise the quality and consistent style of the house’s Grande Cuvée bottling. Most recently, the house has also

decided to allow its flagship wine to spend an additional two years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, so that Grande Cuvée now spends a minimum of seven years on its fine lees, rather than the five years that was customary a few years ago. The current head of Champagne Krug is President and CEO, Maggie Henriquez, who has presided over a golden age at this tiny gem of a Champagne house. Maggie works very closely with House Director Olivier Krug and the rest of the team at Champagne Krug to ensure that the great legacy passed down from father to sons since the days of its foundation by Joseph Krug is not tarnished, and the wines today at Krug are every bit as magical as they have been every step along the way since their journey began here all the way back in 1843.



The deep cellars at Champagne Krug, underneath the maison in Reims.

Joseph Krug, born in 1800, founded Champagne Krug in 1843 in the city of Reims, after having spent nine years working at Champagne Jacquesson. It is interesting to hear how Joseph Krug met Monsieur Memmie Jacquesson, the founder of this house, at an event in Paris and was impressed enough with the young Monsieur Krug to offer him a job on the spot with Jacquesson. At this time, Jacquesson was the largest Champagne house in the world, and Joseph was soon on the train from Paris to Reims to start his new career. While on the train, he met Monsieur Jacquesson's son, Adolphe Jacquesson, who was soon to take over the reins of the family business and become lifelong friends with Joseph Krug. In 1839, while still working at Jacquesson, Joseph Krug started to reflect upon the shrinking market share of the house in

European markets for Champagne and how the need to provide more consistent excellence from year to year was obligatory for a Champagne house that wished to not experience ebbs and flows in its business. To do this, Joseph envisioned a house that built up more significant stocks of reserve wines (particularly from top vintages) to be used in blending a more consistent, non-vintage cuvée. He began to moonlight with a small *négociant* in Reims in 1839, working to perfect his vision of blending of reserve wines into his non-vintage Champagne bottlings, searching for greater excellence irrespective of vintage characteristics. Four years, later, he was finally content that he had established a blending philosophy that would stand the test of time and he had his wife deliver his letter of resignation to Champagne Jacquesson while he was on the road for the house. Soon thereafter, the *négociant* he had been moonlighting for was elected the Second Mayor of Paris and offered to sell his firm to Joseph Krug. As the laws in Champagne at that time required that a house must have the name of the producer on its label, Champagne Krug was born in 1843. At the start of his own business, Joseph Krug was already forty-three years of age and embarking on an adventure that he must have realized he would not see any but the first formative steps of the journey, given the inexorable role that time must to play in the development of world class Champagne.

The Krug family, like many of the top families in Champagne, is of German background (as were the founders of Jacquesson) and Joseph migrated from the city of Mainz when he began his career in the Champagne trade. From the outset, Joseph Krug sought to produce a level of consistent quality in his own Champagne bottlings by the inclusion of a large number of reserve wines and a multitude of different *terroirs* from the region, and one of the hallmarks to this day at Champagne Krug is this passionate pursuit of great individuality in each and every base wine that eventually will find its way into the blends at the house. As Joseph's son, Paul, was still too young at this time to begin to work in the family business, in 1848, Joseph Krug began to keep a meticulous record of his philosophies and blending decisions in a leather-bound notebook that could be passed on to future generations in the hopes of maintaining the Krug house style far into the future. As he wrote at that time, "I sense that we will only succeed if we become outstanding through the remarkable quality of our wines." Amongst his most important precepts was that Krug must be produced from top *terroirs* in the region, as it was Joseph Krug's belief that while great wines might occasionally be produced in Champagne from some of the second tier vineyards, this was most certainly an exception, and consistent excellence for any Champagne house could only be maintained by working with parcels in the best *terroirs* of Champagne's *vignoble*. This leather notebook survives to this day and continues to be used as a keystone for the firm's approach to producing truly excellent wines year in and year out. Joseph Krug lived to be sixty-six years of age and died in 1866, witnessing the growth of Champagne Krug's reputation over its first twenty-odd harvests into a house of international fame for its uncompromising commitment to excellence.

It was during Joseph Krug's tenure as head of his Champagne house that the domaine's famous moniker of "Private Cuvée" first graced the labels of bottles of Champagne Krug. This did not happen immediately from the foundation of the house in 1843, as Joseph worked for several years on his blends until he found that he had hit upon the proper balance of various *terroirs* and reserve wines to truly define what was to become the historical Krug style of Champagne. It was not until the 1850s that the term "Private Cuvée" began to be used on the labels of the domaine's wines, with each bottling designated either as "Private Cuvée #1" or

“Private Cuvée #2”- with “Private Cuvée #1” being a non-vintage-dated Reserve Brut that today corresponds to the “Grande Cuvée” bottling and “Private Cuvée #2” being a vintage-dated Brut wine, with the vintage of the wine hand-written or stamped on each label. The estate would vary over the years how their wines were labeled, as each subsequent generation of the Krug family sought to further refine the business in some aspect, but one can say that the Maison Krug moniker of “Private Cuvée” dates back all the way to the 1850s and the second decade of the house’s long history and it continued to grace bottles of Champagne Krug all the way up to the late 1970s, when the name was officially changed to “Grande Cuvée” as the family estate was preparing to inaugurate their new and unique bottle shape, which has been in use since that time.

In 1866, upon his father’s passing, Paul Krug succeeded his father at the tender age of twenty-four as head of Champagne Krug. He continued his father’s pursuit of excellence at all costs and the *maison* continued to grow and prosper during his career. Paul Krug began his leadership of the family domaine just as the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 was looming on the horizon, but Maison Krug currently has little historical information of how the house weathered this war and the subsequent “cold peace” with its neighbor to the east. In his turn, after forty-four years at the helm of the *maison*, Paul was succeeded by his son, Joseph Krug II in 1910. Joseph Krug II could not escape the long shadow of soldiering that fell across the young men of his generation and he was wounded and taken prisoner at the battle of Ardennes in August of 1914, at the very outset of World War I. Prior to his departure for the front in the summer of 1914, Joseph Krug II left a long list of hand-written instructions for his wife, Madame Jeanne Krug, who intended to remain in Reims during the war and keep the house going on as best she could under the circumstances. World War I was particularly hard on the city of Reims and the region of Champagne, as the city was bombed almost at the outset of the war and the beautiful gothic cathedral caught fire and was devastated in the September attacks of 1914. Eventually the city would be completely evacuated of civilians. Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, the train station in the city was reserved solely for military shipping, so no Champagne could be sent by rail and the roads in the region were pockmarked by bomb craters and were virtually impassable for moving grapes or personnel around between the vineyards of the Côte des Blancs to the south and the city of Reims. In fact, the 1915 Krug was in reality probably the very first Blanc de Noirs produced by the house, as Jeanne Krug found that she could not get grapes from their usual growers in the Côte des Blancs to the cellars in Reims and had to content herself with fashioning a wine almost exclusively made from pinot noir in this year. The 1915 Krug is the only vintage here that was ever made exclusively by women, as all the men from the estate were away at war by the time of the 1915 harvest.

Joseph Krug II did not return to Reims until the end of the war, and his health was deemed potentially fragile enough that his nephew, Jean Seydoux, joined him in running Champagne Krug in 1924. Happily, it turned out that Joseph Krug II’s health remained vibrant enough for him to live to the ripe, old age of ninety-seven, with he and his nephew forming a formidable team at the head of the family estate for decades. Joseph Krug II retired from active direction of the company in 1958. Given his deprivations during the first world war, one speculates that a bit of Krug every day was a very important balm for keeping Joseph Krug II going on until nearly one hundred years of age! During his tenure, Jean Seydoux was joined at the head of the house in 1935 by Joseph II’s son, Paul Krug II. In 1941 Paul became the Managing Director of the domaine and was instrumental in building Champagne Krug into the

polished gem in Reims that we know today. In 1962, Paul Krug II was succeeded at the head of the family winery by his oldest son Henri Krug, who worked very closely with his younger brother Rémi Krug during the course of his tenure. During the two brothers' era, Henri, as President, was in charge of the production side of the business, including making the wines, liaison with the growers Krug worked with on a long-term basis and chairing the very important "tasting committee" responsible for each year's blend of Grande Cuvée. Rémi, as Managing Director, focused on the marketing side of the business, while of course also participating in the tasting committee. I can still remember my very first Krug vertical tasting, hosted by Rémi Krug in Boston back in the mid-1980s, in which ten mature vintages of Krug were served. It was a seminal moment in the training of my palate and I have been firmly ensconced in the Krug camp ever since that superb tasting. While Henri Krug remained primarily in Reims during the course of his career overseeing the yearly flow of grapes from vineyard to cellar, making the wines and directing the annual blending, Rémi Krug was a tireless ambassador for the house, trotting across the globe for many months of each year with plenty of Krug in tow.



Olivier Krug, with a portrait of Joseph to his side, welcoming guests to the maison's blending seminar.

In 1977, the Cognac house of Rémy-Martin combined with Champagne Krug, and this would eventually lead to Krug Champagne becoming a part of the Rémy-Cointreau portfolio, when Rémy-Martin merged with Cointreau in 1989. Rémy-Cointreau, despite its merger in 1989, had witnessed a long simmering feud amongst various members of the two families that ran its constituent companies since the early 1970s, as Rémy-Martin's previous owner, André Renaud, had bequeathed his company to his two daughters upon his passing in 1965- one of whom

married into the Cointreau family and brought along her forty-nine percent stake in Rémy-Martin. Even after the merger of the two family businesses in December of 1989, Rémy-Cointreau's stormy in-house politics eventually could not help be spill over into the affairs at Maison Krug, and this helped lead to the firm's decision to sell off Champagne Krug to Louis Vuitton-Moët-Hennessy (or LVMH) in January of 1999. The years since the purchase of Champagne Krug by LVMH from Rémy-Cointreau in 1999 have been a true renaissance for the champagne house, as LVMH has given Krug the autonomy it requires to continue its uncompromising pursuit of quality, as well as providing additional funding for important projects such as the doubling of the house's library of reserve wines and increasing the amount of time the wines age on their fine lees in the cellars. It is hard to imagine that such projects would have been undertaken under the auspices of the stormy Rémy-Cointreau umbrella.

Today, the sixth generation of the Krug family maintains the family connection with this superb estate, as Olivier Krug joined the family house officially in 1989, though he likes to comment that "I was born a few meters from Rue Coquebert (where Maison Krug has been based for most of its history) in September of 1966, a few days before a very good harvest, and I had Krug on my lips the day I was born." It is probably not coincidental that Olivier also joined the family house in another fine vintage in 1989! His first task was to develop the Japanese market for Krug, and Olivier lived in Japan for the first two years of his association with the domaine. Olivier is the son of Henri Krug, and he reflects that "I joined the house as part of my father's vision to start building the team that would take over 15 years later when he retired- take the quality decisions and continue to pursue the vision of Joseph Krug." With the same intention in mind, Henri Krug hired Eric Lebel as Krug's first *Chef de Cave* in 1998, so that the chief winemaking responsibilities that Henri Krug had shouldered during his career at the *maison* would be continued on in a formal position within the organization at Krug. As Olivier Krug likes to say, "my father wanted to have a strong *Chef de Cave* and someone who shared the same obsession for detail" that had defined Champagne Krug since Joseph Krug's days, and that is certainly true of Eric. Eric Lebel worked side by side with Henri Krug from 1998 until Monsieur Krug's ostensible retirement in 2002, thus cementing the continuity of style and vision that has defined the wines since the winemaking torch was officially passed. When Eric Lebel was hired at Krug, Henri and Rémi's father, Paul Krug had just passed away the year before. Paul Krug, after handing over the reins of the company to his two sons in 1962, still continued to play a key role at the *maison* and was a consistent participant in the tasting committee up until his passing away. As Olivier Krug likes to recall of his early days at the domaine, "My grandfather was still coming to the office every day to join the tastings" and I have "great personal memories of tasting and learning with the two previous generations side by side" at the start of my career here.

It was during the early years of the Henri Krug-led era at the head of family firm that the domaine first began to purchase vineyard land of their own, rather than relying exclusively on contracts with growers in the region. In the early 1970s, Champagne Krug purchased a significant amount of their current twenty hectares of vineyard land, with these earliest purchases including nine hectares of pinot noir vineyards in the village of Aÿ and six hectares of vineyards in the village of Mesnil-sur-Oger, which are of course committed to chardonnay. The purchase of the six hectares of vineyards in Mesnil-sur-Oger, taken at the instigation of a single phone call in 1971 and purchased unseen by anyone at Krug, included the 1.84 hectare vineyard of Clos du

Mesnil, which had been originally created by Benedictine monks in the center of the village in 1698. The Clos du Mesnil would eventually distinguish itself sufficiently in the minds of the Krug team to merit a single vineyard bottling, which was first launched with the 1979 vintage. Further vineyards were purchased in the village of Trépail (which lies equidistant between Verzenay and Bouzy on the southeastern flank of the Montagne de Reims) to bring the vineyard patrimony of the house up close to its current twenty hectares. As Champagne Krug remains very much an artisanal Grande Marque, these twenty hectares of vineyard land are sufficient to meet about thirty-five percent of the annual production needs of this small house. The remainder of the fruit necessary for the annual production of roughly half a million bottles that Krug produces each year hails from a number of long-term contracts with some of the very top growers across the Champagne region. In much the same way that Champagne Krug has maintained continuity through a succession of Krug family members running the firm, many of their growers are third or fourth generation farmers whose families have worked with Krug back into the very early years of the house's history. To give some idea of the continuity that exists from each generation of growers working with Krug, the oldest continuous running contract with a family of grape growers and the house dates back to 1878!

In terms of vineyard sources beyond the parcels owned outright by the house, the Krug team has long held that grand crus are not mandatory to be considered for purchase by the domaine, but rather that whichever vineyards that grapes hail from that are destined for inclusion in one of the various cuvées of Krug should show a very distinctive personality that will add to the potential mosaic of quality for the wine into which it is to be blended. Thus, the estate will purchase grapes as far afield as pinot noir from the village of Riceys in the Aube region and pinot meunier from the village of Ste. Gemme in the western end of the Marne Valley. As pinot meunier is often one of the key signature elements in Krug bottlings, in particular in the Grande Cuvée, the Krug team is ever open to discover new outstanding sources for this variety. What is necessary for grapes intended for inclusion in one of the Krug cuvées is a great and singular expression of *terroir*, a dedicated *vigneron* who is attune with the goals of the house of Krug, and often vines of a certain age to best convey a sense of character into the blend. But the winemaking team at Krug remains ever vigilant in the cellar, and it is not uncommon for juice to not make the grade once it has been vinified, as it may not possess the cut, backbone or precision necessary to add distinctively to any of the various Krug cuvées. This is true both of the vineyards owned by the domaine and the grapes from long-term contracts with growers which are necessary for sixty-five percent of the annual production of the house- once the grapes have been vinified into the *vins clairs* and settled in- this is when final decisions as to potential consideration for blending into one of the Krug Champagne bottlings are taken.

The art of blending at Krug is taken very, very seriously, as this has been the hallmark of their excellence since the very earliest days in the mid-nineteenth century. A cornerstone of this commitment to blending is the house's insistence on vinifying each parcel of grapes on its own to allow for the myriad of variations of *terroir* to play out in the still wines that are to be considered for inclusion in each year's cuvées. For several decades now, Champagne Krug has had a "Tasting Committee" which has overseen the art of blending and producing a single bottling of Krug Grande Cuvée each year from the array of still wines that the house vinifies each year for the production of their Champagnes. The Blending Committee is chaired today by the *Chef de Cave*, Eric Lebel, and also includes Krug's other two winemakers, Julie Cavil and

Raphaële Leon-Grillon, as well as Olivier Krug. The blending team is rounded out by guest members Maggie Henriquez, and until his passing in the spring of 2013, Henri Krug, who did not sit in on every session, but also provide valuable input into final blending considerations for all of the Krug bottlings. Henri Krug was responsible for anticipating the needs of a Tasting Committee to oversee the blending, as he was the first head of the estate to create this entity in a formal manner, anticipating his eventual retirement. Olivier Krug joined this blending team in the 1980s. The Tasting Committee is really the unseen backbone of Krug Champagne today, providing the “tasting memory” necessary to maintain the Krug house style and commitment to excellence that has been pervasive in the cellars here since 1843.

Today Champagne Krug produces five distinct cuvées of Champagne: the flagship of the house- Krug Grande Cuvée, as well as Krug Vintage, Krug Brut Rosé and two single vineyard wines, the Blanc de Blancs, “Clos du Mesnil” and the Blanc de Noirs, “Clos d’Ambonnay”. All of these wines are meticulously crafted with great attention to detail to ensure that each and every wine that departs the Krug cellars in Reims is indelibly stamped with the Krug passion for excellence, which includes the promise of a very long and fitful life in bottle. For Krug, since its very earliest days has been famous for the long lives of the Champagnes that they produce, and as good as each and every cuvée is when it is released, there is little doubt that this is just the start of the journey for each wine and it will be many years after its initial release before any bottle of Krug reaches its apogee of peak drinkability. The company ages all of its wines for a long time in the cellars prior to release, with the Grande Cuvée now spending a minimum of seven years aging before release, any example of Krug Vintage spending at least a decade in the cellar. The single vineyard bottlings of Clos du Mesnil and Clos d’Ambonnay also witness a full ten years of aging *sur latte* prior to release and the Krug Brut Rosé held for between four and five years in the cellars before its own release onto the market. In addition, the firm also holds back a small quantity of Krug Vintage Brut each year for further cellaring in the perfect conditions of their cellars in Reims, which will be released when the team deems the wine is at its peak and which is always at least another decade after the first release of any given vintage. These later-released bottles of vintage Krug are known as “Krug Collection”. The house of Krug has also just begun a program of aging bottlings of Grande Cuvée in the cellars, to replicate the experience that its clients have enjoyed with the Krug Collection bottlings of vintage-dated wines, and in the future we may see the establishment of a range of Grande Cuvée “Collection” bottlings that have been held back in the cellars in Reims to allow them to fully blossom in perfect condition. For like all Krug bottlings, Grande Cuvée is a wine that ages magnificently well and is clearly a more complex and complete wine ten or fifteen years out from its release than it is when it first hits the market.

One of the aspects that sets Krug apart from so many of its neighbors is in its very traditional approach to winemaking and blending. This philosophy originated with Joseph Krug back in the nineteenth century and which has been passed down from generation to generation and continues to define the unique house style here down to this day. First and foremost, the traditional winemaking style of Krug requires that all wines be barrel-fermented, in small, old oak casks. This does not mean that the wines are aged over an extended period in oak, but rather that they start out their lives in these small, old barrels, which tend to average twenty years of age, so as to allow a bit more oxygen to be involved in the initial, alcoholic fermentation. The Krug philosophy holds that wines which are barrel fermented increase the potential for longevity

and optimizes their freshness. All the oak for these 205 liter barrels (a tad smaller than the standard Burgundian *barrique*) hails from the forest of Hautes Futaies in central France, with the coopers employed by the firm to craft the barrels being Seguin Moreau and Taransaud. Once the barrels are made, they are seasoned for three years or more with wines that are not destined for any of the Krug blends, to leach out tannins, new oaky aromas of vanilla or toast and other elements that might mark the wine with flavors or aromatics from the wood. Of course, even three year-old barrels on occasion might impart just a faint whiff of vanilla to a wine, but given the multiplicity of different wines that are blended into a single rendition of Grande Cuvée, it is extremely rare that any Krug wine will show even a delicate touch of wood. The house also maintains a contract with a cooper in Reims to repair and oversee the care of their older barrels, as it is important to retain used barrels which have been properly seasoned and which no longer impart any wood character to the wines.



A tent set up on the edge of the Clos d'Ambonnay for a dinner to launch the release of the 2000 vintage.

The meticulous nature of the winemaking team at Krug begins right at harvest, as the team opts for pressing the grapes as close as possible to the vineyards where they are grown. Consequently, grapes hailing from the domaine's own vineyards in Mesnil-sur-Oger or grapes purchased from growers in the Côte des Blancs will most often be pressed and vinified at the *cuvierie* on the premises of the Clos du Mesnil, rather than transported back to the main cellars in Reims. Similarly, the house also retains cellars and a *cuvierie* in Ambonnay for grapes from the immediate vicinity of that village. Sometimes the Krug local *cuvieries* at Clos du Mesnil or in the

village of Ambonnay will be full with new grapes and fermenting barrels, in which case the domaine will send production back to the main cellars in Reims, rather than have them wait for space in the fermenters in the locations closest to their vineyards of origin. As Olivier Krug notes, “the rule is that we vinify all our Mesnil fruit in Le Mesnil's cellar- however, if for example, we are overloaded in Le Mesnil, it is not impossible that we will bring the juice to Ambonnay or Reims where they can be put into casks and start their first fermentation faster and therefore safer.” Not all of the wines that will go into the various Krug bottlings are vinified by Eric Lebel and his winemaking team, as Krug is also content to purchase still wine from some of their long-standing contracts with top growers in the region, as these *vignerons* have a fine track record of handling the fermentation of their wines with skill and style.

In each and every harvest, Champagne Krug will have approximately two hundred separate wines to vinify and track, as the house holds that it would be a complete travesty to blend different parcels (with their differing personalities) together into a smaller number of cuvées, as this would risk wasting individual qualities that might further enhance the complexity and quality of the Krug Champagnes that will be crafted from these different wines solely for the sake of cellar expediency. The variables here are not exclusively from a single village, vineyard or grower, as the Krug team will often make two or three different wines from a single parcel from a single grower, if exposition, vine age or other characteristics are sufficiently unique to warrant vinifying and tracking the wine on its own. This meticulous approach to the initial vinification process gives the Krug team an extraordinarily wide palette of options when it comes time to determine the various blends that will eventually become Krug Champagnes. With all of these two hundred wines being vinified and tracked separately in small oak casks, it is of course necessary for the domaine to maintain a large number of small stainless steel tanks for holding the wines once the initial alcoholic fermentation is complete, as the cellar team racks the wines out of the old oak casks when the first fermentation is finished, taking advantage of the drop in temperature of the cellars as winter comes on in Reims to clarify the wines prior to their racking into stainless steel tanks.

The use of small stainless steel tanks to hold and track the *vins clairs* after the initial fermentation has taken place is a relatively new phenomenon at Krug, having only been initiated by Paul Krug II in the decade of the 1960s. Before this, the wines would remain in their old oak barrels prior to the selection process involved in the blending. The use of small stainless steel tanks allows the wines to evolve much more slowly today after the initial fermentation than was the case prior to the 1960s, and no doubt this has positively affected the ability of the various cuvées of Krug to age longer in the cellars than was the case in the past. It has most likely also contributed to a tighter, racier style to the wines upon release since that time, as one would assume that the wines previously would have had slightly more evolved aromatics and flavors from having been stored in wood a bit longer than is the case today. There have also been meaningful differences both in the vineyard sources that are utilized today at Krug in comparison to the first half of the twentieth century (as the domaine only purchased their own vineyards beginning in the early 1970s and prior to that time relied entirely on contracted grapes and juice), and in the *cépages* of the wines as the house style here has evolved and refined with the passing of time, but, one must assume that the adoption of the use of small stainless steel tanks for the storage of still wines is one of the most important historical decisions taken by the Krug team in the recent past to ensure the continued uncompromising level of quality of the wines. As

important as this change was for the wines that are selected each year for inclusion in the new blends, it has to be even more important for the reserve wines, as they evolve much more slowly in stainless than they would have in old oak casks, and hence can be kept longer in the Krug cellar to help add to the complexity of the blends.

When it comes to malolactic fermentation, the Krug cellar team, led by Cellar Master Eric Lebel, is quite agnostic, as they will allow individual wines to go through malolactic fermentation if they are so inclined, but the ML is never induced in any of the wines. In general, one would say that most of the base wines, or *vins clairs* in the Krug cellars do not go through malolactic fermentation, but there are always a few in each year that do go through their secondary fermentation. It is also not an infrequent occurrence for one of the reserve wines to go through malolactic while being held in its stainless steel tank. The individual wines are also defined by which pressing they come from, as wines from the first pressing of a specific lot of grapes become one cuvée, and wines from the second pressing becoming another individual lot of wine to be followed separately. Each pressing contains enough grapes to produce twelve casks of wine, which then become one of the cuvées that will be followed down through the coming years for blending purposes. However, not all twelve casks of each pressing will survive to be racked off into stainless steel in the winter, as evaporation in these old barrels will devour two of every twelve casks for topping up of the remaining ten during the three months that the wines spend in barrel during their initial fermentation and settling process. To give some idea of how precise the selection process is at Krug for creating different wines, of the six hectares of vines that the domaine owns in the village of Mesnil-sur-Oger, they will typically craft twenty different wines each year to follow in the cellars and consider for blending. Even the small monopole Clos du Mesnil, with its almost homogeneous exposition, has several different *vins clairs* produced from it, with wines selected by relative vine age of each parcel. For all of the different cuvées produced, the dozen barrels that will house each individual lot are picked at random from the array of different aged barrels in the cellars (ranging from three years of age up to a maximum of forty years of age), rather than for instance, using only barrels from five to ten years old for wines hailing from Ambonnay. Each year, each cuvée will be aged in its twelve barrels of varying age with no design made to ensure that the same aged barrels are used each year for the same parcels.

One of the most important elements in the crafting of Krug Champagne begins soon after the new harvest is safely fermenting away in barrel- this is the consideration of how the blend will be shaped each year to maintain a consistent style for Krug's flagship bottling of Grande Cuvée. This is not a simple equation by any means, for in addition to the roughly two hundred wines that each vintage will create each year, there is also the question of which reserve wines will be included in the blends each bottling as well. Since it first opened its doors in the middle of the nineteenth century, Champagne Krug has been renowned for the large percentage of reserve wines which are held back for blending of their workhorse cuvée. Not only are there two hundred new wines, but today, there are typically another one hundred and fifty reserve wines to consider for the final blend as well, with the reserve wines currently dating back all the way to the 1995 vintage. Eric Lebel, Olivier Krug and other members of the "Tasting Committee" begin tasting and taking meticulous notes early on in the new vintage's wines' evolutions and will probably taste each and every new wine of the two hundred the vintage has produced on at least three separate occasions prior to taking the final decisions that will eventually lead to the new

year's version of Grande Cuvée. In addition, the one hundred and fifty reserve wines, held in small stainless steel tanks in the cellars, also must be tasted in preparation for the blending process, as all of these wines are evolving slowly in the cellars as well. Having visited the Krug cellars a couple of times now with other journalists to participate in blending seminars, I can only say that I have a much keener understanding now of just how complex the blending process is in the creation of Grande Cuvée each year. Our "blending team" of four journalists was given about thirty samples of *vins clairs* to work with, ranging back to the 1995 vintage, to try and create a hypothetical blend of the next version of Grande Cuvée. We ended up using eleven different wines in producing our version. In contrast, the true blend for that year's version of Grande Cuvée, which would then be aged for seven years *sur latte* in the cellars prior to disgorgement and preparation for release, was comprised of one hundred and forty different wines!

Amongst of the most admirable aspects of the purchase of Krug by LVMH was the parent company's decision to double the stocks of reserve wines that the house would maintain for blending of the Grande Cuvée soon after taking over the domaine. This great base of reserve wines is critical in allowing the quality and stylistic consistency of Grande Cuvée to be maintained through the often dramatic stylistic differences of various vintages. For instance, in the torrid summer of 2003, Champagne Krug was probably one of the only Champagne houses that did not feel a lot of pressure from the rather atypical nature of the '03 vintage, as their deep stocks of reserve wines were sufficient to keep the style and structural integrity of Grande Cuvée consistent in such a ripe year. The deep reserve wine program also assures that there are no attendant pressures to use all of the production from vineyards such as Clos du Mesnil in any given year, as any *vins clairs* that do not dovetail nicely with the final release of a vintage of the single vineyard bottling can beautifully augment the reserve wine program. This is of course also true for the bottlings of Krug Vintage, as there is always a very good home awaiting high quality lots that might not fit seamlessly into the style of a specific vintage's bottling.

One of the great hallmarks of virtually every cuvée produced at Krug is the impressive aging potential that the wine will possess when it departs from the firm's cellars in Reims. While this would seem self-evident with the Krug Vintage Brut bottling, which has always been renowned for its superb and graceful arc of ageability, it is also emphatically true of their flagship non-vintage bottling of Grande Cuvée. I have always been a huge fan of the Grande Cuvée's ability to age long and superbly in the cellar and much prefer my bottles of Grande Cuvée to spend at least a decade after their release acquiring further bottle age prior to drinking. Apparently I am not alone in this preference, as the Krug team is set to start introducing a series of Grande Cuvée bottlings along the lines of their Krug Collection series (older bottlings of Krug Vintage that have been held back in the firm's cellars to be released ten or twenty years down the road when the wines have reached their apogee of peak drinkability). This is now to be echoed by a new project for the Grande Cuvée, with various releases held back in the cellars for additional years of bottle age to allow those without the possibility of cellaring to enjoy bottles of Grande Cuvée at various stages of evolutionary development. I have tasted several different ages of Grande Cuvée in the last couple of years as the house has begun this program and can only remark what a great idea it is for the estate to start to hold back part of their production of this bottling for further aging in the cellars in Reims. As one would expect, these wines show beautiful development and much greater complexity on both the nose and palate as a result of the

further aging in the cellar. This new project is bound to really introduce Krug lovers who are not familiar with the beauties of aged Grande Cuvée to a whole new level of appreciation for this great Champagne.

One of the great new innovations at Champagne Krug has been the establishment in recent years of the “Krug ID” number found on the back label of every bottle now released from the firm’s cellars in Reims. This six digit code allows those interested in the history and *cépages* of their particular bottle of Krug to log onto the *maison*’s website and bring up a very detailed background on the particular bottle in question. Information such as the date of disgorgement, base year of the wine in the case of the non-vintage blends of Grande Cuvée and Krug Rosé, as well as the climactic conditions of the growing season in question are all readily available for those with an interest. In the past, it was possible to unearth this information by providing the *maison* with the serial number etched on the bottle or printed on the back label, but it was a time-consuming process and it was not always easy to read the number correctly in the more elegant lighting of many of the venues where I have consumed my bottles of Krug over the years. The Krug ID allows people such as myself who really want to know as much as possible about a given bottle of Krug Champagne to discover its technical details, while not burdening those who simply want to drink a great bottle of bubbly with minutiae that would only detract from their enjoyment of the wine in their glass.

Though my recent tasting notes below on Krug bottlings are never as deep as I would like (I could happily drink a bottle of Krug every day!) and do not adequately begin to convey the great longevity of Krug wines, I have had the pleasure in the past to drink many examples of significantly older vintages of Krug than are included in the notes that follow. I have had no difficulties in believing that most bottles of vintage Krug do not reach their true apogees until fully forty years out from the harvest, and I suspect that if my experience was deeper, I would be able to confirm that forty years of age is hardly the end of the line for well-stored, top vintages of Krug. Though I do not have any notes from the last few years, my most memorable bottles of Krug Vintage in the last decade have been primarily from the decade of the 1960s, which are currently in a glorious place in their evolutions. This hallmark for great longevity has been part of the Krug mantra since its very earliest days, and the team at Krug will tell you that part of the secret to the long lives of all their wines lies in the barrel fermentation of their still wines that are used as the building blocks for Krug Champagne, as the gentle micro-oxygenation that the wines experience during their initial period of fermentation tends to produce wines that are decidedly longer-lived and much more resistant to oxidation later on during their long and graceful evolutions in bottle. The only Krug bottling where I have no experience with the wines aging long and gracefully is with their Brut Rosé, but this may well be a function of no one I know (including myself) having the requisite will power to resist drinking this graceful wine fairly soon after its release. But given the outstanding structure of this bottling, I suspect it would age long and beautifully as well. As I have noted before, certainly the great sleeper in the Krug lineup for long-term aging is the Grande Cuvée, which I have had as old as twenty years after release and which has been simply stunning with so much bottle age. Obviously, the new single vineyard bottling, the Blanc de Noirs “Clos d’Ambonnay”, which was only released for the first time in the 1995 vintage, does not yet have the adequate track record to confirm is long life in bottle as well, but at least based on my tasting of these wines, it is hard to believe that this

beautiful wine will not prove to be every bit as ageworthy as all of its stable mates in the Krug lineup. It is after all, first and foremost, a Krug Champagne.

Krug Grande Cuvée

Krug Grande Cuvée was first introduced to the world in 1978, replacing Krug's Private Cuvée. It is Krug's cornerstone bottling and typically accounts for nearly eighty percent of the domaine's production each year. As discussed a bit above, Grande Cuvée is very slightly different stylistically than its predecessor- as the house now owns twenty hectares of its own vineyards and no longer has to rely exclusively on contracted fruit- and it typically includes a bit more chardonnay in the blend than was the case with the Private Cuvée and is generally acknowledged to offer up just a bit more accessibility out of the blocks than the formerly very sturdy Private Cuvée. In many ways, Grande Cuvée is the logical refinement on the older Private Cuvée, as it possesses the former bottling's great potential for long-term cellaring, but also offers up more immediate appeal upon release for those disinclined to tuck the wine away in the cellar for a decade or more before opening a bottle. It is hard to imagine in today's world of luxury goods that the vast majority of Krug's clientele would be inclined to cellar a new release of Grande Cuvée for eight to ten years prior to serving the wine, so the reputedly more accessible style of Grande Cuvée is most welcome- particularly since it has in no way, shape or form, impacted adversely on the ability of the Krug flagship bottling to age for decades and decades. I should note that I have only drunk the old Private Cuvée bottling on one occasion, and as that bottle was already several decades old, I am really not in a position to comment about how the old Private Cuvées behaved upon release and am relying on testimony from other seasoned tasters, who are a bit older than I am and knew this bottling in its youth. No doubt the contribution of more juice from the village of Ay, where the house now owns nine hectares of vineyards, has done much to increase the early charm of Grande Cuvée without compromising this bottling's ability to age long and gracefully in the cellar. Grande Cuvée is also remarkable for the fairly large percentage of pinot meunier that is included routinely in the blend each year, as typically ten to twenty percent of the final blend will come from this underrated grape in each rendition.

Krug "Grande Cuvée" Brut NV (Reims)

ID #213035

Base Year 2006

This was the current release of Grande Cuvée when I visited Champagne Krug back in mid-April of 2015 and it is a beautiful wine. The reserve wines here go back to 1990 and the wine was disgorged in the summer of 2013. The *cépages* on this release is forty-four percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty-one percent pinot meunier. The bouquet is young and beautifully refined, offering up scents of apple, pear, complex minerality, a touch of orange zest, gentle smokiness and a topnote of cardamom. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely girdle of acidity, superb focus and grip, a deep core, very refined *mousse* and excellent length on the complex finish. This is certainly a fine glass of Champagne today, but its real apogee is probably still a decade down the road. 2015-2045+. **94+.**

Krug "Grande Cuvée" Brut NV (Reims)

ID #312036

Base Year 2005

This particular release of Grande Cuvée is comprised of a blend of forty-four percent pinot noir, thirty-seven percent chardonnay and nineteen percent pinot meunier. It is from the base year of 2005 and the oldest reserve wine used here is also from the 1990 vintage. The wine was disgorged in the summer of 2012. This bottling is already beginning to show just a touch of the signature nuttiness of mature Grande Cuvée on its fine nose of apple, caraway seed, fresh-

baked bread, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, plenty of smokiness and those incipient notes of walnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more adolescent in the mouth than the nose suggests, with a rock solid core, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and complex finish. Structurally, this could still use a few years in the cellar to really blossom and I would be inclined to tuck this iteration of Grande Cuvée in the cellar for a few more years and allow the evolution of the palate to catch up with the superb bouquet. This could prove to be a very long-lived release of Grande Cuvée. 2018-2040+. **93+**.

Krug “Grande Cuvée” Brut NV (Reims)

ID #212018

Base Year 2004

This release of Grande Cuvée was disgorged in the spring of 2012 and is comprised of a *cépages* of forty-four percent pinot noir, thirty-three percent chardonnay and fully twenty-three percent pinot meunier, making this blend one of the highest in pinot meunier in the last decade of Grande Cuvées. As is the case with the blends from the base years of 2006 and 2005, the oldest reserve wine used here was from the 1990 vintage (though of course, this does not mean that each of these blends included the same reserve wine from 1990!) and the wine shows the racy precision of the best wines from this excellent Champagne vintage of 2004. The bouquet is flat out gorgeous and really at a fine moment in its evolution, as it soars from the glass in a constellation of tangerine, white peach, hints of lavender, stunning spice tones, brioche, a complex signature of soil, gentle smokiness and a topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly refined, with a rock solid core, seamless structure, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the complex, vibrant finish. One of the finest recent releases of Grande Cuvée. 2015-2040. **95**.

Krug “Grande Cuvée” Brut NV (Reims)

ID #313052

Base Year 2003

This particular release of the Base Year 2003 Grande Cuvée was disgorged a bit later than the above wines, having come off its fine lees in the summer of 2013. The oldest reserve wines used here date back to 1988 and the wine is made up of a blend that features more pinot noir than customary, with the percentage breakdown being fifty-one percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and nineteen percent pinot meunier. The wine remains impressively youthful on both the nose and palate, which intuitively, I did not expect, given that 2003 was such a torrid summer in France, but this is the art of blending at Krug! The bouquet is a fine blend of apple, peach, warm bread, stony minerality, nutskin, a touch of caraway seed and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and shows off impressive backend mineral drive, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a very long, crisp and complex finish. The wine shows a slightly broader attack than many releases of Grande Cuvée, which is the only hint that it is based on the 2003 growing season, but the backend cut and minerality is exemplary. I would still expect it to be a bit shorter-lived than bottlings based on more classically styled years, but I would be wrong on that count. 2015-2030+. **93**.

Krug “Grande Cuvée” 158th Edition Brut NV

Disg: Spring 2008

Base Year 2002

One of the members of the team at Krug discovered that an importer of their wines in a country outside of France still had stocks of the base year 2002 Grande Cuvée, which happened to be the last release of this bottling shipped without any Krug ID number, and asked if he would like to have the bottles swapped out for the newest release. Upon receiving an affirmative response, these cases of the base year 2002 returned to Reims and were on hand to play a supporting role in the introduction of the new 2002 Krug Vintage. The team at Krug has named this the “158th Edition” to differentiate it from the current release of Grande Cuvée in the market and it will be the first to sport the new label for this bottling. A small amount will be released

alongside of the 2002 Vintage Brut. Back in the era when the 2002 base year version was released, Grande Cuvée spent five years aging *sur latte*, rather than the seven years it does today. The wine is starting to really drink beautifully, as it shows off some lovely secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate today, with notes of apple, peach, almonds, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, dried flowers and a smoky topnote wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with great focus and balance, a lovely core, refined bubbles and superb length and grip on the poised and wide open finish. A superb release of Grande Cuvée. 2016-2035. **94+**.

Krug “Grande Cuvée” Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged 2006 Base Year 2000

This beautiful bottle of Grande Cuvée was bought at auction over this past year in New York from the Roy Welland collection, and I originally reported back in Issue 60 that it had been disgorged in 2007 and was from the base year of 2002. The team at Krug kindly researched the bottle from the serial number (as this was before the superb innovation of Krug ID) and it turns out that it was disgorged one year earlier, in 2006, and was base year 2000. The wine is made up of a *cépages* of forty-six percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and nineteen percent pinot meunier. Interestingly, I drank a bottle of this same iteration of the Base Year 2000 at the *maison* in the spring of last year, but which was disgorged fully a year earlier. Not surprisingly, the wines were absolutely comparable in quality. As I noted in Issue 60, the wine is absolutely superb, wafting from the glass in a maturing blend of walnut, apple, a touch of tangerine, *patissière*, stunningly complex minerality, a touch of orange zest, whisper of the honeycomb to come at full maturity and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still very racy in personality, with a great core, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the complex, poised and seamless finish. A beautiful wine that is now wide open and drinking with great style and grace. 2015-2040+. **95**.

Krug “Grande Cuvée” Brut NV (Reims) Jeroboam Disgorged 2003 Base Year 1997

This beautiful release of Grande Cuvée is still marvelously fresh and youthful out of jeroboam. The 1997 Base Year featured thirty percent reserve wines and is comprised of a blend of forty-eight percent pinot noir, thirty-one percent chardonnay and twenty-one percent pinot meunier. As was the case up until 2012, this version of Grande Cuvée spent five years and change on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, rather than the minimum of seven years that is now customary at the estate today. The wine is drinking with great complexity and class out of jeroboam today, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of apple, tangerine, a hint of blood orange, brioche, lovely minerality, plenty of smokiness and citrus zest and a gentle topnote of hazelnut that would tickle the fancy of any lover of Meursault. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a fine core and superb backend mineral drive. The finish is very long, with crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and lovely complexity on the *à point* and still vibrant backend. A beautiful wine. 2015-2040. **94**.

Krug Brut Rosé

Krug’s Brut Rosé is another fairly recent phenomenon for the house, as it was not released into the market until 1985. The earlier generations of the Krug family had held no interest in producing a Brut Rosé, but in the 1976 vintage, Henri and Rémi Krug had undertaken an experiment of creating a small, experimental lot of Krug Brut Rosé and buried it quietly in the cellars, unbeknownst to their father, Paul Krug II. As the wine evolved positively in the cellars, the two brothers finally decided in 1983 to take the plunge and serve the wine at a blind tasting at the domaine to their father, who was convinced that someone was trying to imitate the Krug

house style, as this unknown Brut Rosé in their tasting lineup seemed an awful lot like a Krug in style. When Henri Krug informed him of the experiment that they had undertaken eight years previously, Monsieur Paul Krug dropped any resistance right on the spot to the concept of a Krug Brut Rosé and the wine was soon added to the Krug lineup in very limited quantities. Like most Krug bottlings, the Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of pinot noir, pinot meunier and chardonnay. A typical cépage for this wine is 50 to 55 percent pinot noir, 20 to 25 percent pinot meunier and 20 to 25 percent chardonnay- depending of course on the general style of the vintage. Like all Krug wines, it is given its fair share of reserve wines to maintain its Krug character! It is a very unique style of Rosé Champagne, as it is always a very, very pale salmon color and is very delicately styled so as to be light on its feet and offer up stunning complexity and intensity of flavor without any perception of heaviness on the palate. The wine attains its very, very delicate salmon color from some of the pinot noir in the blend being fermented on the skins for a short period of time. Krug Rosé is a wine of great subtlety that requires both concentration and patience, as in my experience, it is always a wine that is slow to unfold in the glass once it is opened and really shows at its best if given a bit of air and allowed to come up in temperature a few degrees after serving. It travels a bit below the radar (if this can be said of any of the Krug bottlings!) in the minds of many Krug lovers worldwide, but it is a magically complex and utterly unique expression of Brut Rosé Champagne and every bit the equal of any of the other bottlings crafted in the Krug cellars in Reims.

Krug Brut Rosé NV (Reims) ID #213027 Base Year 2006

The current release of Krug Rosé is a beautiful wine, which is comprised of a blend of fifty-nine percent pinot noir, thirty-three percent chardonnay and eight percent pinot meunier. It was disgorged in the spring of 2013 and includes reserve wines in the blend back to the 2000 vintage. The wine is beautiful and still very youthful and discreet on both the nose and palate, wafting from the glass in a lovely and blossoming blend of white cherries, tangerine, wheat toast, stunningly complex minerality, delicate spice tones and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and seamlessly balanced, with a lovely core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and exceptional focus and grip on the pure and still quite primary finish. This is very easy to drink today, but it deserves some cellaring time to really blossom. 2015-2035+. **95.**

Krug Brut Millésime and Krug Collection

Vintage-dated bottlings of Krug date back to the very earliest releases from the house, as the Private Cuvée #2 was always a vintage-dated wine. From these very earliest days, the philosophy of the Krug family has always been to bottle a vintage-dated Brut when the characteristics of the year were unique and compelling enough to produce a wine that would stand on its own in terms of breed, character and a sufficiently refined expression of its respective vintage. Given the wide array of “vins clairs” that the domaine produces each and every year, it is not surprising of course that the Krug Vintage Brut bottlings are also cuvées comprised of a wide mosaic of different “vins clairs” that epitomize the style of the particular vintage that has been singled out to be bottled on its own. It is also a wine that moves around a bit on terms of its cépage, for if a vintage year succeeds most famously with its chardonnay or its pinot meunier, this success will be reflected in the relative proportions of each varietal included in the final blend of Vintage Krug. To my palate, there are two criteria that are of paramount importance when the Tasting Committee begins to contemplate whether or not a certain year will

be fine enough to warrant a vintage-dated bottling of Krug. First, is the vintage sufficiently high in quality to tell a unique story of the vintage through the lenses of Krug craftsmanship, and secondly, is the structural integrity sufficient in the vintage to ensure that this particular cuvee of Krug Vintage will be able to stand the long test of time and age and evolve gracefully over the very long window that Krug fans expect from a vintage-dated bottling from this house. Keep in mind that it is not a rare occurrence for a Krug Vintage bottling to continue to drink beautifully for up to a century, so the decisions that Eric Lebel, Olivier Krug and the rest of the Tasting Committee take in the cellars today are going to be judged by several future generations of the estate's clientele.

As touched up above, Vintage Krug is aged in the cellars a minimum of ten years after its final blending, prior to its disgorgement and release onto the market. As this is a cuvée that is crafted for a very long and graceful life in bottle, it is usually a very structured wine out of the blocks, and it is not a rare occurrence for the team at Krug to hold back a vintage release substantially longer than ten years if the structural elements are still fairly tight and the wine is not yet ready to give a lot of pleasure when it is first released. For example, the 1988 Krug Vintage Brut was held back several years beyond its planned ten year release date, as it had remained tight and snappy, and the maison instead offered up the more opulent 1989 Vintage Brut first and held back the 1988 so that it could blossom a bit more in the cellars in Reims. There are not a whole lot of Champagne houses that could or would do this with two vintages. Given the six generation-long skill set that has been built up in the Krug family when it comes to master blending, and which is now embodied in the Blending Committee and the wine making team at Krug, it is not surprising that Vintage Krug is often one of the most exquisitely balanced wines of any given vintage, with certain characteristics of a vintage in general often not particularly evident in the Krug Vintage bottling from that year. To again take the 1989 as an example, this was a rather ripe and buxom year for many Champagne producers' vintage-dated blends, and while the wines showed very well out of the blocks, many were better off drunk up on the younger side. The Krug 1989, in contrast, showed right from the start a beautiful synthesis of the ripe and early generosity of the vintage and the brisk spine of acidity and minerality that is so typical of all Krug bottlings. The result is an amazingly fresh and vibrant 1989 Krug today, that is still drinking at its apogee when so many of its contemporaries from this vintage are now past their peaks of optimal pleasure.

Since every young release of Krug Vintage is destined for a long life in the cellar, the maison also holds back a small percentage of each vintage-dated bottling for a second release another ten or twenty years down the road. This is the Krug Collection series. The wines are kept in the cellars in Reims until they are deemed ready for a second release on the market, and then disgorged and sent out from the cellars in search of Krug lovers who may not have kept any of the first release in their cellars- succumbing to the all too frequent temptation to drink with alacrity the Vintage Krug bottles gracing their collections. Having just finished up my last magnum of the 1985 Krug Vintage Brut in my own cellar, I know only too well the phenomenon of not being able to keep one's hands off of the few bottles of vintage Krug that find their way into my cellar each year. The Krug Collection series was designed to ameliorate this inability to stay patient and let the wines reach their apogees at age thirty or forty, rather than popping bottles of Vintage Krug only ten or twelve years out from the vintage. I am not certain precisely when Krug began its Krug Collection program, but certainly it was already well underway in the

1980s when I first entered the wine trade and may well have already been going on for some time prior to this era. But, my first bottles of the 1961, 1964 and 1966 Krugs were all Krug Collection bottlings, all of which I splurged for in the late 1980s. If only I had known a bit more about Krug in those days- I would have kept those bottles until now, so that they could have really reached their absolute summits of complexity- and I could have recent notes on them for this article. But, when it comes to aging Krug Vintage in the cellar, the team at Krug has a lot more self-control than I possess, particularly with those bottles looking me square in the eye every time I go down to pull a bottle of bubbly.



2003 Krug Brut Millésime (Reims) ID# 214029

It had been nearly two years since I last tasted a bottle of the 2003 Krug and I was very impressed to see how time has barely touched the wine structurally, as it remains every bit as fresh and vibrant on the palate as it was upon release. On the nose, the wine is now starting to show some lovely secondary elements in its bouquet of apple, fresh apricot, lovely, Indian spice tones (cardamom is quite prevalent today), superb minerality, fresh-baked bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open on the attack, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and lovely backend mineral drive on the focused, vibrant and zesty finish. As I noted back in May of 2014, this is quite low in chardonnay in this vintage (only twenty-nine percent) and relies heavily on pinot meunier (twenty-five percent of the blend), which gives it a unique character in the pantheon of Vintage Krug. The 2003 is cruising along

beautifully and is now into its plateau of peak drinkability, but will also continue to age very well. 2016-2035. **94.**

2002 Krug Brut Millésime (Reims) ID# 414071

What has been the favorite question of Krug Champagne lovers over the last decade: “when is the 2002 going to be released?” Well, the wait is finally over and it has been well worth the patience that has been expended on behalf of this great wine, which may well be the very greatest young vintage of Krug I have ever had the pleasure to taste. I began my Krug Vintage tasting experience with the new release of the 1981 all those years ago, and I honestly cannot think of any vintage since that time that can offer the same seamless beauty and bottomless depth of the gorgeous 2002! The wine is so perfectly balanced that it seems completely mature today, and yet, it is still a puppy and decades away from its true apogee. The stunning bouquet offers up great purity and precision in its constellation of apple, white peach, caraway seed, walnut, *patissière*, lovely, gentle citrus tones, complex minerality, smokiness and a fine topnote of spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like, with a great, great core, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and stunning length and grip on the boundlessly energetic and completely elegant finish. In all honesty, this is a perfect vintage of Krug, but I will leave a little space at the top of the register to allow it to grow into its full-bloomed, majestic landscape of maturity. One can drink it now with endless pleasure (until the bottle is empty), but it will climb in quality for the next ten to twenty years before leveling out for its long run at the top. 2016-2075+. **99+.**

2000 Krug Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2000 vintage of Krug is a young wine that still needs some time in the cellar to start to blossom, but all of the constituent components are in place for a great wine with a bit more bottle age. The *cépages* of the 2000 Krug is forty-three percent chardonnay, forty-two percent pinot noir and fifteen percent pinot meunier. The very youthful nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, a touch of caraway seed, lovely soil tones, a bit of smokiness and a topnote of salinity. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with broad shoulders, great focus and balance, very elegant *mousse*, and great backend mineral drive on the very, very long and seamless finish. This is a young and stunning wine that is currently still a bit bound up in its structural elements and in need of a bit more bottle age to start to blossom, but it will be superb in the fullness of time. 2020-2055. **95.**

1982 Krug “Collection” Brut Millésime (Reims) Served From Magnum

1982 was an enormous crop in the Champagne region, which at that time was the largest harvest since 1970. The 1982 Krug Collection bottling out of magnum is absolutely beautiful and at its absolute apogee at age thirty-three, soaring from the glass in a superbly complex constellation of apple, nutskin, wheat toast, lovely smokiness, caraway seed, a beautifully complex base of soil and just a touch of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a bright and vibrant personality, great complexity, a lovely core, very elegant *mousse* and a very, very long, elegant and vibrant finish. Out of magnum, this wine has decades to go, but it is drinking so beautifully that it will be very hard to keep one’s hands off of this wine, if one is fortunate enough to have some tucked away in the cellar. 2015-2045+. **96.**

Clos du Mesnil

The 1.84 hectare monopole vineyard of Clos du Mesnil was purchased by Henri and Rémi Krug in 1971, sight unseen. They had received a phone call about the possibility of purchasing six hectares of vineyards in the village of Mesnil-sur-Oger and agreed to purchase

the parcels without even seeing them. Their brisk decision-making allowed Champagne Krug to uncover one of the great single vineyard gems in the entire Champagne region, and one can only imagine their excitement a short time later when they toured the vineyards that they had purchased in Mesnil. The walled-in vineyard, surrounded by the small village of Mesnil, provides a unique microclimate that tends to retain heat a bit longer into the evening hours in the surrounding stone walls, as well as protecting the vines from climactic depredations, and this very sheltered garden of chardonnay vines tends to produce a perfectly ripe wine of exuberant personality in most top vintages. When Henri and Rémi Krug originally purchased the Clos du Mesnil, their intention was to use it, along with the other four-plus hectares of vineyards in Mesnil, as a constituent component of their Grande Cuvée bottling. But, as each parcel and often sections of each parcel are vinified and kept separately in the cellars at Krug, it only took a few years after their purchase to realize that the unique character of Clos du Mesnil stood out in each and every of the multitude of blind tastings that the Tasting Committee conducts of each year's "vins clairs" in preparing that year's blend of Grande Cuvée. The Krugs were already micro-vinifying different sections of the Clos du Mesnil, as the vines were a wide range of ages when they first purchased the vineyard, and the different-aged sections of the vineyard tended to hit optimal ripeness at different times. Given the impressive quality turning up at the Tasting Committee's blind tastings of the various wines being produced at the Clos du Mesnil, Henri and Rémi Krug soon began to contemplate creating a single vineyard bottling from the Clos.

Their father, Paul Krug II, was unequivocally not in favor of pursuing the project of a single vineyard bottling of Krug Champagne. This is not surprising, as since 1843, the reputation of the house of Krug had been based on the excellence of their blended wines, with much of the lauded complexity of Krug Champagne derived from the meticulous approach to blending that the house had taken since its inception in the middle of the nineteenth century. Officially, the sons respectfully averred to their father's perspective, but still conducted a few bottling trials with small lots of Clos du Mesnil, quietly tucking them away in a dark corner of the cellar to see what the magic of time might reveal, and several years later a very surprised Paul Krug was served blind one of the experimental vintages of Clos du Mesnil by his sons. His extremely favorable impression of the experimental vintage of Clos du Mesnil was the last obstacle to the creation of a Krug Clos du Mesnil bottling, which was first commercially produced in the 1979 vintage and released a decade later. It is an utterly unique, almost exotic, expression of Mesnil fruit and the singularly beautiful terroir of the Clos du Mesnil, and today it is firmly established as one of the very greatest bottlings of Champagne produced in the region.

When the Krugs first took over the Clos du Mesnil, it was clear that much of the vineyard was going to need replanting. They undertook this project on a plot by plot basis over several years, so that the vines could be renewed over a leisurely period of time without losing the majority of the production from the vineyard. This policy continues to this day, which currently finds a two-tenths of a hectare portion of the vineyard currently "en friche" and awaiting replanting next year. Henri and Rémi Krug were struck by the garden-like quality of the Clos du Mesnil when they first visited it on that fateful day in 1971, and the house has continued to treat it as a pampered star since those very early days. Today there is a separate chais attached to the Clos du Mesnil, which includes offices, cellars and plenty of entertaining space for visitors. The Clos also has its own winemaker during harvest, Julie Cavil, one of whose primary focuses is to nurture the Clos du Mesnil throughout the growing season and then to carefully craft a wine that

accurately reflects the brilliant underlying terroir of the Clos. The chais at the Clos du Mesnil are also used for the crushing of the grapes each harvest from the other plots that the Krug domaine owns in Mesnil, as well as the grapes from several growers whom they work with in surrounding villages in the Côtes de Blancs. While the recent notes below only reach back to the 1985 Clos du Mesnil, I have older notes that rate very highly the 1982, the magical 1981 and the inaugural 1979. While I have not had any of these vintages in the last several years, I have little doubt that they are all still drinking brilliantly.

2003 Krug Clos du Mesnil Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2003 Clos du Mesnil is a really lovely example of this vintage, which is better in Champagne than most other regions of France in this torrid summer. The vineyard was picked on August 23rd of this hot summer and is a fine success. The bouquet is deep, ripe and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a blend of fresh apricot, apple, gentle smokiness, *crème patissière*, chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread and an exotic topnote of saffron. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with a rock solid core, frothy *mousse*, lovely bounce and very impressive backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. This does not have quite the customary lift on the backend as most vintages of Clos du Mesnil, but its cut and grip are exemplary. 2015-2035. **93.**

2000 Krug Clos du Mesnil Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2000 Clos du Mesnil is a lovely example of this vintage, and like the 2003, it is now drinking very well indeed- albeit, with plenty of underlying structure to carry it far, far into the future. The gorgeous nose soars from the glass in a classic blend of delicious apples, pear, orange zest, very complex, chalky minerality, almond pastry cream and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very mineral-driven, with a superb core, refined *mousse* and excellent cut and grip on the complex, vibrant and very, very long finish. This is far more classic in profile than the exotic 2003 Clos du Mesnil and should age long and gracefully, but like many top 2000 Champagnes, it is starting to drink beautifully at age fifteen. 2015-2045+. **95+.**

1985 Krug Clos du Mesnil Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 1985 Clos du Mesnil is at its absolute zenith today and drinking with stunning purity, complexity and style. The celestial bouquet wafts from the glass in a mature and vibrant blend of apricot, delicious apples, nutskin, chalky minerality, *crème patissière* and warm bread. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very complex, with a beautiful panoply of mature flavors, coupled to superb bounce and cut. The simply brilliant bouquet is long, bright and has excellent focus and grip. This is a perfect moment in its evolution to be drinking the 1985 Clos du Mesnil. 2015-2035. **96.**

Clos d'Ambonnay

After the extraordinary success that Champagne Krug realized with their Clos du Mesnil bottling, the firm sought to find a comparably unique expression of pinot noir to mirror that of the chardonnay of Clos du Mesnil. The grand cru village of Ambonnay in the heart of the Montagne de Reims was the logical choice to focus on for the house of Krug, as the family had been drawing principally on the vineyards of this village for many of its pinot noir needs since the inception of the house in the mid-nineteenth century. But, it was not until 1991 that a suitable vineyard possibility was located, when a tiny, .68 hectare walled-in vineyard on the southeastern slopes of the village came to the house's attention. The wall for this tiny vineyard was completed

in 1760, making it nearly as venerable as that of the Clos du Mesnil. Experimental bottlings began in 1991 by the Krug team, and after three years of following the vineyard and the wines in the cellars, it was deemed that this vineyard would produce an adequately profound expression of pinot noir to warrant a single vineyard bottling of Blanc de Noirs by the house. So, the vineyard was not actually purchased until 1994 by the Champagne Krug, making the 1995 vintage the first vintage of Krug Clos d'Ambonnay to be commercially released by the house, ten years after its inception. This was followed by a 1996 Clos d'Ambonnay, and the house has continued on to produce this beautiful wine again in the 1998 and 2000 vintages. It is an extremely rare wine, given its limited production, and to date, I have not yet had the good fortune to cross paths with the 1996 vintage of Clos d'Ambonnay. However, the other three vintages are clearly amongst the most brilliant young bottles of Champagne I have had the pleasure to taste.

2000 Krug “Clos d'Ambonnay” Brut Millésime (Reims)

The new release of Clos d'Ambonnay is absolutely spectacular. The bouquet is deep, complex and utterly refined, as it wafts from the glass in a very pure blend of white peach, apple, a hint of white cherries, chalky soil tones, brioche, fresh almond, smoky Ambonnay overtones and a brilliant base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and quite powerful in style, with a great core of fruit, striking transparency, brisk acids, elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the very, very complex, seamless and still quite youthful finish. This is a breathtaking example of the 2000 vintage that is certainly approachable today, but is still a puppy and will be even better ten or twenty years down the road. 2015-2055. **97+.**

1998 Krug Clos d'Ambonnay Brut

At the time of my visit to Krug in Reims in June, the 1998 Clos d'Ambonnay was scheduled for release at the end of this year. As I go to press with this issue, a quick search of the internet shows this wine only currently available in Hong Kong and Italy, but this may be a pre-sale offer or a reflection that the wine has already been sold out quietly during its first *tranche*. In any event, this is the first vintage of Clos d'Ambonnay that I have had the pleasure to taste and it is an absolutely exquisite wine. The nose is deep, very pure and very elegant, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of apple, melon, orange peel, brioche, caraway seed and an absolutely brilliant base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite opulent at the core, with beautiful acidity, utterly refined *mousse*, impeccable focus and balance and simply stunning grip on the very, very long, crisp and seamless finish. Like many of the top 1998s, the Clos d'Ambonnay will not demand any bottle age before providing great pleasure, but should have no difficulties holding gracefully for a couple of decades. A beautiful wine. 2011-2030+. **97.**

1995 Krug “Clos d'Ambonnay” Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 1995 Clos d'Ambonnay is an utterly refined and supremely elegant wine that is still fairly youthful at age twenty. The very complex and elegant bouquet delivers a marvelous constellation of white peach, apple, stony minerality, plenty of smokiness, fresh-baked bread, orange zest, gentle spice tones and a very delicate floral topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and laser-like in its focus, with a superb core, great mineral drive, and glorious length and grip on the impeccably balanced, refined and electric finish. A brilliant wine. 2015-2045+. **98.**

**DOMAINE MONGEARD-MUGNERET
VOSNE-ROMANÉE EXCELLENCE
WITHOUT A LOT OF POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE**



Perhaps no other great estate in the village of Vosne-Romanée keeps as low a profile these days as Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret. Look through the pages of some of the seminal books on the region written by folks such as Clive Coates or Remington Norman, and there is just a short cameo appearance in the Coates book on the domaine and nary a mention in the Norman book, though perhaps this is just a reflection that the domaine has never resonated with the English journalists visiting the region. And yet, this fine domaine has absolutely superb vineyard holdings and a brilliant track record for producing classically complex and long-lived wines from their wide variety of parcels scattered throughout the Côte d'Or. Simply in terms of vineyard holdings, Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret has one of the most impressive lineups of great *terroirs* as one is likely to find anywhere in the Côte de Nuits, and to my palate, the wines from the domaine are far more interesting than several of the so-called “stars” in the village of Vosne today. And yet they still travel primarily below the radar of many Burgundy lovers in the early twenty-first century. However, this was not always the case, for when I was first starting out in the wine trade in the early 1980s, here in the US Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret was one of the most highly-regard producers in the Côte d'Or and their wines were amongst the most

popular in all of Burgundy. I vividly recall collectors scrambling to secure bottles of Mongeard wines with the same fervor that they chased those of producers such as Joseph Drouhin and Domaine Dujac back in the day. But, somewhere along the way, they have fallen a bit out of fashion in certain Burgundy circles, despite the fact that the quality of their wines has remained every bit as superb as it was back in my early days in the wine trade.

This should probably come as no surprise to those who visit the domaine and get to know the Mongeard family a little bit, as self-promotion here has never taken precedence over the day to day responsibilities of tending the vines and keeping a close eye on the wines' evolutions in the cellar. As Vincent Mongeard, today's head of the family domaine, likes to say, "you won't find me crisscrossing the globe attending this winemakers' conference or that grand tasting, as I prefer to stay home in Vosne and keep a close eye on things at the domaine." This is the old-fashioned Burgundian approach, and it has proven to be very dependable philosophy for the Mongeard family through several generations. Today, the estate is comprised of thirty-three hectares of vines, primarily lying in the village of Vosne-Romanée and its neighboring communes, but also with holdings as far afield as Beaune and Savigny in the south and Fixin and Marsannay in the northern reaches of the Côte de Nuits, as well as substantial holdings in the Hautes Côtes. There are fully thirty-two separate appellations produced by Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret today. The estate has an enviable lineup of grand cru and premier cru holdings in its vineyard portfolio, but one of the things that has always drawn me to the wines of the domaine is just how good their more basic bottlings are as well, for a *villages* level Fixin or Savigny-lès-Beaune here is also made with consummate care and built to age long and gracefully in the cellar as well.

The domaine's origins, as it is constituted today, lie back in the late 1910s, though there have been Mongeards tending vines in Burgundy for many hundreds of years prior to the formation of Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret. The earliest records that the family has traces their roots in Vosne as *vignerons* all the way back to 1620! Eugène Mongeard was the sixth generation of his family to work the soils in Vosne-Romanée, and when he married Edmée Mugneret in 1919 the contemporary history of the domaine can really be said to begin. The couple had their first child, their daughter Geneviève Mongeard in 1921, and their son, Jean Mongeard, was born eight years later in 1929. During the 1920s and 1930s, the domaine was known as Domaine Eugène Mongeard and the family lived in Flagey-Echézeaux at this time. Sadly, in 1940 Eugène Mongeard passed away at a young age, with Jean only nine years of age, and he never had the chance to pass on his knowledge of viticulture and winemaking to his son in the classic Burgundian manner. Consequently, Jean Mongeard took over the winemaking responsibilities for the domaine at the very tender age of sixteen in 1945 (with the domaine's wines sold in totality to *négociants* from 1940 through 1944) and he was responsible for fifty-one harvests here before his retirement after the 1995 vintage. In his very first vintage, he received assistance from the seminal Burgundian figures of Raymond Baudoin (founder of *La Revue de Vin de France*) and Henri Gouges and bottled the production of his very first vintage for sale, which was organized by Monsieur Baudoin. Raymond Baudoin had contracted to buy the entire Mongeard production in '45, but asked young Jean Mongeard to do the bottling for him, which he did with the assistance of Henri Gouges' two sons, Michel and Marcel. As Jean Mongeard recalls, "I will never forget the gratitude I owe to Marcel and Michel Gouges for helping me in that very first vintage." In the following years, Messieurs Baudoin and Henri

Gouges encouraged Jean Mongeard to continue to sell his wines in bottle, rather than in barrel, and as a result of the support of these gentlemen, Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret was one of the very earliest pioneers in the region for domaine-bottling their wines.

Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret first began working with the famous American importer, Frank Schoonmaker, through the introduction of Raymond Baudoin at the same time, and bottles of the superb 1945 vintage were the first from the estate to be offered for sale in the US. The bottles sold in the American market of the 1945s were the very first to bear the label of Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret. Mr. Schoonmaker, who bought the '45 Mongeard wines from Raymond Baudoin, had been stationed in France as part of the US military during World War II. He would become one of the most important clients for top domaines in Burgundy in this era, many of whom were just beginning to follow the lead of Henri Gouges and the Marquis d'Angerville and breaking away from the traditional *négociant* system and offering a significant percentage of their wines for sale in bottle. As Jean Mongeard likes to recount, since that first bottled vintage of 1945, the domaine's wines have been present in the American market in every year since that time. When the superb Schoonmaker portfolio was eventually split up between the two companies of Chateau and Estate and Vineyard Brands back in the 1970s, Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret began working with Robert Haas and his company, Vineyard Brands, and the two have been inseparable in the US ever since.

Having begun his career in the 1945 vintage at the age of sixteen, Jean Mongeard presided over the domaine during one of the most important historical epochs in the region of Burgundy. His very first vintage only produced forty-five casks of wine- Vosne-Romanée *villages*, Clos Vougeot, Echézeaux and Grands Echézeaux- as there was frost in the spring and hail during the growing season of '45 and the crop was extremely small. The changes that the region underwent from this period at the close of the second world war, when even getting enough bottles in those early post-war years' glass shortages to bottle up a vintage was no easy matter, through the days when more and more domaines began to bottle their own wines in the 1970s and 1980s, and up to today's golden age of Burgundy, he has seen his years in Vosne-Romanée coincide with one of the most important epochs in the history of the Côte d'Or. For many years during his career, Jean Mongeard was the head of the growers' association in Vosne-Romanée and had his finger on the pulse of the region during this dynamic era. I am sure, after losing his father very early on in his life, it was a great pleasure for Jean Mongeard to be able to spend fully two decades working side by side in the vineyards and cellars with his own son Vincent. To be able to spend the following twenty years after his retirement watching the domaine continue to build on his own success and become one of the greatest estates in Vosne-Romanée has certainly been a source of satisfaction for Jean Mongeard, and he and his wife Lisette were very obviously proud to be in attendance for the historic tasting organized at the domaine in November of 2015, from which many of the tasting notes that follow were taken. From our conversation together, it was pretty clear that Jean Mongeard has always liked the more powerful top vintages over the course of his career, and he is very excited about the potential of the 2015s. Some of his favorite past vintages are 1945, 1947, 1959, 1976 and 2003, and he compares the infant 2015s favorably with these past years.

Jean Mongeard was joined at the estate by his son Vincent Mongeard starting in the 1976 vintage and Vincent has been the proprietor of the domaine since his father's retirement in 1995.

From 1976 through 1995, when Jean Mongeard retired, *Père et Fils* Mongeard formed one of the most dynamic winemaking teams in the Côte d'Or and Vincent did not take long to make his impact on the domaine's wines as well. Very early on in his career full-time at the estate, Vincent Mongeard convinced his father to stop routinely filtering their wines, which Jean had done for many years (as this was, of course, the fashion of the times), and bottle the wines unfiltered if they were sufficiently limpid after racking. The use of stems at the domaine has remained the same from father to son, as Jean Mongeard used to retain a percentage of the stems if the vintage's quality was sufficient to ripen the stems well, but would eschew the use of stems in less perfectly ripe vintages. This has continued during Vincent Mongeard's tenure, with a percentage of whole clusters used for certain cuvées in the cellars in top vintages. These bottlings which include some whole clusters in most vintages are the Vosne-Romanée "les Mazières Hautes" amongst the village bottlings, les Orveaux in the premier cru tier and the grand crus of Echézeaux "la Grande Complication", Grands Echézeaux and Richebourg, with most of the other wines in the cellar destemmed in most vintages. The domaine also employs a short pre-fermentation "cold soak" in most vintages, which was first practiced in 1989, as Vincent Mongeard noted that "in '89 the temperatures were very hot at harvest and we employed a two or three day cold soak at twelve to fourteen degrees" for the first time in this year. Both father and son Mongeard have always used indigenous yeasts exclusively for their fermentations.

Like most of the domaine's neighbors in the village of Vosne-Romanée, the Mongeards use a fairly high percentage of new oak for the *elevage* of their wines. The village wines these days are typically raised in about a quarter to thirty percent new wood, the premier crus anywhere from thirty to forty percent and the grand crus from sixty to one hundred percent, depending on the style of the vintage and the particular cru. However, this percentage of new oak is not dramatically different today than was the case here back in the 1960s and 1970s, when Jean Mongeard was making the wines without the assistance of his son Vincent. As father and son Mongeard note, "back in the 1970s it was important to be careful with the natural structures of the wines" and so in some vintages, "to keep the balance, less than sixty percent new oak might be used for the grand crus." They continued, "in the 1980s, a little bit more new oak was generally used- particularly in vintages such as 1985 and 1989- and from this time, generally, the Grands Echézeaux and Richebourg have been raised entirely in new oak and the Echézeaux and Clos Vougeot in sixty to eighty percent." Ten years ago, I tasted a few of the Mongeard wines at the Les Grands Jours tasting at the Château de Clos Vougeot and wondered if the wines were a bit more marked by their new wood than had been the case back in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, when I knew the wines best, as they seemed to be a bit more heavily influenced by oak spice and showed some wood tannins poking out on the finish. Jean Mongeard happened to be pouring the wines at this tasting and I asked him about the oak, to which he replied, "these are still barrel samples and they will be fine with more time to absorb their oak", and sure enough, when I retasted the wines at the domaine a year or two later, their balances were seamless. And given the outstanding track record of the Mongeard wines to age long and gracefully, without ever struggling to integrate their new wood, the percentage of new oak here is certainly just fine, even if I might personally like to see it a bit lower. Of course, the percentages of new oak used is an issue at virtually every domaine in Vosne, and I would hardly complain if the number of new casks used at most domaines in the village were decreased, as the use of new oak utilized in Vosne-Romanée is probably the highest of any of the villages in the Côte de Nuits today.

Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret has been a trailblazer in other ways since becoming one of the village's first domaines (beyond DRC of course) to offer their wines for sale in bottle in the aftermath of World War II. For example, the domaine was the very first estate in the village of Vosne-Romanée to practice a green harvest, as Jean and Vincent Mongeard decided that there was simply no way their vines were ever going to ripen the huge quantities of grapes out in the vineyards in the vintage of 1982 if they did not do something to assist them. Vincent Mongeard recalls that no less a figure than Henri Mayer came up to him out in the vines when he was pruning off some of the grapes in mid-summer and said "you are crazy to be cutting off bunches from the vines- what are you thinking?" But, as he continues, "when my father and I organized the harvest, we were the only ones picking dark berries, as everybody else's bunches had pink grapes, rather than violet-colored ones, and we were able to really make very good wines in this vintage because we green-harvested in 1982." And, their wines from this vintage are indeed outstanding and were a precursor of the new era of Burgundy that we live in today, as they intuitively understood that quality would become the barometer that set the greatest Burgundy domaines apart from their neighbors in the years to come. One has to recall that times were hardly robust in Burgundy in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the relative affluence enjoyed today by so many producers was simply not even remotely a reality at this time, and the decision to cut off a significant percentage of the bunches on the vines in mid-summer of 1982 must have seemed like madness to Monsieur Mayer and most of the Mongeard family's other neighbors at this time.



Vincent Mongeard and two of his talented commercial team in the domaine's beautiful caveau.

Since the mid-1990s, the domaine has practiced a *culture raisonnée* for its viticulture, which employs organic materials and eschews chemical treatments of any kind except in extreme moments of distress, when a judicious application of a chemical treatment is deemed necessary to save a crop in peril. Since 2008, Vincent Mongeard and his vineyard team have also expanded to *biodynamique* viticulture for all of their grand crus and certain of their premier crus, and this will be expanded in the years to come. The practice of doing a green harvest has been continued in years where it is deemed beneficial, as excessive yields are always guarded against since the lessons learned with their family's ringing success in the 1982 vintage. However, it is not necessary every year, as Vincent Mongeard prefers to prune aggressively during the winter months to keep yields low for the following growing season, and *débourgeonnage* or de-budding is also practiced each spring to ensure that each cane does not carry too many bunches later in the summer. Since 2000, Vincent Mongeard has also begun to select his own oak for the domaine's barrels and store the staves for two to three years at the domaine, prior to consigning them to their *tonnelier*, Rousseau, to fashion the staves into barrels. The casks were typically higher toast in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s (as was the fashion of the times), but medium-plus toast since the start of the new millennium.

The Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret young wines are not the most refined and perfumed examples to be found in Vosne-Romanée, but this is not surprising, for both Jean and Vincent Mongeard are classic, old school Burgundian farmers and their wines often echo their muscular frames and clear attachment to the soil. Their wines are much like the men behind them, strong, broad-shouldered and very classic examples of their respective *terroirs* that speak of Burgundy's history as a community of small farmers, tending their plots of vines and working tirelessly in the cellars to ensure that the time spent each year in the vineyards is faithfully translated into the finished wines. As these are wines that are built to age, they do not often stand out in early vintage tastings, where wines from some domaines may exude more early appeal and polish than do the Mongeard wines. But, twenty, thirty or forty years out from the vintage, it is not surprising to find that the Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret wines have blossomed and risen up to the top of the hierarchy of producers in a given vintage, with their wines pure, complex and still vibrant, whereas the wines from some of their neighbors have traded in their early sex appeal for far more modest impressions at maturity. The inherent complexity of Vosne-Romanée and the other communes where the Mongeard family owns vines is always evident from the moment the wines are released, and the elegance of great mature Burgundy arrives in due course in the Mongeard family's wines. However, these are essentially old-fashioned Burgundies in the very best sense of the term, with no over the top stylistic nods to fashion, but wines that faithfully reflect their underlying *terroirs* and age long and gracefully in the bottle. If one could divide the village of Vosne-Romanée stylistically into a Domaine de la Romanée-Conti school and an Henri Mayer school, with the former a bit more aligned to the *Luxe* world of the international jet set and the latter home to traditionally-styled wines that speak more directly of the *vignerons* who work the soils themselves, then the Mongeard wines are most emphatically in the Henri Mayer camp. It is not that one stylistic school is inherently better than the other, they are just different, and the finest examples from either camp are wines of beauty and superb complexity at their apogees and each should be appreciated for their own specific qualities.

I should note that in my experience, Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is one of the most consistent producers to be found in the Côte d'Or, and their track record in more challenging

vintages is absolutely exemplary. A perfect indication of this would be the superb range of wines fashioned by Jean and Vincent Mongeard in the difficult 1983 vintage, which produced a lot of tough, chewy wines due to the drought conditions of this growing season and the hail that affected several communes unfavorably. However, the Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret 1983s are stellar wines and probably the most successful wines I have tasted from any Côte d'Or domaine in this vintage and the wines continue to drink beautifully down to this day. We have already mentioned above how well the domaine excelled in 1982 as well, and I have had beautiful 1980s from the domaine as well in the past. I have to imagine that other vintages, such as 1979 here are also outstanding, and a lone bottle of the 1973 Grands Echézeaux that I drank several years ago also qualitatively transcended the vintage. Clearly this trend has been going on for a long time at this estate, as Vincent Mongeard chose to serve a bottle of the 1965 Echézeaux as part of the vertical tasting of this bottling at the domaine in November and the wine was really excellent! I could not ever recall tasting a 1965 red Burgundy previously and I could not have been more impressed with the superb quality of the '65 Mongeard Echézeaux. In more recent years, their 2000s are stunning (and every bit as good as their 2001s and 2002s) and they made some of the top 1995s and 1996s as well. Even their 1990s have retained superb freshness as the years have gone by, which has not generally been the case with a large number of wines from this very warm vintage.

The domaine has evolved quite a bit in the last decade or so, as today, one can visit and taste very comfortably in their beautiful tasting room and *caveau* right at the estate, which is commodious enough to have very easily handled more than a hundred visitors during their grand tasting in November of 2015. The Mongeard family has also built and operates a four star hotel in Vosne-Romanée, Le Richebourg, which was opened in 2002 and now includes a restaurant and spa. It sits just down the hill from the domaine itself and, though I have never had the pleasure to stay there, by all reports, offers wonderful service, spacious, colorful rooms and plenty of fine wines by the glass or bottle. With Vincent Mongeard currently at the top of his winemaking game, this is one of the greatest estates in all of Vosne-Romanée today, and with the next generation of the Mongeard family starting to dip their toes in the water at the domaine, the future looks very bright for this outstanding producer of old school, *terroir*-driven wines of impressive aging potential. They certainly deserve to be more widely praised in the Burgundy market today for their consistent and long-standing excellence.

Vosne-Romanée AC

The Mongeard family has fully two hectares of vines used for their lovely Vosne AC bottling, scattered amongst five different lieux à dits in the village (not counting the single climat of les Hautes Mazières which is now bottled on its own), with all of these lying in the lower section of AC vineyards between the village center and the Route Nationale. The family has parcels in some of the best of these “villages level” lieux à dits, including aux Réas and les Genevrières on the southern end of the commune, les Vigneux in the center of the village, and right on the border of the Clos Vougeot, les Violettes and les Portes-Feuilles, at the northern extreme of Vosne. The vines in all of these parcels are a good age, with forty-five years the average, and the wine sees a bit of new oak during its élevage. It is a very classy example of Vosne AC and ages very well, as the couple of notes on older bottles I have below will attest.

1993 Vosne-Romanée- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

As I mentioned to Vincent Mongeard that the first vintage I had tasted *sur place* here was the 1993 vintage, he disappeared down into the cellar at the end of our tasting to trot out an example from the vintage for me to taste blind. He did not mention the vintage when he returned, and I stumbled around for a bit thinking this was a slightly older wine from a more exalted *terroir*, but eventually locked in on 1993. But I never imagined that this was “just” the Vosne-Romanée AC bottling, as the wine was drinking splendidly and offering up great complexity in its tertiary nose of black cherries, dark berries, meaty tones, forest floor and coffee. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and very nicely gamey, with beautiful, autumnal complexity, tangy acids, still a modest touch of tannin and really lovely length and grip. Back when the 1993s were released, I did not have my Burgundy act together enough to cellar village wines (drinking most that I purchased fairly early on in their evolutions), but I really wish I had kept more around to allow them to develop along the lines of this really lovely bottle. The 1993 Vosne AC from Mongeard-Mugneret is now into its apogee of maturity, but it will have no troubles keeping for a couple more decades. Delicious wine. 2011-2030. **90.**

1957 Vosne-Romanée- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1957 Vosne AC from Jean Mongeard is really a lovely old wine that still has plenty of life in it and delivers very impressive vibrancy and complexity for village wine of its age and from one of the less heralded vintages of the decade of the 1950s. The autumnal bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of candied raspberries and cherries, *sous bois*, cinnamon and a touch of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and beautifully transparent, with still a nice sweet core of red fruit, very good focus and balance and a long, *à point* and quite vibrant finish. Lovely old village wine. 2015-2025. **87.**

Nuits St. Georges “les Plateaux” and Nuits St. Georges “les Allots”

2010 Nuits St. Georges “les Plateaux”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The inherent elegance of the 2012 vintage has worked beautifully with the Mongeard family les Plateaux bottling. The wine offers up a very pretty bouquet of cherries, strawberries, woodsmoke, cocoa, a fine base of soil, fresh herbs, just a bit of spicy oak and a gentle, youthful topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows lovely mid-palate depth, with ripe tannins, good acids and very good transparency on the long and quite elegant finish. A really lovely 2010 Nuits *villages* in the making. 2019-2040. **90.**

2009 Nuits St. Georges “les Plateaux”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2009 Nuits *villages* bottling from Mongeard-Mugneret is quite tasty, but it is a deep and ripe wine that comes across as just a touch heavy-handed to my palate and is far more defined by its vintage than its place of origin. The nose is a ripe blend of red and black cherries, chocolate, early notes of forest floor, herbs, spicy oak and roasted venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fat core, chewy tannins and good length and grip on the finish. This is a good, sturdy style of Nuits that steers clear of any signs of overripeness, but is still quite marked by its vintage and a bit ponderous on the palate and I suspect one will be well-served to drink it through some of its youthful tannin, rather than giving it extended bottle age. Not bad for an '09. 2014-2030. **87.**

1971 Nuits St. Georges “les Allots”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The *lieu à dit* of les Allots lies in the northern sector of vineyards in the commune, just below the premier cru of Aux Vignerondes on the slope. Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret continues to produce this bottling, but I seldom taste it during my visits to the domaine.

However, the 1971 les Allots that they shared at their celebration in November of 2015 was really lovely still and shows just how well their village wines can age in top vintages. The bouquet is deep and tertiary in its complexity, delivering a fine mélange of cherries, strawberries, forest floor, woodsmoke, mustard seed and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very transparent today, with a fine core of fruit remaining, melted tannins, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. For a forty-four year-old village wine, this is still terrific! 2015-2025. **89.**

Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Narbantons”

The Mongeard family has a nice, 1.39 hectare parcel of vines in the premier cru of Narbantons, with the vines having been planted in 1959. The domaine purchased their parcel in Narbantons in 1988 and have been producing the wine since that vintage. I have always liked this bottling from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret, as I have the impression that the sturdy style of this particular terroir in Savigny perfectly dovetails with the family style of winemaking. The Narbantons here is typically raised in anywhere from thirty to forty percent new oak each year, and of course, I would love to see the percentage of new wood used for this particular wine diminished a touch, as this strikes me as a terroir that would really meld beautifully with more “one wine” barrels and a tad less new oak. But, that said, I have never had an example of Mongeard Narbantons that was over-oaked, and even vintages where I had some reservations about the new wood tannins present in the young wine have aged very well and shown no difficulties carrying their oak with a bit of bottle age. This is one of the great “sleepers” in the Mongeard portfolio, and I have long followed their bottling of Narbantons and been very happy with how the wines have evolved with cellaring, as the note on their lovely 1993 below will attest.

2010 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Narbantons”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2010 Narbantons from Vincent Mongeard is an excellent wine that has integrated its new wood beautifully since I first tasted it out of cask in the spring of 2012 and is now showing outstanding potential. The beautiful and classic bouquet offers up scents of cherries, orange zest, raw cocoa, incipient notes of gamebird, vinesmoke, coffee and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure on the attack, with a lovely core of red fruit, fine transparency and very suave tannins on the long, youthful and potentially very elegant finish. Young Narbantons can often be a touch *sauvage*, but this most emphatically not the case with the lovely 2010 version from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret. 2020-2050. **92+.**

1993 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Narbantons”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1993 Narbantons from the Mongeards was just a few years away from starting to blossom when I crossed paths with a bottle back in November of 2008, as at the fifteen year mark the wine was offering a lovely and complex aromatic blend of raspberries, a touch of grilled meat, fresh herb tones, coffee and a superb base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with tangy acids, melting tannins and very fine complexity and grip on the long and well-balanced finish. While the tannins were not particularly strident at the time I tasted this bottle, the secondary layers of complexity were just starting to emerge and a handful more years in the cellar would certainly pay dividends. High class juice and a superb value in its day! 2013-2030+. **92.**

Vougeot “les Cras” and Vougeot “Petits Vougeots”

The domaine has two premier cru parcels in the village of Vougeot, with their parcel in les Cras just under a third of a hectare and their plot in Petits Vougeots a bit smaller at a quarter of a hectare of vines. Both parcels today are planted with thirty-five year-old vines and both are typically raised in about a third new oak these days. Petits Vougeots is higher up on the slope than les Cras, and the domaine’s parcel in the vineyard of les Cras is down towards the bottom of the slope here, so this is pretty flat land, with the Petits Vougeots showing a bit more slope and is probably the slightly superior of the two premier crus in wetter years, as it will drain a bit better. Conversely, in drought years, the les Cras will perform ahead of the Petits Vougeots. I do not see these wines too often from the domaine (witness no recent notes on their Petits Vougeots), but the examples that I have tasted have always been quite good, with sturdy and fairly broad-shouldered personalities and plenty of aging potential, as the note on the ’76 les Cras below will attest.

2010 Vougeot “les Cras”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2010 les Cras is a really fine bottle in the making and really shows off its Chambolle-Musigny similarities in its complex nose of red and black cherries, fresh herb tones, a touch of cocoa, woodsmoke, gamebirds, chalky soil tones and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows the vintage’s lovely purity on the attack, with a very good core, lovely nascent complexity and a long, tangy and fine-grained finish. This will be a terrific wine in another five or six years and should age gracefully for a good quarter century after it reaches its plateau of maturity. 2020-2045+. **91.**

2009 Vougeot “les Cras”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2009 les Cras from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is a very good example of the vintage, but when this was served side by side with the 2010 version, it was easy to see which was the superior vintage! The 2009 offers up a ripe and stylish bouquet of red and black cherries, a bit of venison, chocolate, a solid base of soil, a gentle framing of new wood and a topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, with a plush attack, a good core, moderate tannins and impressive freshness and lightness of step for the vintage on the fairly long finish. This is a very good 2009 that is already drinking quite well, but should keep for another decade and a half. 2015-2030+? **89.**

1976 Vougeot “les Cras”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

This particular bottle of the 1976 Vougeot “les Cras” is starting to get a little edgy on the nose and shows just a touch of oxidation, but underneath is still a wine with plenty of stuffing and complexity on the palate. The bouquet is a very autumnal blend of dried cherries, bonfire, game, *sous bois*, dried oak leaves, mushrooms and the aforementioned hint of oxidation. On the palate the wine is still quite vigorous, with its full-bodied format showing good mid-palate depth, fine complexity, tangy acids and still a bit of backend, slightly rustic tannin perking up the impressively long finish. Given how sturdy this remains on the palate, I wondered if the threat of oxidation on the nose here was simply reflective of a tiring cork, rather than the wine reaching the end of the line. The palate seems to indicate that there is at least another fifteen years or more of potential longevity here. 2015-2030+? **87+?**

Nuits St. Georges “les Boudots”

Les Boudots is one of the great premier crus in the commune of Nuits St. Georges and is a quintessential example of the band here on the Vosne side of the village. The Mongeard family

does not have a particularly large parcel here, at thirty-eight ares, and their vines are fairly young by the high standards of the domaine, as they are thirty years of age. The domaine makes a really fine example of Boudots and this is one of the very top premier crus in their portfolio, as the wine always shows the elegance and complexity of this terroir when fully mature, and as the notes on the '76 and '78 Boudots below will attest, this is a long-lived bottle of premier cru. Like all the Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret premier crus from the Côte de Nuits, their Boudots is typically raised in thirty to forty percent new wood each year. This is one of the great “sleepers” in the domaine’s lineup and a wine that I am always on the lookout for to either add to my cellar or enjoy of a well-stocked wine list. The wine is a very classic example of Boudots and really deserves a minimum of a decade in the cellar in top vintages before it starts to really stir and is at its best between age fifteen and twenty-five, though as the notes below will happily attest, it has no trouble aging forty or fifty years.

2013 Nuits St. Georges “les Boudots”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2013 Boudots out of the blocks is showing the more modest ripeness of this vintage as a bit of *herbacité* in the upper register of the bouquet, but the wine has good depth and length on the palate and should prove to be just fine with sufficient bottle age. The nose wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, venison, dark soil tones, fresh herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and tangy, with a good core, fine intensity of flavor, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This will need some cellaring to blossom, but should prove to be a complex and highly satisfying middleweight in due course. 2023-2060. **90+**.

1978 Nuits St. Georges “les Boudots”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1978 Boudots is still at its apogee and is drinking with great style and complexity. The outstanding and quite red fruity bouquet delivers a constellation of cherries, blood orange, autumnal soil tones, gamebirds, cloves, cinnamon, a touch of bonfire and a discreet framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and absolutely *à point*, with superb transparency, melted tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and tangy finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Nuits St. Georges at its peak. 2015-2035+. **92**.

1976 Nuits St. Georges “les Boudots”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1976 Nuits “Boudots” from Jean Mongeard is a superb example of this vintage and is quite a bit more vibrant and structurally sound than the '76 Suchots that was paired up with it at the domaine’s fine tasting. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite classy for the vintage, offering up scents of cherries, strawberries, mustard seed, a touch of clove, forest floor and a topnote of oak leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively pure on the attack (particularly for a '76), with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, still slightly tannic and very well-balanced finish. This does not show any of the rusticity that so many '76s show today. A fine bottle with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2015-2035. **90**.

Vosne-Romanée “Petits Monts”

The Mongeard family has a thirty ares parcel in Petits Monts that is located at the bottom of the slope in this fairly steep vineyard (just across the path from Richebourg) and is located equidistant between Reignots to the south and Cros Parantoux to the north, so this is a prime location in this fine premier cru. The domaine’s vines are also a very good age at fifty years-old, and yet I have never really been blown away by this bottling of Petits Monts chez Mongeard, as it always seems to lack just a touch of elegance vis à vis the domaine’s bottlings of Suchots or en

Orveaux, not to mention other producers' examples of Petits Monts. I have never been able to figure out the reason for this, but perhaps the clones here are not the best in the domaine's vineyard patrimony? These days, Vincent Mongeard will raise his Petits Monts in thirty to forty percent new oak and the wine always shows good depth at the core, fine soil signature and fairly broad shoulders. It is a sturdy and quite ageworthy example of Petits Monts, but, in my experience, it does not have the same exceptional elegance found in the examples from Véronique Drouhin or Louis-Michel Liger-Belair. But, that said, I do not get to taste it with any regularity and perhaps my impressions would change if I had a bit broader experience with the cuvée chez Mongeard.



Looking down at the village of Vosne-Romanée from the vineyard of Petits Monts.

2013 Vosne-Romanée “Petits Monts”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

Petits Monts is another of the very high on the slope premier crus in Vosne and this is one of the coolest premier cru *climats* in the commune, so in a vintage of moderate ripeness like 2013, this wine is cut in a leaner style. The bouquet on the 2013 Petits Monts is lovely, offering up scents of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, a lovely base of soil tones, gamebird and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and tangy, with a good core of black fruit, fine soil signature and a long, focused and modestly tannic finish. 2021-2050+. **89+**.

1990 Vosne-Romanée “Petits Monts”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

I very much like the nose on the 1990 Petits Monts from the Mongeard family, but the wine is already starting to get a bit long in the tooth and shows off a bit of oxidation in the mid-palate. The deep, complex and tertiary bouquet is a blend of raspberries, coffee, *sous bois* and

smoky, autumnal tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full and quite mature structurally, with a bit of maderization already dominating the core, gentle acids and sound length and grip on the old and complex finish. This is still a pretty good drink, but it needs drinking up over the very near-term, as the writing is already on the wall. 2013-2018. **86.**

Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”

The domaine’s parcel of Suchots is even smaller than their holding in Petits Monts, as they only have twenty ares of vines here, making this one of the smallest premier cru cuvées in the Mongeards’ cellars. Les Suchots is a big premier cru by Vosne standards at more than thirteen hectares, with a dirt road running through the middle of the vineyard. The Mongeard family’s parcel of vines is in the upper section above the roadway, on the same level of the slope as Romanée-St.-Vivant, the les Verailles section of Richebourg and the les Cruots lieu à dit of Echézeaux. These vines are fifty years of age and the wine is typically raised in about a third new wood each year. This is probably the most elegant Vosne premier crus in the Mongeard stable out of the blocks, but as it is also their smallest premier cru, it is not a wine that I taste with any great regularity. Given the lovely quality of the examples of Mongeard-Mugneret Suchots that I have had the pleasure to taste, it is certainly a cuvée that I would like to taste a great deal more in the future!

2006 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2006 Suchots is already into its apogee of maturity and is drinking with lovely style and complexity at age ten. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of raspberries, forest floor, gamebird, a touch of orange peel, oak leaves and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open in personality, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, sturdy and well-balanced finish. This is not the most elegant of vintages for the Mongeard family’s Suchots, but the wine delivers plenty of depth and complexity in a very enjoyable, albeit, slightly rustic style. 2015-2035+. **90.**

1978 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1978 Suchots has certainly been fully mature for a couple of decades, but continues to drink very well indeed and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a tertiary blend of desiccated cherries and strawberries, *sous bois*, a touch of fresh nutmeg, oak leaves, coffee, venison and just a whisper of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex, focused and nicely transparent, with a good core, fine focus and grip, melted tannin and a long, bouncy and autumnal finish. Good juice. 2015-2030+. **90.**

1976 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1976 Suchots from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is not as complete as the 1978 version and there is a fairly generous touch of rusticity here on both the nose and palate, to go along with the complexity of bottle age. The bouquet shows a touch of “rusty pipe” elements in its blend of red and black cherries, roasted game, forest floor, bonfire, cinnamon and cedar. The threat of oxidation in the not too distant future can also be sensed on the nose here, though it is not yet manifest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and starting to get a touch edgy in terms of structure, but still with a good core of fruit and a bit of chewy tannin perking up the long and complex finish. This is quite a typical 1976, as this drought vintage did not produce many particularly elegant wines to start with, but solid sturdiness that has stood the test of time pretty well and offered up some good drinking along the way. My gut feeling is that it is time to

drink this wine up in regular-sized format, as the palate is starting to fray just a bit and the nose promises maderization down the road. But, that said, for drinking now, this is really not a bad wine in its more rustic style. 2015-2025. **87.**

Vosne-Romanée “les Orveaux”

The premier cru vineyard of les Orveaux is one of the highest up on the slope, and consequently, one of the cooler climats in Vosne and Flagey. The vineyard actually lies properly in the commune of Flagey-Echézeaux, on the border with Chambolle-Musigny, and in fact, only a percentage of the surface area here is actually accorded premier cru status, as the vast majority is actually grand cru and is one of the lieux à dits that comprise Echézeaux. The Mongeard family actually owns the vast majority of the premier cru section of les Orveaux, as of the 1.79 hectares of this vineyard that are ranked as premier cru, the domaine owns 1.08 hectares of vines. Of the three premier crus owned by the Mongeards in Vosne, les Orveaux has the youngest vines, with the vine age ranging from twenty-five to fifty years of age. I have to believe this dates back to the frost of the winter of 1985, as Orveaux is way up at the top of the slope, so no doubt the brutal frost of the winter of 1985 killed a fair number of vines in the family's parcels. As is true of other premier crus that lie in Flagey, such as les Beaumonts and les Rouges du Dessus, les Orveaux can start out life a little sturdy and broad-shouldered in style, with much of the inherent elegance of this cru masked behind its fine structural elements. This is not surprising, as one can say that this is also true of a great many examples from neighboring Echézeaux as well. Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret's Orveaux is raised typically in thirty-five percent new wood and is quite a long-lived premier cru, needing in general a good decade of bottle age to start to really blossom and showing all signs of keeping nicely in bottle thirty-five to forty years out from the vintage.

2010 Vosne-Romanée “les Orveaux”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

Out of bottle, the 2010 les Orveaux is still in its adolescent phase of absorbing its new wood and in need of several more years of bottle age to really start to show its true colors. The nose is pure and still quite primary, offering up a lovely blend of plums, cherries, coffee, a fine base of soil, Vosne spices and cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, superb soil inflection, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and well-balanced finish. The new oak component here is integrating beautifully and this wine should be absolutely lovely in another eight to ten years. 2020-2050+. **93.**

2009 Vosne-Romanée “les Orveaux”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2009 les Orveaux from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is a very fresh and vibrant example of this vintage, which Vincent Mongeard calls rather “*gourmand*” in style, and he thinks that this is a vintage that will offer up a lot of pleasure early on in its evolution. The nose shows a complex and generous mélange of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, venison, fine soil tones and spicy wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, but also impressively light on its feet, with a good core of fruit, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. The 2009 is decidedly more fruit-driven in personality than either the 2010 or 2008 Orveaux, but this is a very good example of the vintage. 2014-2035+? **90.**

2008 Vosne-Romanée “les Orveaux”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret's 2008 Orveaux is quite shut down at the present time, but it is quite clear that this will be a superb example of the vintage. The reserved nose offers up lovely purity and nascent complexity in its blend of strawberries, cherries, blood orange, great

minerality, Vosne spices, a touch of mustard seed in the upper register (belying the vineyard's close proximity to Chambolle?) and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with lovely focus and transparency, tangy acids, a fine core of fruit and great bounce and focus on the very long, modestly tannic finish. Like so many top 2008s, this wine will age as much on its fine acidity as it will on its tannic structure and should prove to be quite long-lived and delicious at its apogee. 2018-2045+. **92+**.

2007 Vosne-Romanée “les Orveaux”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

Like many of the 2007s, the Mongeard-Mugneret Orveaux is really drinking quite nicely at the present time, though I have little doubt that this wine will continue to age very nicely for at least another twenty years. The lovely nose is showing some signs of secondary development in its mix of strawberries, *sous bois*, venison, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a discreet base of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite complex, with a good core, blossoming, autumnal soil tones, still a bit of tannin and very good length and grip on the tangy and nicely focused finish. This is a lovely drink today, but there are plenty of reserves here and this wine will continue to cruise along nicely for a couple of decades. 2013-2035+. **91**.

2006 Vosne-Romanée “les Orveaux”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The handful of 2006s I have tasted in the last year have been pretty shut down and adolescent at the present time, and this is certainly true of this very promising Mongeard Orveaux. There is plenty of potential here, but leave this vintage in the cellar and look at vintages such as 2007 or 2009 if the urge strikes you to open a young bottle of Orveaux! The 2006 offers up a reticent bouquet of red and black cherries, venison, incipient notes of *sous bois*, hints of the truffles to come and a nice framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with an excellent core of sweet fruit, a lovely signature of soil, firm tannins and a very long, complex and tangy finish. All this fine wine needs is more time in the cellar! 2020-2050. **92+**.

1983 Vosne-Romanée “les Orveaux”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1983 Orveaux from Jean Mongeard is a really lovely example of the vintage and very much indicative of how beautifully he handled this difficult vintage. The bouquet is bright and tertiary in its blend of raspberries, cherries, orange zest, a touch of cinnamon stick, *sous bois* and venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and perfectly resolved, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and a long, meltingly tannic and complex finish. A fine bottle at its apogee. 2016-2030+. **92**.

Clos de Vougeot

There are two parcels of Clos de Vougeot owned by the extended Mongeard family- one planted in 1968 and one planted in 1962, so these are now nice old vines. One parcel lies just alongside the Château de Clos Vougeot, while the other is further south in the vineyard, lying just below the border with Grands Echézeaux, so both parcels are placed high up on the slope of the Clos, rather than down on the flatter sections near the Route Nationale. The upper section of the Clos Vougeot has quite different soils in the middle of the slope or down by the Route Nationale, as this very upper section has fairly gravelly soils with a high limestone content, whereas one finds quite a bit more clay in the mid-slope (but still with excellent drainage, due to the high portion of small chalky stones interspersed here, and the lowest section has quite deep and heavy clay soils that sit over a subterranean water source and can get very muddy in wet years. Happily, the Mongeards' two parcels are both way up at the top where there is very little clay and plenty of limestone, which gives the resulting wine a fine spine of minerality and great

longevity in the bottle. The vines here are a very good age in both parcels, ranging from forty-five to fifty years of age and this is consistently one of the top examples of Clos Vougeot found in the Côte d'Or. Vincent Mongeard these days will raise his Clos de Vougeot in anywhere from seventy-five to one hundred percent new wood, depending on the style of the vintage, and the wine always carries its wood well in my experience, though it does take a few years to fully absorb it. But, this is a grand cru chez Mongeard that is emphatically made for the long haul and should really not be broached in even more forward stylistic years like 2007 until it has spent a full decade in the cellar. It is one of the stars in the cellar, year in and year out.

2012 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2012 Clos de Vougeot from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is a stellar bottle in the making, but this is still many years away from blossoming and remains a properly young wine today. The bouquet is refined and shows excellent promise in its blend of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, venison, a fine, complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still very primary, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, beautifully suave tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. 2024-2075+. **93+**.

2008 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The Mongeard family's 2008 Clos Vougeot is a superb wine in the making, with the great transparency of the vintage very much in evidence on both the nose and palate. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, plums, a nice touch of blood orange, gamebirds, woodsmoke, a beautifully complex base of soil, fresh herbs and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a very elegant profile out of the blocks, a fine core, tangy acids and a very long, moderately tannic and soil-driven finish. A superb wine in the making. 2020-2060+. **93+**.

2006 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2006 Clos de Vougeot from the Mongeard family is a fine young wine, with its tannins starting to soften up nicely, but full maturity still at least another five or six years away and its true apogee probably more like a dozen years down the road. The fine nose delivers a complex blend of plums, baked cherries, coffee, roasted venison, bonfires, a fine base of soil and a judicious framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in terms of flavor complexity, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, moderately tannic and very well-balanced finish. This will be a very good example with a bit more bottle age. 2021-2055. **92**.

1990 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1990 Mongeard-Mugneret Clos Vougeot is one of the best examples of this vintage that I have tasted in many years, as it shows no signs of overripe, prune aromatics or flavors and really is a judiciously balanced 1990 red Burg. The deep and complex nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of roasted plums and black cherries, venison, *sous bois* and a lovely, smoky topnote redolent of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very tangy for a 1990, with a plush core of fruit, superb complexity and focus, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the impressively fresh finish. If all 1990 red Burgundies had turned out this well, I would not be always talking about the vintage in the past tense! 2009-2040. **93**.

Echézeaux

The domaine has two parcels of vines that are used for this bottling, with each one lying in a different lieu à dit that comprise the vineyard of Echézeaux. One is in the lieu à dit of Echézeaux du Dessus which lies up slope from Grands Echézeaux, and the second parcel is found in the climat of Les Treux, which Henri Mayer used to say was one of the finest sectors of the vineyard and where his brothers Georges and Lucien both had parcels of vines. For this “regular” bottling of Echézeaux, Vincent Mongeard currently raises the wine in fifty to sixty percent new oak and the vines range in age from twenty-five to fifty years of age. This is one of the top examples of the grand cru to be found in the Côte d’Or, and though I often focused on the Vieilles Vignes bottling in my merchant days, the vertical tasting in November fully underscored just how fine the “regular” Mongeard Echézeaux bottling ages.

2010 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2010 Echézeaux from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is an outstanding example of the vintage, offering up a deep, pure and very elegant nose of plums, black cherries, cocoa powder, gamebirds, incipient notes of *sous bois*, bonfires, cedar and a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a great core of fruit, tangy acids, impeccable focus and balance, fine-grained tannins and superb length and grip on the properly reserved finish. This is still many years away from starting to blossom, but this may well be the finest young vintage of this bottling I have ever tasted *chez* Mongeard. 2023-2075+. **95.**

2009 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2009 Mongeard family’s Echézeaux is an excellent bottle in the making and shows no signs of *sur maturité* on either the nose or palate. The bouquet is quite a bit more open than the 2010, delivering a fine mélange of plums, baked cherries, venison, forest floor, chocolate, mustard seed and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and impressively light on its feet for the vintage, with moderate tannins and very fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This does not have the same depth at the core as the stunning 2010, but this is a very, very successful 2009 grand cru. 2019-2040. **93.**

2008 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2008 Echézeaux from Mongeard-Mugneret is also aging very gracefully and is a very fine example of its respective vintage. The bouquet offers up a vibrant blend of red and black cherries, *sous bois*, venison, a touch of cinnamon, bonfire, mustard seed and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very soil-driven in profile, with a fine core, modest tannins and a very long, complex and tangy finish. This will start to drink well in another few years, but it will probably not reach its true apogee for another decade. A fine result. 2018-2045+. **92+.**

2007 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2007 Echézeaux from Vincent Mongeard is now drinking very well in deed and is very tasty. The bouquet wafts from the glass in an autumnal blend of forest floor, hung tame, cherries, a bit of orange peel, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and wide open, with a good core, fine soil signature and plenty of complexity on the long, gently tannic finish. This still has the remaining tannin to age another couple of decades, but they are beautifully buried in fruit and the wine is now entering its plateau of peak maturity. It does not possess the same degree of elegance as the troika from 2008 to 2010, but it is a very good bottle. 2015-2035. **90.**

2006 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

These days, the 2006 vintage has been forgotten a bit, but it is a lovely year and these wines are some of the great sleepers still around in the Burgundy market. The 2006 Echézeaux from the Mongeards is absolutely superb and clearly of the same quality as the 2009 and 2008 versions, as it jumps from the glass in a complex and nicely maturing blend of plums, red and black cherries, cocoa, a touch of hazelnut, incipient notes of forest floor and spicy wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and a long, moderately tannic and classic finish. The tannins here are still a tad chewy and a few more years' worth of bottle age will let them fall away a bit more, but this wine is getting very close to its primetime window and is a terrific bottle of Echézeaux. 2018-2055. **93.**

2000 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2000 Echézeaux from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is a terrific bottle of this cru that is now at its apogee and drinking with breed and generosity. The gorgeous bouquet delivers a constellation of cherries, plums, chocolate, *sous bois*, gamebird, summer truffles, fresh nutmeg, oak leaves and a touch of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows even more vigor today than the bottle of 2001 Vieilles Vignes served alongside of it, with a lovely core of pure, fruit, superb focus and complexity, melting tannins and excellent length and grip on the very elegant finish. A dynamite wine at its peak. 2015-2035+. **93+.**

1996 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1996 Echézeaux, which was the first made without the assistance of Jean Mongeard, is an excellent wine, with the acids of the vintage still beautifully integrated in the body of the wine. The lovely nose offer sup scents of red and black cherries, orange peel, bonfires, venison, coffee, forest floor and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and autumnal in profile, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. The balance here is very good and this is a very good 1996. 2015-2040. **91.**

1995 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

It is very interesting to compare the profiles of the 1996 and 1995 Echézeaux from the domaine, as we did at this tasting. The 1995 is far more autumnal and tertiary on the nose than its counterpart from 1996, but on the palate the wine is still quite a bit more tannic and is in need of further bottle age, whereas the 1996 is just starting to drink well. The 1995 offers up a complex nose of forest floor, fallen leaves, brown spices, bonfire, roasted venison and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with a good core, tangy acids and still a bit of chewy tannin perking up the backend and demanding a bit more bottle age. This is quite a masculine vintage of Echézeaux here, but this wine remains very well-balanced and it should be excellent to drink with another five years in the cellar. 2020-2050. **91+.**

1992 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1992 vintage of red Burgundy has really aged well, after its quite vegetal adolescence, and today, this is one of the most pleasurable vintages for current drinking. The '92 Echézeaux from the Mongeards is a superb wine, jumping from the glass in a very complex and *à point* blend of cherries, orange zest, Vosne spices, forest floor, a touch of nuttiness, gamebirds, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, melted tannins and fine complexity on the long and very refined finish. This is perhaps just a touch shorter than the very finest vintages of this bottling, but the wine is drinking absolutely beautifully today and delivers plenty of pleasure. 2015-2030+. **92.**

1978 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1978 Echézeaux from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is still at its absolute zenith of maturity today and is drinking with marvelous complexity and style. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex combination of desiccated cherries and raspberries, a touch of orange zest, duck, forest floor, woodsmoke, cloves and still just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and tangy, with a fine core, superb complexity and grip, laser-like focus and a very, very long, perfectly mature finish. A dynamite 1978 grand cru at its apogee, but with decades of life still ahead. 2015-2035. **94.**

1965 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

I cannot ever recall tasting a bottle of 1965 red Burgundy, but the Echézeaux from the Mongeard family is really a lovely wine and a total surprise. The bouquet is deep, complex and still quite vibrant, offering up scents of cherries, strawberries, orange peel, grilled venison, mustard seed, forest floor and lovely Vosne spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and delicate in structure, but with fine intensity of flavor, fine balance and an impressively long, complex and tangy finish. This is a quintessential middleweight that is still well into its plateau of maturity and drinking with plenty of style. A total revelation for the vintage! 2015-2025. **88.**



Jean Mongeard retired after the 1995 vintage, but he can often still be found holding court at the domaine.

Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes”

The old vines here were planted in 1929. This is a different parcel of vines that are also located in the climat of Les Treux (where the domaine also has a plot) that were previously owned by one of the Mongeard cousins, and so it is distinct from the other two parcels owned by the domaine that contribute to the regular bottling of Echézeaux. The domaine produced their Echézeaux Vieilles Vignes cuvée through the 2011 vintage, after which their cousin bequeathed the vines to the Hospices de Beaune, and since the 2012 vintage, the Hospices bottling of Echézeaux has hailed from this same parcel of old vines. Prior to their donation to the Hospices de Beaune, these venerable old vines were farmed by Vincent Mongeard and the wine produced entirely by the domaine.

2010 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The Mongeard family’s 2010 Echézeaux V.V. has not quite closed down as much as some grand crus from this vintage, but it is headed that way and is clearly preparing for an extended period of hibernation in the coming years. However, the promise in this wine is still very evident today, as it offers up a deep and precise nose of black cherries, dark berries, coffee, a fine base of soil, venison, incipient notes of forest floor, spices and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, ripe, fine-grained tannins and impressive length and grip on the tangy and very, very promising finish. All this needs is time. 2023-2060. **93+**.

2005 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2005 Vieilles Vignes from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is a superb example of this vintage and offers up a still quite youthful bouquet of red and black cherries, plums, chocolate, gamebird, fresh herbs, Vosne spices and cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with lovely sappy mid-palate depth,. Ripe tannins and a very long, tangy and still quite primary finish. Like so many major 2005 red Burgundies, this is years away from its peak and will last forever. 2025-2100. **95**.

2001 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2001 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes” from Vincent Mongeard is a fine bottle that is now drinking very well indeed, wafting from the glass in a complex and nicely mature mix of desiccated cherries and plums, *sous bois*, chocolate, summer truffles, gamebird, fresh nutmeg, oak leaves and a bit of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, still a touch of melting tannin evident on the backend and very fine complexity on the long finish. This has decades of life still ahead of it and is really a fine bottle, but it is now into its plateau of peak maturity and it is far from a crime to be opening bottles today! 2015-2040. **93**.

1991 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1991 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is a glorious wine and I was shocked to see just how close in quality it was to the superb Grands Echézeaux in this vintage. The deep and utterly brilliant bouquet delivers scents of black plums, woodsmoke, *sous bois*, black cherries, dried leaves, espresso and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with a great core of fruit, outstanding transparency, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very refined, tangy and classic finish. This is a great bottle of Echézeaux! 2013-2040+. **94**.

1989 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The Mongeard family's 1989 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes” is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a decidedly riper rendition of this *terroir* than the 1991 version, but also excellent complexity and breed. The superb nose is a wide open and very pretty blend of red and black cherries, a touch of nutskin, forest floor, venison, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke and dark soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with excellent acidity for the vintage, melting tannins and very good length and grip on the lovely finish. This is a superb bottle of '89 red Burgundy. 2009-2020+. **92.**

1988 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The domaine's 1988 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes” is a very good wine, but the last time I tasted it back in 2010, the wine was still a bit buttoned up behind its structural elements and struck me as likely to always be a rather four-square vintage of this fine bottling. The bouquet is deep, complex and starting to nicely show its tertiary elements in its blend of grilled meat, dark berries, a fine base of soil tones that are starting to move towards the autumnal (but are not there yet), a touch of soy sauce, charred wood and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and reasonably complex, albeit just a bit chunky in personality, with a fair bit of firm tannin still in evidence, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. It is possible that this wine is still in the last stages of its adolescence and will eventually gain more breadth and breed with further bottle age, but I have a feeling that this will always be just a bit chewy and four-square in personality. It is a good drink, but not quite up to the level of the very best vintages of this wine. 2010-2035+. **89+.**

1985 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

There was a time when I most definitely preferred the 1983s from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret to their 1985s, as the family made simply great '83, but at our vertical tasting at the domaine in November, the '85 old vine Echézeaux had eclipsed its counterpart from 1983. The 1985 offers up an excellent bouquet of desiccated cherries and red plums, summer truffles, cinnamon, clove, roasted duck, forest floor, orange peel and a topnote of brown spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very complex, with simply beautiful balance, a lovely core, bright acids, still a touch of backend tannin and outstanding length and grip on the complex and wide open finish. A beautiful bottle of Echézeaux. 2015-2035+. **94.**

1983 Echézeaux “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

For many years, I had to give the nod to the 1983 Echézeaux Vieilles Vignes versus the 1985, as it was more precise aromatically and every bit as deep and complex on the palate. It still shows its precision on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex and mature blend of cherries, raspberries, cinnamon, forest floor, coffee, orange peel and a topnote of cloves. On the palate however, the wine is just starting to show a bit of its structural chassis, as the fruit seems to be commencing its slow fade out. There is still good depth at the core and fine complexity, but this is starting to look over the far edge of its plateau of maturity (after an outstanding peak run) and will begin to decline in the not too distant future. Still a good drink, but not quite as good as it was five years ago and it is probably not a bad idea to drink this up over the coming five to ten years in regular-sized format. 2015-2025. **91.**

Echézeaux “la Grande Complication” Vieilles Vignes

The la Grande Complication bottling of Echézeaux was first produced by the Mongeard family in the 2012 vintage, as this cuvée was created to replace the prior Vieilles Vignes bottling after those vines were bequeathed to the Hospices de Beaune. This comes from a few rows of

vines planted with selection massale in the family's parcel in the lieu à dit of Echézeaux du Dessus by Jean Mongeard in his very first year as head of the domaine back in 1945. These vines produce very small bunches and small berries and probably have deserved to be bottled on their own for many years, but as the domaine already had their Vieilles Vignes bottling produced from their cousin's plot of vines planted in 1929, it was not until the 2012 vintage that this bottling was created by Vincent Mongeard. The wine is currently aged entirely in new casks each year and is made in very small quantities. One would suspect that it will not be produced every year, but thus far, there has been a bottling of la Grande Complication in the 2012, 2013 and 2014 vintages. I have only had the pleasure to taste the 2013 version thus far.

2013 Echézeaux “la Grande Complication” V. V.- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2013 la Grande Complication bottling of Echézeaux from Vincent Mongeard is a very young and promising wine that still shows a bit of the vintage's early *herbacité* today on the nose. The bouquet is deep, black fruity and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, black plums, woodsmoke, espresso, a lovely base of soil, fresh herbs and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a fine core, ripe tannins and lovely vibrancy and backend energy on the focused and still very young finish. This will be a very fine example of the vintage in due course, but it needs to be buried in the cellar for a while longer. 2023-2060. 93+.

Grands Echézeaux

The Grands Echézeaux bottling is one of the great flagship wines of Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret and they have consistently made one of the greatest examples of this grand cru for as long as I can remember. The oldest vintages of Grands Echézeaux from the Mongeard family that I have had the pleasure to taste is the 1964, which I have been fortunate to cross paths with on three or four occasions over the years (most recently at the family's grand tasting in November of 2015, where they generously opened bottles for more than one hundred guests!) and it is a great, great wine and a superb testimony to just how long-lived this cuvée is from the domaine. The Mongeard family owns just under one and a half hectares of vines in this vineyard, making it, along with Echézeaux, their largest holding in a grand cru vineyard. The wine is typically not destemmed one hundred percent and usually includes a significant percentage of whole clusters in most years, if the vintage characteristics allowed for ripe stems. These days, the Grands Echézeaux is usually raised entirely in new oak each year. The domaine's parcel is located at the upper end of the slope of Grands Echézeaux, right in the heart of the vineyard (and just below the little dirt road that separates the two Echézeaux lieux à dits of Les Poulaillères and Echézeaux du Dessus on the hill above Grands Echézeaux), with the vines here are all in their primes, ranging from forty years of age to nearly seventy years-old. In my book, Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret's example of Grands Echézeaux, along with the bottlings from Maison Joseph Drouhin and Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, is the most consistently excellent example of this great terroir found in all of Burgundy.

2013 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2013 Grands Echézeaux from Vincent Mongeard, like all of his 2013s, is still a very young wine and showing a bit of *herbacité* on the nose at this early stage of its evolution. The bouquet is a youthful and complex blend of black cherries, black plums, espresso, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very

primary in profile, with a fine core, bright acids, ripe tannic and a long, vibrant and youthful finish. The more modest ripeness of 2013 has given this quite a black fruity personality out of the blocks, with its fair share of herb tones, but it should prove to be a lovely wine with sufficient time to blossom. 2023-2060. **93.**

2012 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret's 2012 Grands Echézeaux is a brilliant young wine, offering up a deep and very pure nose of plums, black cherries, cocoa, gamebirds, woodsmoke, a very complex base of soil tones and a fine base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with excellent nascent complexity, ripe tannins and superb focus and grip on the very long and still very primary finish. All the constituent components are in place for greatness down the road, but one will need some patience! 2025-2075. **95.**

2010 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

Like so many 2010s today, the Grands Echézeaux from Vincent Mongeard is very hunkered down and reserved at the present time, but with glorious potential for down the road. The bouquet offers up a black fruity mélange of dark berries, black plums, venison, woodsmoke, complex soil tones, coffee, mustard seed and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off beautiful mid-palate depth, with excellent focus and balance, fine-grained tannins and a very, very long, tangy and promising finish. A superb bottle in the making. 2027-2075. **95.**

2009 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

If one needed any more evidence that Vincent Mongeard is at the top of his game today, then consider just how beautifully he has done in the 2009 vintage! His 2009 Grands Echézeaux is truly exceptional, with no signs of overripeness in evidence and a very classy and elegant profile on both the nose and palate. The excellent bouquet delivers scents of baked plums and black cherries, venison, chocolate, woodsmoke, fresh nutmeg, a fine base of soil, a touch of mustard seed and a sound foundation of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the wide open and really blossoming finish. The wine is already starting to show some autumnal shadings and is not a bad drink today, but I would give it another four or five years in the cellar to allow it to more fully develop its secondary layers of complexity. Really a terrific 2009. 2020-2045+. **94.**

2007 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2007 Mongeard-Mugneret Grands Echézeaux is a really fine example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a complex and classy blend of plums, cherries, chocolate, blossoming notes of *sous bois*, game and nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a good core, lovely complexity and a long, tangy and modestly tannic finish. This is already a very suave and elegant bottle that is drinking with real polish, but it has tons of life still ahead of it and there is no rush to drink it anytime soon. A fine, fine '07. 2015-2040. **93+.**

2005 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 2005 Grands Echézeaux from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is going to be a great, great wine, but it is still a puppy and needs at least another decade in the cellar. The bouquet is young, but stunning, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of red plums, red and black cherries, a hint of blood orange, a gorgeously complex base of soil, cocoa powder, gamebirds, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with great

depth of sappy fruit at the core, seamless, ripe tannins, outstanding soil signature and a very, very long, tangy and laser-like finish. This is an utterly brilliant bottle in the making. 2025-2100. **96+.**

2003 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

Vincent Mongeard's 2003 Grands Echézeaux is quite typical of the vintage, but quite tasty in its idiosyncratic style. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite roasted in profile, delivering scents of cassis, hung game, coffee grounds, charred wood and damp leaves. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, broad and velvety on the attack, with a bit of a dip in the mid-palate, melted tannins and nice complexity on the fairly short finish. This is an okay drink today and will not get better, but it is a far cry from a classic expression of this *terroir*. 2015-2025. **87.**

1991 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

Mongeard-Mugneret's 1991 Grands Echézeaux is a brilliant wine and one of my favorites of this superb vintage. The deep, complex and vibrant nose soars from the glass in a constellation of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, *sous bois*, a nice touch of blood orange, a bit of venison, charred wood and a very complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off a fine core of black fruit, with lovely soil signature, tangy acids, stunning complexity and outstanding length and grip on the still modestly tannic finish. The 1991 Grands Echézeaux from the Mongeard family has just reached its apogee of maturity, but this perfectly balanced wine still has many decades of life ahead of it and it would be a crime to drink this wine today if one only had one or two bottles in the cellar, as it is going to cruise along at this very high level for many, many more years to come. A gorgeous wine. 2009-2050. **95.**

1982 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1982 Grands Echézeaux from Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is a truly superb bottle of wine and a revelation for the vintage. As recounted above, the domaine practiced a green harvest in this vintage and attained far better concentration in this high yield vintage than most of their neighbors. The beautiful nose soars from the glass in a tertiary blend of cherries, raspberries, cocoa powder, *sous bois*, cinnamon, a touch of truffle and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and impressively deep at the core, with superb complexity and focus, still a bit of fine-grained tannins on the backend and superb length and grip on the refined and classy finish. A dynamite 1982! 2012-2025+. **92.**

1978 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

If memory serves me correctly, I have only tasted Jean Mongeard's brilliant 1978 Grands Echézeaux on one occasion, and that was many, many years ago. I was thrilled to see it standing in the lineup at the November tasting and the wine is everything I remember about it, offering gorgeous depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The superb bouquet offers a blend of raspberries, cherries, a touch of orange zest, gamebirds, *sous bois*, Vosne spices, cedar and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very, very transparent, with a sweet core of red fruit, lovely focus and grip and just a whisper of backend tannin still perking up the wine on the very, very long and complex finish. This wine is at its zenith, but is so beautifully balanced and I can envision it cruising along at this great level for decades to come! 2015-2045. **95.**

1976 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

I wondered if the 1976 Grands Echézeaux was not a perfect bottle at this gala tasting at the domaine in November, but Vincent Mongeard thought it was showing fairly correct. The wine is quite autumnal on the palate today, delivering a blend of cherries, venison, coffee, forest floor, cocoa, oak leaves, bonfires and just a whisper of the oxidation hovering on the horizon. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely plush at the core, with good focus and

grip, fine complexity, but a bit of remaining backend tannin now poking out on the long finish. The combination of oxidation not too far away and the bit of fruit drying out and not covering the remaining tannins fully makes me think, if this bottle is representative, that it is time to drink up this wine. 2015-2025? **87+?**

1973 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

It has been several years since I last tasted this wine, but include the note here based on how good it was at that point in the time and the possibility that it is still good today. From a rather difficult vintage, this wine was rather amazing. The nose is deep and complex, offering up notes of chocolate, crushed raspberries, venison, plums, plenty of *sous bois*, and a topnote of cinnamon sticks. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and really pretty well-balanced, with good focus, decent depth at the core, and good length and grip on the finish. This wine had a lovely, juicy core of plummy fruit for about five minutes, and then thinned out a bit in the mid-palate from there on out. But still, though the finish shows signs of breaking up in the not too distant future, it is still a pretty amazing drink for a 1973 red Burgundy. 2003-2010+? **89.**

1972 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

(This too is an older note, as I have not had the good fortune to drink a bottle of this wine in several years, but as the original note indicates, the wine should still be drinking beautifully, so I include it here.) The 1972 Grands Echézeaux is a classic Mongeard wine, delivering a rich, complex and beautifully focused glass of grand cru. The fine bouquet offers up scents of singed game, chocolate, vinesmoke, plums, cassis, forest floor, earth, herbs and toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and black fruity, with great depth and focus, and a very long and opulent finish. Like many of Jean Mongeard's wines, this is a wine that is long on opulence and personality, though it is not the most elegant interpretation of the vineyard. However, I have had many an old Mongeard-Mugneret bottle, and they seem to never fail to faithfully deliver all the potential of their respective vineyards and vintages. The 1972 Grands Echézeaux is a very fine bottle of wine at its apogee and with years of life still in it. 2001-2025+. **92.**

1964 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

I have had the good fortune to drink the beautiful 1964 Grands Echézeaux from Mongeard-Mugneret on a handful of occasions over the years, but I had not seen a bottle now in more than a decade and was thrilled that the family generously chose to show this wine at their November 2015 tasting. This is a gorgeous bottle of wine that has been fully mature for decades, but continues to cruise along flawlessly and has decades of life still in it. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of desiccated cherries and red plums, cocoa powder, summer truffles, Vosne spices, gamebird, forest floor, mustard seed and still a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very complex and still at its absolute peak, with a super core of sweet fruit, lovely soil complexity, melted tannins and great focus and grip on the very, very long, velvety and vibrant finish. A great wine. 2015-2035+. **95.**

Richebourg

Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret makes one of the greatest expressions of Richebourg to be found in the entire Côte, though this is their smallest parcel of vines in a grand cru and the wine is not all that easy to cross paths with once the bottles leave the domaine to be buried in clients' cellars for their extended period of aging. The family has just over thirty-one ares of vines in Richebourg, located in the core of the vineyard (rather than in the lieu à dit of les Veroilles), at the same level on the slope as the middle of the vineyard of la Romanée-Conti. The Mongeard family's plot of vines here is again at a beautiful age, ranging from forty to sixty years of age

and the wine is routinely treated to all new barrels in the cellar each year. This is one of the grand crus in which Vincent Mongeard will often retain a percentage of whole clusters during the fermentation, if the vintage is favorable to perfectly ripe stems, and the wine is not surprisingly, the longest-lived and slowest wine to unfold in the Mongeard-Mugneret roster of grand crus.

2013 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

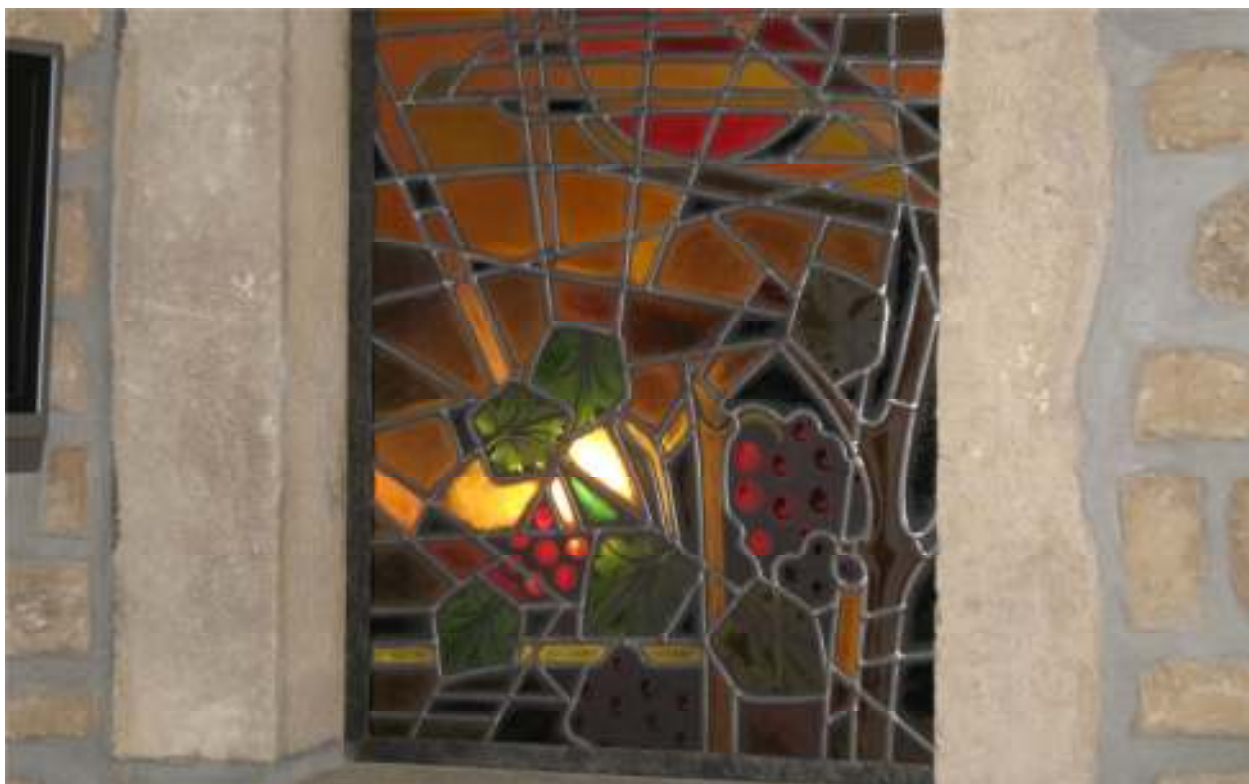
The 2013 Richebourg from Vincent Mongeard is a really superb young wine, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, a touch of venison, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a well-integrated base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still very primary, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long, tangy and youthful finish. This has the cooler, black fruity profile of a moderately ripe vintage, but everything is in place for this wine to age long and gracefully and it should be marvelously complex at its apogee, if not the most opulent vintage of Richebourg from the Mongeard family. 2025-2075. **94.**

2005 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

I had the good fortune to taste the 2005 Richebourg alongside of the Grands Echézeaux from this vintage and had a slight preference for the Grands Echézeaux at the present time. Interestingly, at age ten, the Richebourg '05 was still in the process of absorbing its wood on the backend and there was still a touch of uncovered oak tannin showing on the finish. The bouquet is deep, pure and like so many top 2005s, also very closed today, as it reluctantly offers up scents of plums, black cherries, chocolate, woodsmoke, venison, a touch of fresh herbs and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very primary, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, tangy acids and a very long, chewy finish. There are ripe fruit skin tannins here that are perfectly buried in the fruit component, and the wine has plenty of stuffing to eventually do the same with the wood tannins, but it was a bit surprising to taste a ten year-old wine still in the process of accommodating its new wood. I am sure it will eventually do so and end up being a terrific wine, but will it ever be able to catch the sublime quality of the seamlessly balanced 2005 Grands Echézeaux *chez* Mongeard? 2030-2100. **94+.**

2002 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

This is not my vintage of the century (or even the decade), but if all 2002 red Burgundies showed the same soil reflection as the Mongeard Richebourg, I would stop attaching caveats to my notes on '02 red Burls. This is a flat out brilliant wine, soaring from the glass in a blaze of raspberries, red plums, bacon fat, raw cocoa, incipient notes of forest floor, a touch of mustard seed and a beautifully buried foundation of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a glorious core of fruit, lovely soil signature and a very, very long, suavely-tannic and tangy finish. Some might note the oak char here as a bit too toasty, but I like this marriage with Richebourg better than the very spicy, Taransaud style of new wood. This is a great, great wine in the making, but it is still a bit too young for primetime drinking. 2020-2065. **97.**



1996 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1996 Mongeard-Mugneret Richebourg is one of the great wines of the vintage and if all the '96s were evolving as gracefully as this wine, we would have no reservations with the vintage! The stunning nose is deep, pure and complex, as it offers up a superb constellation of plums, red and black cherries, cocoa powder, Vosne spices, a beautiful base of soil, nutskins, just a whisper of autumn leaves and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and utterly suave, with a lovely core of fruit, seamless balance, modest tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This is already a stunning glass of wine, but I would be inclined to still hold off gratification for another five years and really let it blossom completely. 2021-2070. **95+**.

1995 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1995 Mongeard-Mugneret Richebourg is one of the top examples of the vintage that I have tasted in recent times and this wine is going to be stunning when it reaches full maturity. It is still a handful of years away from that point, but offers up a beautifully promising nose of plums, cherries, forest floor, duck, Vosne spices, fresh nutmeg, a hint of mustard seed and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and almost sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, still a bit of beautifully-integrated tannin to resolve, lovely balance and a very, very long and complex finish. With the proper food pairing, I am sure this is already a great drink, but I would still give it another half dozen years in the cellar to allow it to really reach its peak- where it will remain for decades and decades to come! 2022-2075. **95**.

1993 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The Mongeard family's 1993 Richebourg is now into its plateau of peak maturity and is drinking beautifully. The superb and vibrant bouquet offers up scents of plums, black cherries, cocoa powder, venison, a complex base of soil, a touch of bacon fat, mustard seed, dusty rose

and toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off outstanding mid-palate depth, with a great core, seamless balance, melting tannins and superb length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. This is a bit more black fruity in personality than some mature vintages, but every bit as magical as the very finest examples of this great bottling. The wine is drinking brilliantly well, but has easily another half century of life ahead of it. 2015-2065. **98.**

1991 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1991 vintage at Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret is one of my all-time favorites and the '91 Richebourg is drinking splendidly. The deep, pure and absolutely beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a blaze of black plums, smoked duck, roasted black cherries, forest floor, bonfires, a beautiful base of soil tones and a deft touch of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still young and black fruity in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and complexity, still a bit of tannin to resolve and outstanding length and grip on the cunningly balanced and very pure finish. Richebourg does not usually float my boat, but this is a beautifully refined and complex example that is as long on elegance as it is on pure muscle. 2013-2040+. **95.**

1989 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1989 Mongeard-Mugneret Richebourg is another stunning wine at its apogee. The superb and absolutely *à point* nose offers up a marvelous mélange of red plums, cherries, duck, fresh nutmeg, *sous bois*, mustard seed, cocoa powder and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very tangy for an '89 red Burgundy, with a plump core of fruit, beautiful soil signature, still a trace of backend tannin and great focus and grip on the very, very long, very complex finish. This is a brilliant 1989 red Burgundy! 2015-2055. **96.**

1988 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1988 Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret Richebourg is a lovely example of the vintage, but this very, very good wine could not quite keep pace with some of these other mature vintages of this *cuvée* on display at the great tasting at the estate in November of 2015. The bouquet is pure, complex and wide open, offering up scents of cherries, raspberries, campfire, duck, forest floor, a touch of nuttiness, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and tangy, with a good, solid core, lovely intensity of flavor, still some backend tannin waiting to fully fade and lovely length and grip on the autumnal, complex and vibrant finish. A lovely bottle that is drinking beautifully. 2015-2035+. **92.**

1987 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1987 Richebourg from Jean Mongeard is still drinking beautifully and shows no signs of imminent decline. This is a classic middleweight from this lovely, transparent vintage, wafting from the glass in a complex and utterly classic nose of raspberries, blood orange, *sous bois*, venison, mustard seed, Vosne spice tones and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with good depth in the mid-palate, outstanding intensity of flavor and complexity, faded tannins, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the classy finish. So many top 1987s have now come and gone, after delivering truly lovely wines at their apogees, but the Mongeard-Mugneret Richebourg is still in its prime of life and is a really lovely bottle. This may not have the depth or opulence of a great vintage of Richebourg, but it has the complexity and flavor profile of the vineyard and really is a delicious bottle for current drinking. 2015-2025. **91.**

DOMAINE GILLES BARGE CLASSIC AND EXCEPTIONAL EXAMPLES OF CÔTE-RÔTIE



Domaine Gilles Barge is one of the great, under the radar producers of classically-styled Côte-Rôtie to be found in Ampuis. The Barge family has been based in the region as *vignerons* since 1860 and they were the very first estate to sell their wines in bottle in the appellation, when Jules Barge first began offering his Côte-Rôtie domaine-bottled to private clients in 1929. Jules Barge was the grandfather of today's proprietor of the family domaine, Gilles Barge, who has in turn been joined by his own son Julien in recent years. Gilles also has a younger brother, seventeen years his junior, Jean-Pierre Barge, who has also helped with the domaine over the course of his career. The family property now extends to six and a half hectares of vines in the village of Ampuis, in some of the very finest *lieux à dits* in the appellation and most planted to old vines. The Barge family were first bit by the bug of vineyard management and winemaking back in the days before phylloxera arrived in the region, as Jules Barge's grandfather was hired by a doctor in Lyon to tend his parcel of vines in the slopes up above Ampuis back in 1860. By the turn of the century, the Barge family had acquired some plots of their own in the steep slopes of the village. Today, the family domaine is based in the heart of the town, walking distance from the main *Place* in the center of Ampuis, across the street from the Guigal cellars and

located right at the base of the great vineyard slope of Côte Brune that rises up above the town. Not coincidentally, the family has a very choice parcel in this great vineyard.

Jules Barge's son, Pierre Barge, took over the small family domaine from his father in the early 1970s, after having worked side by side with him for many years. Back in the decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the Barge family farmed two hectares of vines in Ampuis, which was considered quite a large domaine by the standards of Côte-Rôtie back in this era. Neither Jules nor Pierre Barge were trained winemakers, which was the case with all of the other old timers in Côte-Rôtie back in their generation (including such seminal figures as Marius Gentaz and Albert Dervieux), and in fact, Pierre Barge's son, Gilles Barge, was the very first *vigneron* in the entire appellation of Côte-Rôtie to have been formally trained at oenology school when he returned back to the family domaine in 1979! In addition to having studied oenology at the university, Gilles Barge also worked for a few years with a wine merchant in Ampuis prior to joining his father Pierre at the family estate, so he was well-versed in the wine trade and a *vigneron* who was well-prepared for the dramatic changes in Côte-Rôtie that arrived with his generation. In many ways, one can consider Gilles Barge as the polar opposite of Marcel Guigal in the appellation in this era, for the latter is the modernizing son of a *Chef de Cave* for the then-preeminent *négociant* firm of Vidal-Fleury, bent on spreading the word about the great quality of the wines from the Rhône Valley (and building an empire at the same time) and the former is the traditionally-minded son of the land whose family was the first to estate bottle the wines of Côte-Rôtie and who has spent much of his career just outside the limelight. Both men, in their own ways, have been seminal figures in Côte-Rôtie and did tremendous service to the appellation in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. Gilles Barge has been one of the most important *vignerons* in the firmament of Côte-Rôtie since his arrival full-time at the domaine in 1979, increasing his family's vineyard patrimony, creating new single vineyard bottlings from the domaine, reclaiming and replanting a great *terroir* first abandoned in the wake of phylloxera and acting as the President of the Syndicate of *Vignerons* in Côte-Rôtie from 1989 until 2001. Throughout his long and illustrious career, he has always remained a staunch traditionalist in his approach to his wines, retaining the stems in the classic style during fermentation, eschewing the use of new oak barrels and always seeking to produce long-lived and cellar-worthy wines that blossom into very elegant examples of the appellation. As we said, stylistically the polar opposite of Marcel Guigal (though both men share the same staunch commitment to quality), but perhaps every bit as important in the historical epoch that saw Côte-Rôtie emerge from the shadows and become well-known as one of France's greatest red wines.

When Gilles Barge was a teenager and considering studying oenology at the university, his father Pierre had only officially taken over as the head of the family domaine a few years earlier, as his grandfather Jules Barge had enjoyed a very, very long and successful career as a *vigneron* (in the context of those far less lucrative days in Côte-Rôtie) and had only retired at the outset of the 1970s. However, as has been the practice amongst the Barge men for seven generations now, Pierre had worked decades alongside of his father Jules in the steep slopes above Ampuis prior to taking over formally as head of the domaine upon the retirement of his father. The domaine's wines really started to gain a strong following in the latter half of the 1960s and by 1974, Pierre Barge was domaine-bottling the estate's entire production for sale directly in bottle. In the Barge family tradition, despite Gilles Barge returning home to the domaine in 1979 and having vinified every vintage here since 1978, he did not formally replace

his father at the helm of Domaine Barge until 1994, and up through the vintages of the late 1980s, the wines continued to be labeled as Domaine Pierre Barge. From that time forward, they have been labeled as Domaine Gilles Barge, though Gilles has had the assistance of his own son Julien now for several years, as Julien Barge's first vintage here was the 2002. During the era of both Jules and Pierre Barge, the family produced solely a blended example of Côte-Rôtie from their fine parcels in Ampuis, as was the style in the region in this era, but by the late 1980s, Gilles Barge was prepared to start to produce single vineyard bottlings from their prime parcels and the last classically blended bottling from the estate (as Jules and Pierre Barge had produced over the course of their careers) was produced in 1990. And beautifully-situated vineyard parcels the family most assuredly had accumulated by this era, as these included vines in such great *terroirs* as a full hectare of vines in the superb *lieu à dit* of Côte Brune, as well as parcels in the *lieux à dits* of Côte Blonde and Lancement (immediately above Côte Blonde on the slope) that comprised just under a hectare between them.

With the arrival of Gilles Barge at the family domaine and the synergy found in the growing international appeal of Côte-Rôtie in the marketplace of the 1980s, the family was able to expand the number of hectares that they worked during this era. First, the Barge family entered into a *fermage* agreement with Joseph Duplessy in Ampuis in 1978, who had been a very, very important producer of the same generation as Jules Barge and who owned superb parcels of old vines in the *lieux à dits* of Côte Blonde and Baleyat, with these vines having been planted to *Petite Sérine* in the immediate aftermath of the second world war in 1946. With the addition of the half hectare of old vines from Joseph Duplessy and the subsequent renting of parcels in the *lieux à dits* of Côte Blonde (twenty *ares*) and Boucharey (one hectare) at the start of the 1980s, Domaine Barge's blended bottling of Côte-Rôtie began to be more of an even blend of *Côte de Blonde* and *Côte de Brune* fruit, rather than the primarily *Côte de Brune* base of the wine back in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. Starting in 1989, the family began bottling the production from the vines rented from Joseph Duplessy on their own, calling this wine Cuvée Goutillonnage, but it was a very small production cuvée that augmented the main, blended bottling from Domaine Barge. Throughout the decade of the 1980s, Gilles Barge had begun to contemplate keeping the two differently-styled sections of the *vignobles* of Côte-Rôtie separate, and by the 1989 vintage, he was prepared to start offering more than the single, blended cuvée of Côte-Rôtie that his father and grandfather had produced. The Domaine Barge Cuvée Goutillonnage was the first bottling to be offered beyond the family's blended Côte-Rôtie, with this bottling uniquely produced in the 1989, 1990 and 1991 vintages. Additionally, in 1991, Monsieur Barge also produced a second bottling to augment the Cuvée Goutillonnage, and today's fine flagship wine of Cuvée du Plessy (named in honor of Monsieur Duplessy) was launched. The wine was initially produced from the family's own parcels in the Côte Blonde and Lancement in 1991, and beginning with the 1994 vintage, the domaine also added in the fruit from the half hectare of old vines rented from Monsieur Duplessy into the blend for the Cuvée du Plessy. This has now become their flagship bottling of *Côte de Blonde* fruit from the domaine since 1994.

In this same year of 1994, when the Duplessy fruit that was going into the Cuvée Goutillonnage made the transition into the blend of the Cuvée du Plessy, the vineyard sources for this bottling were further expanded by the addition of more fruit from a full hectare of vines in the *lieu à dit* of Boucharey (situated above the vineyard of Le Combard on the *Côte de Blonde*

slope on the Tupin-Ampuis boundary) and sixty *ares* in the *lieu à dit* of Lancement (just above the vineyard of Côte Blonde on the slope and next door to Baleyat). All of these are classic *terroirs* in the Côte de Blonde and the Cuvée du Plessy is a quintessential example of this style of Côte-Rôtie: perfumed, velvety and utterly refined on the palate, with tannins that tend to fall away a few years ahead of the other Barge bottlings. As the Duplessy parcels were co-planted with viognier, this bottling has always included five percent of the white grape in the blend and this has continued with the expansion of this cuvée with other Côte de Blonde vineyard parcels since 1994. Prior to the addition of new vineyard sources to serve as the base of the Cuvée du Plessy, Gilles Barge and his father produced only three thousand bottles a year of the Cuvée Goutillonnage from the Joseph Duplessy old vine parcels, but this has expanded to fully twenty-five thousand bottles of Cuvée du Plessy over the years, with the consolidation of the Cuvée Goutillonnage fruit in the cuvée, as well as all of the additional fruit going into the blend of the Cuvée du Plessy from other parcels and today, this is the largest of the three cuvées of Côte-Rôtie produced by Gilles and Julien Barge.

In addition to starting to produce single vineyard bottlings at the family domaine during his tenure, Gilles Barge also undertook the arduous task of the restoration of the steep hillside vineyard of le Combard, in conjunction with two other *vignerons* in the region, Yves Gangloff and Stéphane Montez. The three *vignerons* pooled resources and undertook the reclamation of this outstanding *terroir*, that had first been abandoned to vineyard cultivation in the aftermath of phylloxera in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and then again lost in the aftermath of the First World War and the dearth of men to work the vines. Le Combard is a just under two and a half hectare, very, very steep, stony vineyard on the southern border of Ampuis and the neighboring village of Tupin. In his boyhood, Gilles Barge and his friends would often spend long afternoons playing in this almost entirely abandoned vineyard. It has had a long history as one of the top *terroirs* of Ampuis, dating back to Roman times, when it was first cleared, terraced and planted to vines, but was almost lost by the time that the three *vignerons* began to clear away the brush and trees and breath life back into this parcel in the late 1980s. It is rather geologically unique in the appellation in being comprised of volcanic soils, with the top half of the vineyard laced with glacially-deposited round stones (similar to the *galets roulés* of Châteauneuf du Pape) and produces a wine that beautifully synthesizes the elegance and perfume of a classic Côte de Blonde wine with a bit more backbone from the volcanic, stony soils found here. It is one of the steepest vineyards to be found in all of Côte-Rôtie and the *vignerons* here contracted for the construction of a small monorail to service the upper reaches of this ravine-like vineyard, which they jointly use to move equipment up into the vines and bring in their grapes at harvest. Working when their viticultural responsibilities in their other vineyard parcels allowed, it took the three men and their families fully two decades to completely clear and reclaim the entirety of the vineyard of Le Combard from the encroaching wild, and Gilles and Julien Barge produced their first bottling from their one hectare of vines here in the 2007 vintage.

In addition to the expanded offering of Cuvée du Plessy in 1994, Gilles Barge also began to bottle and label his one hectare of vines in the vineyard of Côte Brune on their own in the same vintage, with the first release of this wine as a single vineyard bottling released at the same time as the second vintage of Cuvée du Plessy. The Côte Brune bottling from Gilles Barge also includes viognier, with two percent of this cuvée comprised of white grapes, and this is not

typical of bottlings from this *lieu à dit*, as most *vignerons* with parcels in Côte Brune only grow syrah here. The viognier certainly takes a distinct backseat in the traditionally broad-shouldered Barge style of the *terroir* in Côte Brune, and this bottling is decidedly more “masculine” in style than the Cuvée du Plessy and takes a few more years in the cellar to fully blossom and begin to drink with generosity. The vines that the Barge family farms in Côte Brune range from forty to sixty years of age today, with all of the vines planted here *selection massale*. This parcel of vines were first purchased by Jules Barge in 1950 and this was the backbone of the blended Côte-Rôtie that the domaine made exclusively in his era. As noted above, beginning in 2009, the long work of resurrecting the vineyard of le Combard finally came to fruition with the release of the 2007 vintage of this cuvée from the one hectare of vines owned by the Barge family, bringing the number of distinct Côte-Rôtie bottlings offered by the Barge family up to three. The combination of the volcanic soils and the *galets roulés* found in the soils of this *Côte de Blonde* vineyard tend to give a wine that is a bit more structured out of the blocks than most examples from these chalkier soils of the southern half of Côte-Rôtie and the Le Combard bottling really seems to my palate to perform like a hypothetical blend of what we would traditionally think of as classic expressions of both the *Côte de Blonde* and *Côte de Brune* styles. The wine includes fully eight percent viognier in the blend, but there seems to be the potential for a bit more spine and tannic chassis here than in the Cuvée du Plessy, which remains the far more archetypical example of Côte-Rôtie from the *Côte de Blonde*. However, for the foreseeable future, the Côte Brune bottling remains the deepest, most structured and potentially longest-lived of the three Domaine Barge bottlings of Côte-Rôtie. The upcoming release of the 2013 vintage will find the fourth cuvée to be released from the Barge family, as Gilles and Julien Barge will produce their first bottling of pure “Côte Blonde”, from some of the family’s oldest vines in this vineyard. It will produce sixteen hundred bottles and I am eagerly looking forward to tasting the wine in the near future!

In terms of vinification in the Barge cellars, Gilles Barge has very much followed along in the footsteps of his father Pierre, but with a willingness to also change things a bit in the cellars to fine tune the wines during his era. Fining and filtration of the Barge wines were both discontinued under the regime of Gilles Barge, and when he adopted the use of stainless steel tanks for fermentation in the 1980s, he did so while still continuing to submerge the cap by creating a grid of wooden planks to hold down the cap and give him a classically-styled extraction, while still being able to take advantage of the temperature control and superior hygiene presented by the use of stainless steel. However, the use of whole clusters and long *elevage* in old casks, *demi-muids* and *foudres* has always been the Barge family recipe for the raising of their wines prior to bottling, and this has not been changed as one generation passed on the reins of the domaine to the next. In particular, the use of the stems seems to be one of the most important elements in maintaining the very traditional style of Côte-Rôtie produced here and which harkens back stylistically to the wines of Marius Gentaz, amongst other old-timers. Another very traditional aspect of the *elevage* here is the extended period of time that the wines spend in their older wood vessels prior to bottling, with the wines typically spending fully two years (three for the Côte Brune) in aged casks, *demi-muids* and *foudres* prior to bottling. There is no set system to assigning barrels or larger casks for aging, but the trend here in the last decade or so is to use more *demi-muids*, as Gilles and his son Julien Barge really like how this sized-barrel works with their Côte-Rôties. In recent times, the Cuvée du Plessy has evolved to be raised primarily in older barrels, while the Le Combard and Côte Brune in *demi-muids* and

foudres. Gilles Barge has never been a fan of new wood for Côte-Rôtie, which he feels obscures the underlying *terroir* in the wines, so wood is replaced very slowly here, with the goal simply to maintain sound vessels for raising the wine, rather than imparting the flavor of new wood in their classic examples of Côte-Rôtie. These are great, great examples of Côte-Rôtie and the Barge family deserves to be more widely recognized for the exceptional, classic wines that they have produced from these steep slopes in Ampuis for seven generations. They remain outstanding bargains and are one of the absolute blue chips of Côte-Rôtie, if one is looking for great wines built for the cellar, rather than investment vehicles.



The reclaimed and newly-terraced sections of the Le Combard vineyard in the southern end of the Côte de Blonde.

Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”

As noted above, the Cuvée du Plessy was first released under this label in the 1991 vintage. It is today the classic “Côte de Blonde” bottling from Domaine Barge, which is comprised of a blend of parcels in this southern half of the Ampuis vignobles of Côte-Rôtie, with the heart of the blend found in the old vines that the family originally rented from Joseph Duplessy beginning in 1978. The precursor to this wine was sold under the Cuvée Goutillonage label in the 1989, 1990 and 1991 vintages, when it was made solely from the old Petite Sérine vineyard parcels that had belonged to Monsieur Duplessy. With the change in 1994 to a single Côte de Blonde bottling comprising the fruit that went into the Cuvée Goutillonage and the vineyard sources that went into the 1991 Cuvée du Plessy, the expanded vineyard sources that

now comprise this bottling average thirty-five years of age. Five percent of the cuvée is made up of viognier and the wine spends twenty-four months aging in older barrels prior to bottling, as these days the demi-muids and foudres in the Barge cellars are reserved for the Le Combard and Côte Brune. This is now the workhorse bottling from Domaine Barge, as they cultivate four and a half hectares of vines from a handful of different vineyards to dedicate to the Cuvée du Plessy. For slightly earlier drinking, the Cuvée du Plessy is the Barge bottling to choose, as it typically will arrive at its velvety, perfumed maturity a few years ahead of either the Côte Brune or Le Combard bottlings.

2012 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2012 vintage in Côte-Rôtie is absolutely gorgeous (and quite reminiscent stylistically of the 2008 vintage in Burgundy) and the Cuvée du Plessy is already quite accessible and polished on both the nose and palate. The complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of plummy fruit, violets, coffee, raw cocoa, a fine base of chalky *Côte de Blonde* soil tones, nutskin, plenty of smokiness and a topnote of spices from the whole clusters. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine, core, a bit of suave tannin and lovely length and grip on the focused and very well-balanced finish. A lovely bottle that is still a few years away from truly blossoming, but is already getting pretty hard to resist. 2020-2045+. **92+**.

2011 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2011 Cuvée du Plessy from the Barge family is an utterly classic and youthful example of its *terroir*, displaying a youthfully reductive nose that takes some time in decanter to get to blossom at the is early date, but which eventually reveals a very complex constellation of cassis, pepper, hazelnut, gamebirds, mocha, tapenade, still a youthful touch of stems and a beautiful base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a lovely core of fruit, superb soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthfully complex and classy finish. This is less open out of the blocks than the fine 2012 version, but it has a touch more mid-palate stuffing and my gut feeling is that in the long run, it has a chance to outpace its younger sibling. In a world of ludicrously overpraised, mediocre Rhône wines, it is so nice to taste something true to its historic roots and with veritable potential for the long haul! 2022-2045+. **92**.

2010 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2010 vintage in Côte-Rôtie has a lot of hype, but it is one of my least favorite vintages of the last twenty years here, as the wines are simply ripe (and sometimes overripe) and not particularly representative of their underlying *terroir*. The 2010 Cuvée du Plessy is one of the better 2010s I have tasted, offering up a very stylish, fruit-driven bouquet of cassis, pepper, roasted game, coffee, just a whisper of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush and offers up plenty of ripe fruit on the attack, but seems a bit attenuated at the core and is not particularly long on the moderately tannic finish. This is a good, solid wine, but in the context of just how beautiful the Cuvée du Plessy can be in most vintages, this is not special. 2020-2040. **88**.

2007 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2007 Cuvée du Plessy is a very nice bottle of Côte-Rôtie, but it is less soil specific in personality than the 2012, due to the much warmer vintage characteristics of 2007. The wine is more black fruity than the 2012, as it offers up scents of cassis, pepper, violets, roasted game, woodsmoke and a bit of balsam bough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and very nicely balanced, with a plump core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the classic finish. This does not show the same inherent complexity of the 2012 or 2011 versions, but it is a very good example of the vintage and still a fine bottle of Côte-Rôtie. 2018-2040. **90.**

2005 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2005 Cuvée du Plessy is another very good effort from a ripe and fruit-driven year that has been far more highly praised in some journalistic circles than it really merits. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a seductive blend of black cherries, cassis, leather, pepper, woodsmoke and chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with an almost opulent core of fruit, modest tannins and a long, velvety and fruit-driven finish. The 2005 Cuvée du Plessy has more mid-palate stuffing than the 2010 version, but it again gets a demerit for not showing the typically refined serving of soil that defines this wine in most vintages. This is already drinking very well, and is quite tasty, but pales in vertical tastings such as this where there are truly transparent vintages also in the lineup. 2016-2035+. **90.**

2001 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2001 vintage of Cuvée du Plessy is one of Gilles Barge true success stories from this era and holds its own very, very well, in the wake of the brilliant wines produced from these *Côte de Blonde* parcels in 1998 and 1999. The utterly classic nose offers up a complex and utterly precise blend of black raspberries, pepper, gamebirds, beautiful soil tones, cocoa, violets and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined in profile, with a great core of fruit, superb soil signature, still a touch of backend tannin and outstanding focus and grip on the poised, complex and beautifully balanced finish. A classic vintage of Cuvée du Plessy. 2016-2040+. **93.**

1999 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

In contrast to the ripe, but vastly overrated vintages of 2009 and 2010, the 1999 vintage in Côte-Rôtie is truly a ripe year of true greatness and the '99 Cuvée du Plessy is a breathtakingly beautiful wine. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a blaze of cassis, black plums, pepper, mocha, beautiful violet tones, a glorious base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with superb transparency, fine-grained tannins, outstanding complexity, ripe, seamless tannins and exceptional length and grip on the poised and perfectly suave finish. This wine is still quite youthful and has decades and decades of life ahead of it, but the remaining tannins here are so seamlessly interwoven into the fruit of the wine that it is already very, very easy to drink, and if one has enough bottles in the cellar, there is no reason not to be enjoying a few right now. That said, it will be even better down the road! 2016-2050. **95.**

1998 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

There was a bit of hydric stress in Côte-Rôtie during the 1998 growing season, so even though it was a very warm summer, the grapes did not ripen quite as perfectly as in the subsequent year. This has given the 1998 Cuvée du Plessy a slight sense of reserve that is very, very appealing, and though the wine is quite different in personality from the gorgeous 1999, it is very, very close to it in quality. The pure and more reserved nose offers up excellent complexity and precision in its constellation of cassis, black olive, pepper, still a touch of youthful stem tones, superb minerality, violets and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and brilliantly transparent, with a fine core, great cut and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding focus on the long and complex finish. Even at age eighteen, the 1998 Cuvée du Plessy is still a tad on the young side and could do with a couple more years

in the cellar before really starting to drink at its plateau. It is a beautiful wine that should not be overlooked in the long shadow of the legendary 1999! 2018-2055. **93.**

1995 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 1995 Cuvée du Plessy is a fine bottle and a classic example of this quite good, sturdy vintage in Côte-Rôtie. The bouquet really shows the floral elements found in the five percent viognier in this bottling, along with the perfume that is classical *Côte de Blonde* fruit, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, pungent violets, cassis, cocoa, stunning soil tones, woodsmoke and spit-roasted gamebirds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely purity on the attack, fine soil signature, melting tannins and superb length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is now fully mature, but has decades of life still ahead of it. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2040. **92+.**

1991 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The first vintage of the Cuvée du Plessy hailed from the 1991 vintage, but I like to think that this particular bottling did not really reach its current guise until 1994 , when the old vine Duplessy parcels were added into the *assemblage*. What fun it would be to compare this wine with the 1991 Cuvée Goutillonnage. The 1991 Cuvée du Plessy is now fully mature and a lovely example of this great year in Côte-Rôtie. The nose offers up a superbly complex mélange of baked black cherries, plums, woodsmoke, roasted game, violets, superb soil tones, coffee and a gentle topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and still quite vibrant, with a wide open personality, lovely focus and grip, a good core and fine balance on the long and utterly classic, *Côte de Blonde* velvety finish. A very lovely wine at its apogee. 2016-2035. **92.**

Côte-Rôtie “Le Combard”

The resurrection of the Le Combard vineyard, which lies on the border between the town of Ampuis and the next southerly neighboring village of Tupin, was an immense project that will begin to deliver even greater rewards as the years go by and the youngest vines here get a bit older. The vineyard was not entirely abandoned when Gilles Barge, Yves Gangloff and Stéphane Montez first began to reclaim this lieu à dit that had been lost to the wild, as there were eighty ares of old vines here that were still in production in the late 1980s. With the clearing, reestablishing of terraces and the opening up of the upper reaches of the vineyard with the monorail, the three vigneron now have just under two and a half hectares of vines planted. There were eighty ares of vines in Le Combard already here when the project first began in the latter 1980s, and these are now fully eighty years of age, so not all of the vineyard is planted to young vines. The remainder of the vineyard was planted in the year 2000, after the three vigneron had finished clearing the hillside, rebuilding or reinforcing the terraces and getting the monorail in place for the upper slopes. As I noted above, the combination of the rare volcanic soils and the large, upper sector of the vineyard that is graced with round stones from glacial deposits provides a terroir that is very atypical in the “Côte de Blonde”, with the wine tending to have a bit more tannic backbone out of the blocks than most examples of Côte-Rôtie in this southern half of the appellation, and stylistically, it tends to perform like a synthesis between the typical styles of the Côte de Blonde and the Côte de Brune. While the eighty year-old vines that were already here when the vineyard clearing and replanting began give the Barge bottling a core of fruit and mineral drive that might not be found if it were produced solely from the vines planted in 2000 here, there is little doubt that the younger vines in the blend can still be felt a bit in this bottling and it will continue to gain in depth, power and gravitas as these vines get a bit

older. I really like this bottling chez Barge and expect it to be an absolutely great example of Côte-Rôtie when the younger vines are another ten years older, with its unique expression of minerality adding a fine undertow to the beautifully pure and complex fruit that Le Combard produces. This cuvée is raised for twenty-four months, entirely in older demi-muids and foudres. In great vintages, such as 2013, the Barge family will label this wine as “Coeur de Combard”, reflecting the family’s estimation of the excellence of a given vintage in the vineyard.

2012 Côte-Rôtie “Le Combard”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2012 Le Combard is an excellent wine, and given that this is made from the youngest average age of vines on the estate, the high quality of the 2012 is a very strong endorsement for the special quality of this *terroir*. The classic nose delivers a fine constellation of cassis, meaty tones, violets, a bit of bonfire, a superb base of soil, a touch of nutskin and a topnote of fresh-ground pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the ripely tannic and very well-balanced finish. Superb juice. 2022-2060. **93**.

2010 Côte-Rôtie “Le Combard”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2010 Le Combard from the Barge family is another good, solid effort for the vintage, but not one of their great wines. I assume that this was still fairly young vines in 2010 and the wine lacks some mid-palate amplitude as a result. The bouquet is focused and nicely reserved, offering up scents of cassis, venison, woodsmoke, a bit of stony soil tones and black olive. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with moderate tannins and good length and grip on the focused and fairly promising finish. It could use a bit more stuffing in the core, but it is a good wine and a very respectable effort for this torrid vintage. 2019-2040. **88+**.

2007 Côte-Rôtie “Le Combard”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2007 Le Combard is another very good example of this ripe vintage and it does show more ripe fruit character on the nose than the 2012 version, but also a very good underpinning of soil tones and spice. The bouquet delivers a mixture of pepper, cassis, roasted game, coffee, nutskin, scorched earth and a bit of savory elements in the upper register from the whole clusters. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly closed in personality, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, slightly angular finish. This still needs some bottle age to blossom and will not drink much ahead of the 2012 version, as it is not as suavely balanced as that vintage. Good juice. 2021-2045. **90+**.

Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”

With the release of the first single vineyard bottling of Côte Brune in 1994, Gilles Barge began to produce what is arguably one of the greatest examples of Côte-Rôtie made today in the appellation. The Barge family has always replaced vines here in a measured fashion since their purchase of this full hectare in 1950, recognizing the value of old vines and they have always replanted from cuttings taken from the original vines already planted here when they purchased the parcel sixty-six years ago. As this has always been planted by selection massale, I assume that it is all Petite Sérine, as is the case with the parcels that the family began renting from Joseph Duplessy in the Côte de Blonde in 1978. As noted above, the Barge family’s bottling of Côte Brune is today comprised of vines that range from forty to sixty years of age and fairly unusual in using a bit of viognier in the blend, as two percent of their parcel in the vineyard is planted to this white grape. Of course, readers may recall that Marius Gentaz also included a small percentage of viognier in his own bottling of Côte Brune back in his day. Given the more

tannic structure inherent in wines from this great terroir, the Barge family actually gives this wine fully three years of élevage prior to bottling, in their cellar combination of older demi-muids and foudres. This cuvée is quite clearly one of the greatest bottlings of Côte-Rôtie currently produced in the appellation. For those who lament having missed out on putting the wines of Marius Gentaz in their cellar back during his career, the Domaine Barge Côte Brune bottling is about as close as one can get today and this great wine should be one of the international superstar cuvées of Côte-Rôtie, rather than one of the best-kept secrets in the world of wine. I cannot urge readers strongly enough to get on board with this bottling before it is discovered fully and becomes far, far more difficult to source and afford!



2012 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2012 Côte Brune from Gilles and Julien Barge is a great young example of Côte-Rôtie, offering up a more reserved and deeper aromatic profile than either of the estate’s other two bottlings in this vintage. The first class nose offers up a classic blend of cassis, dark berry, black olive, venison, beautifully complex minerality, still a notable touch of stems and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, outstanding transparency and superb cut and grip on the focused and ripely tannic finish. This is going to be one of the top examples of Côte-Rôtie from the 2012 vintage, but it will need more time in the cellar to show all of its layers of complexity. 2023-2060. **94+**.

2011 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2011 version of the Barge family’s Côte Brune is a complete classic in the making, but the wine today is hunkered down behind its structural elements and looking for an extended period of hibernation in the cellar prior to drinking. The youthful bouquet is beautifully complex and traditional in style, offering up a pure constellation of cassis, smoky plums, a touch of pepper, gamebird, black olive, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, plenty of youthful stems and a brilliantly complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tightly-knit, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature, ripe, seamlessly integrated tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the youthful, balanced and beautifully promising finish. I would not touch a bottle of the 2011 Domaine Barge Côte Brune for at least another decade, despite the fact that it is so well-balanced that it is really pretty easy to drink in its reticent youth! Great wine in the making. 2026-2060+. **94.**

2010 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2010 Côte Brune is one of the best examples of Côte-Rôtie that I have tasted from this vintage and a fine bottle in the making. The deep and still fairly reserved nose offers up scents of cassis, black raspberries, cocoa, gamebird, a pretty good base of soil (and stunning for 2010!) and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with firm, well-integrated tannins, very good focus and balance and a long, broad-shouldered and still very primary finish. This will be an excellent 2010 in the fullness of time, but it is still a puppy and needs more bottle age. Like all of the 2010s from Domaine Barge, the alcohol here is very, very well-managed, and while I suspect this wine is over 13.5 percent, it shows no heat or signs of *sur maturité*. 2023-2060+. **92.**

2009 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2009 Côte Brune from Gilles Barge is every bit as ripe as the 2010, but it shows a bit more of a roasted quality on the nose and is not as deep in the mid-palate as its younger sibling. The bouquet delivers scents of cassis, hung game, chocolate, plenty of smokiness and a dollop of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plush and well-balanced, with good mid-palate depth (though not the core of the 2010), moderate, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the fairly fruit-driven, but suave and classy finish. Again, this is a very strong effort for the vintage, but I have to give a slight nod to the 2010 version for the long haul. 2016-2035. **91.**

2007 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

Despite the hot vintage of 2007, which can tend to blur the precision of *terroir* expression and produce more fruit-driven wines, the ’07 Côte Brune from the Barge family is a classic bottle of Côte-Rôtie in the making. The bouquet offers up more breed and soil signature than the other two Barge cuvées from ’07, as the wine offers up scents of dark berries, cassis, pepper, hung game, cocoa, charred wood, black olives and balsam boughs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively detailed, with an excellent core, fine soil tones, moderate tannins and outstanding grip on the long and classy finish. This is a very, very impressive 2007 Côte-Rôtie. 2020-2050. **93.**

2006 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

I really like the 2006 vintage in Côte-Rôtie and the Côte Brune bottling from the Barge family is outstanding. This is still a fairly youthful wine at age ten, offering up a complex and classy aromatic constellation of cassis, black olive, pepper, still a touch of stems, a really fine base of soil, espresso, gentle medicinal tones and a bit of charred wood in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really soil-driven, with moderate tannins,

fine focus and grip and a long, transparent and classic finish. Fine, fine juice that just needs a few more years in the cellar to reach its plateau. 2020-2050. **93.**

2001 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2001 vintage of Côte Brune from Gilles Barge is an excellent wine that is beginning to transition out of its adolescent phase and towards full maturity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, shoe polish, black olives, pepper, excellent soil tones and a bit of charred earth. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just a bit chewy still on the backend, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and classic finish. 2018-2040. **92.**

1999 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

When first showing his 1999s back in the early years of the new millennium, Gilles Barge was often quoted as saying that “1999 is the greatest vintage of my career.” It is very easy to see why he feels this way, as the 1999 Côte Brune is a brilliant wine in the making, offering up a deep and complex constellation of cassis, black plums, dark chocolate, sweet nutty tones, gamebirds, pepper, a very complex base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a sappy core, great focus and balance, ripe tannins and simply stunning length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is still in its gorgeously fruit-driven period of youthful generosity, but there is a whole universe of soil lying just below the glossy surface of fruit here and it will be unleashed in the years to come and produce an utterly compelling bottle of Côte-Rôtie! 2023-2065+. **96.**

1998 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The drought vintage of 1998 produced hydric stress in the steepest vineyards in Côte-Rôtie, and this is not one of the greatest recent years in the region. The Barge family’s Côte Brune bottling from this vintage seems to show some of the effects of hydric stress during the growing season, as this is a leaner style of wine than most top recent vintages from this parcel, but the wine is still complex and has matured fairly briskly and is now drinking in its plateau. The bouquet offers up a lovely and *à point* bouquet of charred wood, nutskin, gamebird, cassis and black olives. On the palate the wine is medium-full, soil-driven and complex, with nice intensity of flavor (if not a lot of extra stuffing at the core), just a bit of remaining tannin and fine focus and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not one of the greatest vintages of Côte Brune from Domaine Barge, but it is still a highly satisfying wine and a success for this vintage. That said, based on the two recent bottles of 1998 that I tasted, I have to give a slight nod to the Cuvée du Plessy in this vintage. 2016-2040. **91+.**

1995 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

1995 was only the second vintage for the Côte Brune to be bottled on its own, and it is truly and exceptional effort in this classic year. The bouquet is deep, complex and focused, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, bitter chocolate, a touch of venison, gentle nuttiness, plenty of smokiness and a great vein of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a fine core, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, modestly tannic and very soil-driven finish. Just a classic bottle of Côte Brune, the 1995 version from Gilles Barge could still use a few more years in the cellar to blossom more fully and should continue to drink beautifully for many decades. 2018-2050. **94.**

Blended Bottlings of Barge Côte-Rôtie

Prior to 1989, the Barge family solely produced a single, blended version of Côte-Rôtie from their various parcels of vines in the appellation. In that vintage, the first bottling from the

former vines of Joseph Duplessy were bottled up on their own and which would eventually lead to the four distinct cuvées of Côte-Rôtie now produced at Domaine Barge. As readers will recall from the discussion above, prior to the addition of the Côte de Blonde fruit from the half hectare of vines from Monsieur Duplessy (commencing in the 1979 vintage) the majority of the blended Barge bottling of Côte-Rôtie was produced from their hectare of vines in the vineyard of Côte Brune. I have to imagine that the addition of the fruit from Monsieur Duplessy subtly changed the style of the blended bottling here and which may have served as the catalyst for Gilles Barge eventually deciding to create his three distinct cuvées of Côte-Rôtie, so that he could have the archetypical Côte de Blonde bottling of the Cuvée du Plessy, as well as the single vineyard bottlings of Le Combard and Côte Brune. The Barge blended examples of Côte-Rôtie harken back to earlier times in this appellation, where it was often thought that a blended example from different lieux à dits was preferable to a wine produced from a single vineyard. Much the same thinking was prevalent in Barolo and Barbaresco in this era. One can still come across some of the blended Barge bottlings at auction and from specialist merchants, and they are very strong wines and beautiful windows into an era in Côte-Rôtie that has gone by.

1988 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Pierre Barge

The 1988 blended version of Côte-Rôtie from Gilles Barge and his father Pierre is a fine, old school example and was a bit reductive still when we first opened it and needed a good twenty minutes to fully blossom and show its true pedigree. Once open fully, the wine offers up a fine bouquet of cassis, spit-roasted venison, camphor, woods ash, a very complex base of soil tones, bonfire and a distinctive topnote of cloves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a fine core of fruit, still just a whisper of backend tannin and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. This was the last vintage that the Barge family only produced a blended bottling of Côte-Rôtie and the 1988 is a fine bottle that is now fully mature, but has decades of life still ahead of it. 2016-2035+. **92.**

1979 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Pierre Barge

I really like the ethereal and transparent style of the best 1979 northern Rhône and the Pierre Barge Côte-Rôtie is a classic example of this genre. This was the first vintage of the blended wine to include fruit from the half hectare of Côte de Blonde vineyards that had formerly belonged to Monsieur Duplessy. The bouquet of the 1979 is fully mature and quite complex, offering up scents of desiccated dark berries, clovers, juniper berries, woodsmoke gamebirds, *sous bois* and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and complex, with nice intensity of flavor, lovely soil signature and a long, silky and vibrant finish that still retains fine grip, despite the tannins having fully faded many years ago. Just a lovely bottle of fully mature Côte-Rôtie for current drinking. 2016-2026. **91.**

1978 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Pierre Barge

The 1978 Côte-Rôtie from Domaine Pierre Barge was the first vintage where Gilles assisted his father in the cellars and the wine is a superb example of this outstanding year. This is also the last year where the blended wine *chez* Barge did not include the production from Monsieur Duplessy's half hectares of vines, making the 1978 primarily produced from Côte de Brune fruit. The utterly traditional and complex nose of the 1978 wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, black olives, venison, pepper, nutskin, woodsmoke and a potpourri of stem-related spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with lovely transparency, impeccable focus and balance and great length and grip on the complex and perfectly poised finish. A classic. 2016-2035+. **94.**

RECENTLY TASTED BARBERA, BAROLO AND BARBARESCO



The fine Barolo cru of Monvigliero, as seen from the G. B. Burlotto parcels of vines.

Many subscribers have asked me to cover the wines of Piemonte in more depth in the coming years and I will do the best I can to add another trip to Europe into the yearly schedule and accommodate this wish. I do drink a fair bit of wine from this beautiful region, but it is mostly older vintages that are fully mature and I have reported on these wines with some frequency in the past. However, I understand that folks would also like to see notes on more recent vintages, even if they are not close to mature, as these are the wines that are out in the marketplace and still available for additions to the cellar. As I am not in the habit of opening young Piemonte wines out of my own cellar (fully knowing just how good they will be when they are fully mature two or three decades down the road!), the following notes are mostly a report on what has crossed my path at various tastings over the last couple of years, rather than a more selective article on the producers who I follow most diligently. That said, I did open a handful of bottles out of my cellar to make the report a bit deeper and broader, and I will admit to enjoying a few of these more adolescent examples more than I anticipated. I hope to have a proper report on the 2011s and 2012s from Piemonte ready by the end of the summer of this year and will start covering the new vintages in this beautiful region regularly from this point forward. In the meantime, here are some recent notes on younger and middle-aged Piemonte wines to bridge the gap to the proper coverage on the new releases on the horizon from this magical northern corner of Italy.

Barbera

2012 Barbera d'Alba- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2012 Burlotto Barbera is a lovely wine and shows a bit more mid-palate sappiness than the 2011 did out of the blocks, which makes it quite tasty in its youth. The bouquet is really superb, offering up notes of cherries, orange peel, peanuts, a lovely base of soil, just a touch of tariness and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish. Focused and tangy, with a fine, sweet core of fruit, just a touch of backend tannin and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice that will age very well indeed. 2014-2025+. **90+**.

2009 Barbera- Olek Bondonio

The 2009 Barbera from Olek Bondonio is a good, solid example of this varietal. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, a touch of road tar, fresh herb tones, dark soil and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core of fruit, still a bit of backend tannin and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This is not the most complex example of Barbera, but it has depth, balance and length. 2014-2020. **88**.

2005 Barbera "Codana"- Giuseppe Rinaldi

The Barbera "Codana" bottling from Giuseppe Rinaldi is made from sixty to seventy year-old vines and is one of the top bottlings of Barbera in the region. The 2005 Codana is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, tar, fresh oregano, a touch of nutskins and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very pure on the attack, with a good core. Bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the very well-balanced finish. It has been a couple of years since I last tasted this wine and I would love to cross paths with it again, as it is built to age very gracefully. 2013-2020+. **92**.

Barbaresco

2009 Barbaresco "Sori Rio Sordo"- Ca' Rome'

I had not tasted any wines previously from the Ca' Rome' estate owned by the Marengo family, so really had no idea what to expect. Their 2009 Sori Rio Sordo is a good, solid wine on the nose, but marred by uncovered wood tannins on the backend that makes its future evolution in bottle highly questionable. The wine is raised in a combination of new *barriques* and older *botti*, but the new casks should have been soaked a longer time prior to putting this pretty wine into them, as they have left a nasty tattoo of oak tannin in the wine. The bouquet is quite pretty, offering up scents of cherry, orange peel, lovely spice tones, a nice base of soil and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish and nicely transparent on the attack, with a good core, but those nasty, uncovered barrel tannins drying out the finish. Maybe there is enough stuffing to eventually absorb the wood tannins, and if so, this wine could click up a couple of points in score, but the bottom line is that the new *barriques* have messed up a pretty good wine. 2018-2035? **83+?**

2009 Barbaresco "Chiaramanti"- Ca' Rome'

The Marengo family's parcel of Chiaramanti was planted in 1978, so these were forty-plus year-old vines in the 2009 vintage. Interestingly, this wine sees more new *barriques* than the Sori Rio Sordo bottling, and this is evident on the nose, but the wine has more stuffing (perhaps because of older vines) and has absorbed its wood tannins far better. The bouquet offers up a complex nose of red and black cherries, road tar, forest floor, coffee, orange zest and a load of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and nicely concentrated at the core, with good length and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a well-balanced finish. This has

handled its serving of new oak far better than the Rio Sordo and is really a pretty good, solid example of Barbaresco. 2020-2040+. **88.**

2008 Barbaresco “Maria di Brun”- Ca’ Rome’

The Maria di Brun bottling is only produced in top vintages and is aged in a combination of Slavonian oak *botti* and *barriques*. The 2008 is borderline overripe on the both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a mélange of black cherries, tar, herbs, damp earth and an overly generous serving of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit alcoholic, with reasonable depth at the core, but overripe flavors and drying wood tannins sticking out uncovered on the finish. I did not ask for the octane when I tasted this wine, but it must be north of 14.5 percent and it has leached out the tannins from the oak pretty aggressively. Again, the balance is so suspect I have no idea when it might be drinkable. ??? **83.**

2007 Barbaresco- Luigi Oddero e Figli

The 2007 Barbaresco from Luigi Oddero e Figli is a good, sturdy, old school example. The bouquet offers up a deep and youthfully complex nose of black cherries, road tar, licorice, a touch of gamebird and a topnote of oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with fine focus and grip, chewy tannins and a long, sturdy and youthful finish. This is not the most elegant glass of Barbaresco and still needs some time to blossom, but it will be a good, solid bottle in the fullness of time. 2020-2040+. **89.**

2005 Barbaresco “Martinenga”- Marchese di Gresy

The 2005 Martinenga from Marchese di Gresy is a good, solid, okay bottle of Barbaresco, but given that this is one of the greatest *terroirs* to be found in Piemonte, it really should be better than this. The bouquet is deep and complex, but also shows a bit of spit polish from the cellar technique, as it offers up scents of black cherries, road tar, woodsmoke, herbs and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, well-balanced and rather high-toned for a great *terroir*, with modest mid-palate depth, moderate tannins and pretty good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Is this now young vines? Okay at best. 2015-2030+. **88.**

2005 Barbaresco Riserva- Terre del Barolo

The 2005 Barbaresco Riserva from Terre del Barolo is a good, solid wine. The bouquet offers up a complex and fairly classic constellation of cherries, anise, road tar, a good base of soil tones, gamebirds, fresh oregano and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and nicely transparent in personality, with a good core, moderate tannins, bright acids and good length and grip on the nobly rustic finish. This is not top division Barbaresco, but it has depth, complexity and merit, if not a whole lot of elegance. Good, honest juice. 2017-2040. **89.**

2001 Barbaresco “Santo Stefano”- Bruno Giacosa

I had not crossed paths with a bottle of 2001 Santo Stefano from Bruno Giacosa in at least five years, but, I was not surprised to see that this superb wine is still a solid decade away from blossoming. The still tight and promising nose offers up a complex blend of red and black cherries, road tar, gamebirds, woodsmoke, a great base of soil and a bit of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with impressive, nascent complexity, a rock solid core, firm, well-integrated tannins and stunning length and grip on the seamless and very youthful finish. This will be a brilliant wine in the fullness of time, but

at least a solid decade's worth of patience is really required before this wine starts to hit on all cylinders. 2022-2065+. **94+**.

2001 Barbaresco "Serra Boella"- Paitin di Pasquero-Elia

The estate of Paitin di Pasquero-Elia was very much a modernist in the decade of the 1990s and early years of the new millennium, but has moved a bit away from the overtly modernist style in recent vintages. 2001 was sadly still full tilt modern boogie here, with the use of roto-fermenters (which they still employ), micro-oxygenation and the use of plenty of new French *barriques* for the *elevage*. The results with their 2001 Serra Boella are predictably disappointing, as the wine offers up a young and decidedly rustic nose of baked cherries, leather, barnyard, road tar, new oak and damp, muddy earth. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and chewy, with a solid core, a blocky palate impression and a fairly long, tannic and tarry finish. Pretty pedestrian fare. 2018-2030. **81**.

2001 Barbaresco- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 2001 straight Barbaresco from the Produttori is excellent. The deep and classic nose offers up a constellation of desiccated cherries, gamebird, fresh almond, a touch of orange zest, licorice, herb tones and a lovely base of soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a fine core, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and still fairly primary finish. This will be a superb wine with a bit more bottle age, but like most of the 2001s, it is not in any hurry. 2018-2040+. **92**.

1998 Barbaresco "Santo Stefano" Riserva- Bruno Giacosa

As was the case with the 2001 white label Santo Stefano, it had been five years since I last saw a bottle of the '98 Giacosa Riserva from this great vineyard. This wine is still too young for primetime drinking, but it is starting to get closer to its moment of blossoming, as it offers up a deep and complex nose of cherries, road tar, licorice, incipient notes of *sous bois*, fresh oregano and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with its structural elements still producing a bit of youthful angularity that needs to be waited out. The wine is rock solid at the core, moderately tannic and quite tangy, with lovely focus and excellent length and grip on the backend. Five more years in the cellar may be enough for this wine to really start to drink with some generosity, but the real fireworks will not start for another dozen years or so. 2016-2040. **92+**.

Barolo

2008 Barolo- Bongiovanni

The 2008 blended Barolo from Bongiovanni is a lovely and quite classic wine, partially hidden under a generous serving of new French oak. The bouquet offers up a blend of red and black cherries, game, road tar, herbs, woodsmoke and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, fine focus and nascent complexity and a long, tannic finish that is quite marked by its cedary oak element. Some wood tannins here need to be resolved, but the stuffing is here and that will probably be accomplished over the next few years. A good wine that could be so much better without the *barriques*. 2022-2050. **89+**.

2008 Barolo "Pernanno"- Bongiovanni

The 2008 Pernanno cru bottling from Bongiovanni was aged entirely in *barriques*, with thirty percent new wood. The wine is certainly marked by its oak, but has impressive depth of fruit and mid-palate stuffing and should eventually absorb its serving of French *barriques* fully. The bouquet is superb under its new wood veneer, delivering a fine blend of black cherries,

plums, road tar, just a touch of chocolate, a fine base of soil and the aforementioned new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with fine focus and balance, firm tannins and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. Good juice that could be great wine without the French wood. 2020-2045+. **91.**

2008 Barolo “Vigna Cerretta”- Ca’ Rome’

The 2008 Barolo “Vigna Cerretta” from Ca’ Rome’ was my favorite wine that I tasted from the estate at this event. This cru lies in Serralunga and the Marengo family’s parcel of vines was planted in 1961. Like the other wines from this estate, the Vigna Cerretta sees some *barrique* during its *elevage*, but the balance on the 2008 was quite good. The bouquet is a classic, albeit, slightly modern blend of red and black cherries, new leather, road tar, fresh oregano, a nice base of soil and a bit of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and quite promising, with a good core of fruit, very well-integrated tannins and good length and grip on the long finish. To my palate, the cedary elements here on the nose and palate from the percentage of *barriques* used in the cellar do not add anything and are a bit of a distraction, but at least with the 2008 Vigna Cerretta, everything is in balance and the wine should age quite gracefully. 2020-2060. **90+.**

2008 Barolo “Rapet” Gold Label- Ca’ Rome’

The 2008 Barolo “Rapet” Gold Label from Ca’ Rome’ is also from a cru in Serralunga and similarly, spends its *elevage* in a combination of *botti* and *barrique*. The 2008 Rapet is a good wine, with fine stuffing and structural integrity for long aging, but the new wood here shows just a bit at the backend at the present time. Hopefully, this is just a passing phenomenon of youth and the wine will eventually fully absorb its wood tannins. The bouquet is deep and fairly promising, offering up scents of black cherries, road tar, a bit of bonfire, fresh herb tones, a good base of soil and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, nascently complex and chewy, with a good core, long, ripe fruit tannins, fine grip and a focused finish. If the bit of uncovered oak tannins here on the backend are absorbed with bottle age, then the score could tick up a bit. 2020-2045+? **89+?**

2008 Barolo “Nei Cannubi”- Poderi Luigi Enaudi

I had not tasted a wine from Poderi Luigi Enaudi since their 1989 and 1990 releases, so I was very curious to see how their 2008 Cannubi bottling might be. Sadly, this is a very modern and not particularly successful wine, offering up a modern nose of black cherries, road tar, damp soil tones, herbs and a fair bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and neutered, with a reasonable core, moderate tannins, but almost no character or complexity to be seen on the palate. At least the finish is reasonably long, but this seems really stripped by a heavy-handed approach in the cellar and I really have no idea when I would want to drink it. UI assume the bottle was representative, as it was being poured by the US importer at their portfolio tasting and when I asked, the pourer said that the wine was perfectly fine. ??? **80.**

2007 Barolo- Poderi Aldo Conterno

The 2007 Barolo from Poderi Aldo Conterno weighs in at a full fifteen percent alcohol and was raised entirely in new, Slavonian oak *botti*. The wine offers up a ripe and forward nose of red and black cherries, road tar, roses, woodsmoke and a nice touch of soil. On the palate is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered in style, with a sweet core of fruit, ripe tannins, low acids and very good length and grip on the wide open finish. This is very well-made in its more forward style and does not show any uncovered wood tannins, despite being raised entirely in new oak *botti*. 2014-2035. **89+.**

2007 Barolo “Vigna Cicala”- Poderi Aldo Conterno

Since the 2001 vintage, the Vigna Cicala from Poderi Aldo Conterno is raised entirely in youngish Slavonian oak *botti*, but they are renewed every couple of years and the 2007 is showing some uncovered wood tannins on the palate. The Conterno family makes a selection in the vineyard for this bottling, so that only vines that are forty-five years of age or older are used for this cuvée. The nose on the 2007 is deep and ripe, delivering a blend of red and black cherries, licorice, dark chocolate, fresh herb tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, structured and shows off a great core of fruit, with firm tannins and a very long, focused and nascently complex finish. I hope the bit of uncovered oak tannins on the backend only need time to be absorbed, and if this is the case, then the score will seem overly conservative when the wine is ready to drink. 2018-2040+. **91+?**



2006 Barolo- Luigi Oddero e Figli

The 2006 Barolo from Luigi Oddero e Figli is a bit marked by brett, which usually does not bother me a whole lot, but here is strident enough to be distracting. The nose is a blend of black cherries, game, licorice, tar, fresh herbs and a bit of barnyard from the brett. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tarry in personality, with good complexity, rough, old-fashioned tannins and a long, tangy and youthful finish. I would like this better if it were just a bit cleaner, as there is stuffing and soil signature here. 2020-2040. **88.**

2005 Barolo “Vigna Rionda”- Luigi Oddero e Figli

The 2005 Vigna Rionda from Luigi Oddero e Figli is a very good bottle of wine, cut from the well-tested cloth of noble rusticity. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite worthy, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, woodsmoke, gentle notes of road tar, anise, fresh herb tones, fine minerality and a touch of eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, firm, old school tannins and fine length and grip on the youthful and well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2023-2060+. **92.**

2004 Barolo- Paolo Scavino

The days when the wines from Paolo Scavino were very over-oaked are now in the past and I quite liked the more moderate side of modern Barolo that their 2004s were showing. The blended Barolo, which hails from parcels in seven different crus is really quite good, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of red and black cherries, a touch of blood orange, road tar, fresh herbs and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and oddly (as there was no overtly new oak notes on the nose), showing a touch of wood tannin on the palate. The wine has a good core, well-measured tannins and good length and grip on the promising finish. I assume that I simply caught the wine at an adolescent moment before it had fully absorbed its wood component and the wine should eventually fully integrate this and drink quite well. It is a bit of a hybrid stylistically, but far superior to what was going on here in the decade of the 1990s. 2014-2035. **91.**

2004 Barolo “Carobric”- Paolo Scavino

The Carobric bottling from Paolo Scavino is comprised of fruit from Cannubi, Rocche and Bric del Fiasc that is from younger vines and do not go into those individual cru bottlings from the family estate. It was first produced in 1996. The 2004 was raised in one-third new French *barriques* and is a good, gently modern wine, offering up a bouquet of cherries, woodsmoke, herb tones, a touch of toffee, soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and impressively long, with a more polished, accessible personality than the blended '04 Barolo, an almost velvety texture and good length on the wide open finish. I like this quite well (and again, this is a big step up from what was going on here in the 1990s), but it does not really gain anything but early accessibility from its *barriques* and this could be far more interesting if raised in *botti*. But, it is certainly well made in its style. 2014-2030. **90.**

2001 Barolo “Cannubi Boschis”- Cavallotto

I had a hard time figuring out the 2001 Cannubi Boschis from Cavallotto, as the wine had an odd, resinous streak running through both its nose and palate that seemed slightly out of place for this traditional producer. The bouquet is a mix of black cherries, bonfires, coffee grounds, herb tones, roasted venison and road tar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch inky in personality, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, chewy and not particularly pure finish. Maybe this is just in an adolescent phase and particularly cantankerous at the present time, but I had expected a more polished showing for this wine. If it shakes off its inky, resinous personality in the coming years, it will probably merit a score near the top of the range. 2016-2035+? **85-90?**

2001 Barolo “Vigna Rionda”- Luigi Oddero e Figli

I had high hopes for the 2001 Vigna Rionda from Luigi Oddero e Figli, but the wine is borderline overripe and a bit disappointing as a result. The nose offers up a complex blend of black cherries, prunes, chocolate, hung game, damp earth and licorice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, fine focus and a long, chewy and tannic finish. I have only tasted this wine on one occasion, and maybe there are better bottles out there? 2019-2040? **84-89+?**

2000 Barolo “Big ‘d Big”- Podere Rocche dei Manzoni

The 2000 Barolo “Big ‘d Big” from Rocche dei Manzoni was raised in French *barriques* for three years prior to bottling, and then spent an additional year aging in bottle prior to Valentino Migliorini releasing it out into the market. The 2000 vintage was a very ripe, forward and buxom vintage, which was sandwiched between two great and utterly classic vintages in 1999 and 2001, but this wine has aged fairly nicely and at age fifteen is drinking still quite well. The bouquet is deep, ripe, complex and (impressively) no longer shows any influence from its three years *elevage* in *barrique*, as it offers up scents of baked black cherries, a touch of prune, forest floor, road tar, herbs, a bit of beef bouillon, anise and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tarry, with a good core, still some chewy tannins and fine length and grip on the impressively well-balanced finish. This has plenty of life still ahead of it, but is really not a bad drink at all at age fifteen. The torrid aspect of the 2000 vintage becomes more prominent as the wine has a chance to open up in decanter, but it is a pretty good example of this overripe year. 2016-2035. **89.**

1999 Barolo “Rocche del Falletto ” Riserva- Bruno Giacosa

The 1999 Barolo Rocche del Falletto from Bruno Giacosa is a brilliant example of this underrated and totally stunning year. The bouquet is still quite young, but also suave and blossoming, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, licorice, gamebirds, incipient notes of camphor, a gorgeously complex base of soil, coffee, fresh oregano, a touch of hazelnut and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and loaded with sweet fruit at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, firm, ripe and very well-integrated tannins and stunning length and grip on the young, but still, so promising finish. The refined style of the 1999 vintage should make this wine start to blossom around age twenty, but I would still be strongly inclined to not really start drinking it for at least another decade, as the real fireworks here will not begin until the wine is at least a quarter century old. All this brilliant wine needs is more bottle age! 2019-2060. **95.**

1999 Barolo “Mondoca di Bussia Soprana”- Oddero

I have been really impressed by the newer vintages of Oddero that I have tasted in recent times and their 1999 Mondoca di Bussia Soprana is an absolutely lovely example of this fine, fine vintage. The bouquet offers up a superb, maturing nose of cherries, orange peel, road tar, a fine, complex base of soil and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and pure, with a fine core, lovely balance and a long, complex and moderately tannic finish. The balance is impeccable here, and though this is not a blockbuster in style, there is excellent intensity of flavor and very fine drinking ahead. 2015-2040. **92+.**

1996 Barolo “Bussia”- Poderi Aldo Conterno

Back in the mid-1990s, the wines at Poderi Aldo Conterno saw less new wood during their *elevage* than they do today and I liked the style better back in this era. The 1996 Bussia is still a bit on the young side, but not a bad drink with some extended decanting time. The bouquet is deep, blossoming and complex, offering up red and black cherries, licorice, bonfires, road tar, camphor and a fine base of soil tones that are transitioning to the autumnal side of the scale. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, shows lovely secondary layers now and quite solid at the core. The finish is long, moderately tannic and tangy, with a bit of backend tariness and good soil drive on the complex and well-balanced finish. This is really a very tasty bottle that is just starting to drink well, but will be even better with a few more years in the cellar. 2016-2035. **91+**.

1995 Barolo- Giuseppe Rinaldi (served from magnum)

I love the wines of Giuseppe Rinaldi and the 1995 Barolo is a beautiful wine that is just now starting to reach its plateau of maturity. The wine offers up a vibrant, sappy nose of black cherries, fennel, road tar, fresh oregano, gentle balsamic tones and a lovely base of soil that is just starting to turn autumnal in personality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still fairly tarry, with a superb core of fruit, ripe tannins that are just starting to truly resolve, outstanding focus and a very, very long, complex finish that closes with superb grip. This wine is going to be a long-distance runner from the 1995 vintage and there is no hurry to open it, but with proper decanting, it is already starting to drink quite well. 2015-2060. **93**.

1993 Barolo “Monfortino”- Giacomo Conterno (served from magnum)

The 1993 vintage is one of my favorite, “sleeper years” in Piemonte, and obviously, I am not the only who liked this vintage, as Giovanni Conterno chose to not only produce his Monfortino in ’93, but he bottled in in magnum! The wine is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, black cherries, gentle balsamic tones, a fine base of soil, a dollop of nuttiness, gentle tariness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, wide open and quite transparent in personality, with a fine core, moderate tannins, bright acids and excellent focus, length and grip on the poised, pure and complex finish. 1993 produced a very elegant crop of Baroli and the Monfortino is certainly cut from this cloth, with all of the depth one expects from this great bottling nicely buried in a slightly more middleweight package. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2035+. **93**.

THE 1995 RED BURGUNDIES AT AGE TWENTY-ONE



The 1995 growing season in Burgundy was as topsy-turvy as any of the recent years in the region, most of which have certainly been characterized by some rather atypical weather patterns in the last decade. In the vintage of 1995, the early spring was warm and got the budbreak underway early, only to have the region hit with snow on May 13th in some of the vineyards on the upper slopes and frost following on the flatter, lower sections a couple of days later! Even by today's rollercoaster weather standards, the spring of 1995 was pretty extraordinary! The flowering in June therefore was disrupted and stretched out over an extended period of time and was not particularly successful, promising a small crop in the autumn. There was also plenty of mildew to be warded off in the vines as the month of June unfolded (once the May snow had finally melted away), giving the producers plenty of work out in the vines to protect the crop. Heat arrived at the end of this month and hydric stress was the next hurdle to be faced by *vignerons* and this remained an issue throughout much of the next two months, so that many vines shut down for extended periods along the way in the backend of the summer of '95. Due to the hydric stress, ripeness was decidedly lagging at the start of September of 1995, and the rather sturdy character of the tannins of the vintage can certainly find their origins in this period of drought and rather fitful ripening. The village of Chassagne-Montrachet was also hit by hail in August of this year, adding yet another 1995 complication for domaines in this commune.

There was finally some rain in the second week of September, which was quite beneficial for the vines that were still suffering from the drought conditions of the previous two months, but this also caused some pressure from rot, to add to the *vignerons*' list worries in the last fortnight leading up to the picking. Harvest was started on September 21st in the Côte de Beaune 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 just a bit more ripeness (after the delays brought about by the hydric stress of July and August). The malolactic fermentations for the '95s were slow for this vintage and the reds ended up being pretty tannic wines right out of the blocks after the bottling, as the stretch of mid-summer drought had left its mark on the wines with rather sturdy and slightly dry-edged tannins. As Marie-Christine Mugneret of Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg recalled about the *elevage* of the 1995s, "the wines changed dramatically after their first winter in cask, as in the fall, they were classy and very velvety in texture, but after the temperatures dropped in the cellars, the tannins really arrived in force in the wines." The rugged tannins of the 1995 red Burgundies have been one of the calling cards of the vintage since that time and remain quite present as the wines stride into their twenty-first year.

The best red wines of 1995 certainly have the stuffing to outlast their tannins (or at least manage them well), but the vintage has certainly taken its time evolving in bottle and I did not open too many bottles out of my cellar during the stretch between the vintage's tenth and twentieth birthdays, as the wines were still generally dominated by their tannins, chewy and not particularly pleasant for drinking during this period. However, even in plusher vintages like 1999, age ten to fifteen or eighteen is not really primetime to be drinking red Burgundy, as the wines generally do not show a whole lot of their character during this period of transition from youth to maturity and can be rather reticent and subsumed in their structures during their early middle ages. This was certainly the case with the 1995s, as the odd bottle which I crossed paths with during this period of their evolution was generally tough, chewy and not particularly accessible, despite most examples still showing good mid-palate density of fruit to go along with their substantial chassis of tannins. However, as the wines celebrated their twentieth birthdays, it seemed that it was a good time to start to take a deeper look at the vintage and see where it was in its evolution. I was part of a couple of tastings of the 1995s over the course of 2015 here in the New York area, and followed these up by asking to taste a few bottles after my tastings of the 2014 vintage in the Côte d'Or in November of this past year. From the examples I have tasted over the course of the last half year or so, it seems that this is a vintage that is starting to finally stir from slumber and there are some very good bottles for drinking today, though also a significant percentage that still demand a bit more bottle age.

It is also pretty clear that, at least from the vantage point of their crossing the threshold into their twenty-first year, it is a better vintage at the grand cru and best-placed premier cru level than elsewhere, as one might expect, as most of the grand cru and these most-favored premier cru vineyards are located in the finest mid-section of the slope and would have handled the hydric stress of July and August of 1995 better than vineyards up above them on the more well-drained higher reaches of the *vignobles* slope, as their soils were able to retain a bit more water during the drought period of midsummer and the vines more likely to resist shutting down for any extended period of time during the height of the summer months. Consequently, the tannins often seem a bit riper in the wines from the best-situated vineyards than in the less well-placed premier crus (and one would assume for most village wines as well, though I only tasted a single

example in preparation for this particular report, as the 1995 vintage was before the time when I learned to cellar my favorite producers' wines up and down their entire appellation hierarchy, including their village wines).

So what are the styles of the red wines of 1995 today, as they begin to enter their third decade of life? For the most part, the wines are now very nicely developed aromatically and show plenty of secondary and tertiary layers of complexity, with lovely autumnal elements now intermingled with fruit that remains fairly fresh and present, and with plenty of additional game, spice and smoky elements as well. The vintage is also fairly transparent down to its underlying soil tones, though the signatures of *terroir* do not quite take center stage in the presentations of the wines today in the same manner as in higher acid vintages such as 1996 or 2008, as there is more meaty and gamebird-type elements in prominence in the vintage than with other more clearly soil-defined vintages. Some of the 1995s share, with their counterparts from the 1996 vintage, a bit of that "rusty pipe" element on both the nose and palate, though this characteristic is more of a wine by wine phenomenon, rather than something that is true of the vintage as a whole. On the palate the wines remain, generally, still a bit tannic, but again, this is more prevalent in some bottles and less so in others. Clearly, tannin management was a bit tricky in 1995, and as Marie-Christine Mugneret intimated, it was hard to gauge this particular characteristic in the wines during the early days, as the tannins only really came on in the personalities of the wines after their first winter in cask. Given that the mid-1990s was an era with a bit more extraction practiced in general in Burgundy than is the case today, it is not too surprising that there remain some fairly chewy 1995 reds more than two decades out from the vintage, as this was part of the style of winemaking in this era in the region. However, as Jeremy Seysses of Domaine Dujac comments about the 1995s today, "this is a vintage that I am reaching for fairly often in the cellar these days, as there are certain dishes where one wants a slightly more sturdy wine- with a bit of tannic backbone- to match up more properly with the style of the *cuisine*, as some more hearty or rustic dishes just do not marry as well with wines from more delicately styled vintages."

As the notes below will attest, many of the top wines from 1995 could still do with a bit more time in the cellar to more fully blossom, but they are generally progressing in a fairly favorable direction and will provide some very good drinking over the coming decades. Some are more tannic than others, and there is little doubt that some wines will always remain a bit chewy and working around the tannins in these wines will always be part of the equation when pairing them at the table. However, as Jeremy Seysses' comments indicate, this type of red Burgundy vintage can certainly play a role at the table, if more robust fare happens to be on the menu. Many of the wines at age twenty or twenty-one are showing more tangy acidity than I recall their showing in their youths, and this can be quite striking in some wines today. Occasionally this is now translating in a few wines to volatile acidity, but for the most part, the acids remain fairly well-integrated in the respective structures of the wines and most are simply nicely tangy on the palate today. As noted above, it is the best-located and premier crus and the grand crus that generally excelled in the 1995 vintage, but for the most part, these particular wines are still a few more years away from really starting to drink with generosity, and opening bottles of these wines today can still produce fairly chewy examples. That said, the 1995 reds are generally a bit more enjoyable to drink today as a vintage as a whole, than is the case with the 1996s, which seemed a bit more scattered in their evolutionary arcs when I wrote about them a

few years ago. I certainly did not encounter any 1995 reds where their constituent components seemed to be on different timetables of aging, as was the case with a few 1996s, where the tannins and acids seemed to be far less evolved than the fruit components in some of the wines.

There are a few domaines that absolutely excelled in the 1995 vintage- seemingly choosing every correct option during the decision-making process prior to bottling, so that there are some '95s that are truly great wines and in the same league as the top examples from more exalted vintages. Certainly, Christophe Roumier excelled in this vintage, and the 1995s from estates such as Domaine Dujac, Domaine Lafarge, Domaine Robert Chevillon et Fils and Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret are also outstanding wines that transcend the general quality level of the vintage. But, it is not only the absolute star producers of the vintage that have made very good 1995s and there are an awful lot of good wines to be found in this vintage, though not all of them ready for primetime drinking. But, based on where the vintage was showing at age ten, one has to say that the evolution of the vintage over the ensuing decade has been quite positive and the vintage deserves a bit higher level of expectation today than was the case ten years ago, where the very recalcitrant personalities of so many of the wines made this a vintage that many red Burgundy enthusiasts simply gave up on before the wines entered into their second decade of existence. Today, it is quite clear that there are some very pleasant surprises to be found amongst the 1995 red Burgundies, and though the wines will always have a bit of the robust and sturdy character of the vintage as part of their collective personalities, there is complexity and good soil signature to be enjoyed across a wide spectrum of the vintage today, and this should only improve as more of the top wines continue to blossom over the coming five to ten years.

In terms of further longevity, I am not really sure how this vintage will continue to evolve over the coming two or three decades. One scenario is that the tannins will continue to fall away gracefully and progressively, with the wines getting better and better as the years flow by, and at age thirty or forty, many of the wines will be even better to drink than they are today. However, my gut instinct is that this is not likely to happen for the vintage as a whole, and I would imagine that the tannins will always remain somewhat present in the wines and they will not make really old bones in the cellar. This scenario, which I think more likely, is that the wines will continue to drink pretty much as they are today, with the grand crus more fully blossoming over the next five to ten years, but the wines always retaining a bit of the vintage's chewy character, and while complex and highly satisfying in this particular style, not likely to have truly long periods of peak drinkability, and probably only providing a ten to fifteen year window at their apogees, before the tannins and remaining acidities start to dominate the wines as the fruit gently fades into the background. However, as red Burgundy never, ever ages in a linear fashion and vintages seem to provide surprises more often than not as they move through their cycles of maturation, it will be very interesting to see how the 1995 red Burgundies fare over the longer-haul and which of the above scenarios might prove to be more accurate in the coming decades. Today, at age twenty-one, many wines do indeed provide a lot of enjoyment in their particular stylistic idiom, and as Jeremy Seysses observes, they are currently best with more robust fare at the table, but the wines are aging quite well in comparison to the earlier prognostications about the vintage and there is a lot here to like with the best 1995s.

The following wines have all been tasted since the end of 2014, with the vast majority tasted during the course of 2015 or at the very beginning of this year. I am indebted to my friend

Andy Hobson, who I have the pleasure to taste with here in the New York area with some regularity and who really got this project rolling in the middle of 2015, as he put on a superb blind tasting of 1995s that got this article off of the “to do list” and on its way to its completion in time for Issue 61. The initial raid he made on his cellar of 1995s to assess their development at this tasting was extremely generous (not a whole lot of people will open their sole bottle of 1995 Musigny from Christophe Roumier to share at so early a stage of the wine’s evolution!) and many of the gems whose notes follow came from Andy’s cellar. Many of the Burgundy *vignerons* whom I visited with in November of last year, during my first pass through the fine 2014s, also generously opened bottles of their 1995s to further expand the scope of the feature. A few of the notes have appeared in recent domaine features as well, but I have reprinted them here for ease of future reference and apologize in advance for the duplication that this will cause in the database. All in all, 1995 is not a great red Burgundy vintage, but it is a good vintage, and there are plenty of wines to be found that are beginning to really provide some enjoyable drinking, if one is willing to accept the stylistic bent of the vintage and enjoy the wines for their many positive attributes today.



Gevrey-Chambertin

1995 Gevrey-Chambertin “aux Combottes”- Domaine Dujac

The 1995 Combottes is a bit deeper-pitched on both the nose and palate than many of these other vintages from the 1990s, but it is beginning to come around nicely after a fairly long

period of hibernation. The excellent nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of leather, emerging notes of forest floor, game and a touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, blossoming notes of autumnal maturity, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the complex finish. A fine bottle of Combottes that needs just a few more years of cellaring to fully resolve its tannins and reach its apogee. 2014-2040. **92+**.

1995 Gevrey-Chambertin “Fontenys”- Domaine Joseph Roty

The 1995 Fontenys from Domaine Roty is now starting to really just starting to drink at its apogee and offers up a superbly complex and vibrant nose of dark berries, forest floor, roasted venison, a touch of dried eucalyptus, coffee, bonfires and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still just a touch chewy, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, a bit of ripe tannin remaining and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced and complex finish. With the right dish, this is already a very good drink and is very much the kind of wine that Jeremy Seysses talks about when he wants a more robust style of Burgundy to match with certain dishes. 2016-2035+. **92**.

1995 Charmes-Chambertin “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Denis Bachelet

Denis Bachelet’s 1995 Charmes-Chambertin it still pretty hunkered down behind its structural elements today and in need of further cellaring to blossom, but the constituent components here are good and this may well be an excellent bottle with some further extended bottle age. Today, the wine is pretty dense in its black fruity bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, some tarry tones, grilled meats, dark soil and charred wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite chewy, with tangy acids, a good core, and fine length and grip on the still quite adolescent finish. This needs at least another five years of bottle age before it will start to drink, and it may end up significantly better than my score indicates, once it has had a chance to blossom, but right now, it is still pretty grumpy and adolescent and hard to get a very precise read on. 2020-2045+? **88-92?**

1995 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Henri Perrot-Minot

The 1995 Charmes-Chambertin from Domaine Perrot-Minot is really a very pretty example of the vintage and has aged into quite an elegant wine at age twenty-one. The complex and nicely red fruity nose offers up scents of cherries, raspberries, cloves, mustard seed, forest floor and a generous touch of spicy oak notes that are redolent today of sandalwood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and nicely transparent, with good, but not great depth at the core, lovely soil signature, moderate tannins and fine shape and bounce on the long and complex finish. The tannins here are really beautifully buried in the remaining fruit and this is one of the most beautifully balanced 1995s for drinking today. It does not have quite the same mid-palate fruit amplitude as the very best examples from the vintage, but the wine is poised, complex and nicely focused and is a very enjoyable glass of Charmes at its apogee. Impressive juice. 2016-2035+. **91**.

1995 Charmes-Chambertin “Trés Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Joseph Roty

Not surprisingly, given the style of the ’95 vintage and the more extracted style of wines produced by so many domaines in the mid-1990s, the ’95 Domaine Roty Charmes-Chambertin is still a bit on the young side and really needs more bottle age to shed its tannic chassis and begin to drink with more generosity. However, this wine is loaded with potential and really only needs a bit more time in the cellar to blossom fully. The excellent bouquet offers up notes of dried dark berries, black cherries, coffee, charred earth, roasted game, dried eucalyptus, dark soil tones and a fair bit of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced,

with superb mid-palate concentration, lovely soil signature and a very, very long, still fairly tannic finish. Another five years in the cellar should really allow this wine to start to hit on all cylinders, and it should drink very well for many decades after. 2020-2050+. **94+**.

1995 Mazis-Chambertin- Maison Leroy

Madame Leroy has always had a very good source in Mazis-Chambertin and her 1995 version is really a beautifully balanced and very sophisticated example of the vintage. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, beetroot, woodsmoke, gamebirds, coffee, incipient *sous bois* and a nice touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with lovely purity of fruit on the attack, a fine core, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and complex finish that is getting very nicely autumnal at age twenty. A fine bottle. 2015-2040+. **93**.

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 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Domaine Armand Rousseau

The 1995 Clos de Bèze from Charles Rousseau is an excellent bottle in the making that is almost ready for primetime drinking, but quite there yet. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, blood orange, grilled meats, *sous bois*, coffee, a bit of vanillin oak and a topnote of exotic spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined in profile, with a fine core of fruit, suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the nearly open, tangy and soil-driven finish. It is very easy to drink this wine today, but I would try to keep my hands off of it for another three or four years and let its structural elements fade away just a bit more. A superb 1995! 2018-2050. **95**.

1995 Chambertin- Domaine Armand Rousseau

My last couple of bottles of the 1995 Rousseau Chambertin out of my own cellar (last one drunk three years ago) were good, but showing just a touch of that “rusty pipe” element that so many wines from the vintage flashed during their adolescent phase, but this most recent bottle out of a friend’s cellar had moved beyond that stage to really start to drink with style and grace. The marvelous bouquet offers up a very deep, transparent and meaty mélange of cherries, coffee, woodsmoke, venison, a gloriously complex base of soil tones and a deft framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a fine core, still some structural elements to resolve, but excellent length and grip on the focused and soil-driven finish. High class juice. 2019-2050. **95+**.

Morey St. Denis

1995 Morey St. Denis “Clos Sorbés- Domaine Jacky Truchot

Jacky Truchot’s 1995 Clos Sorbés, or at least the last bottle of this wine which I crossed paths with on the wine list at the l’Hostellerie de Clos in Chablis, was just a touch volatile and took a little while in decanter for the VA to blow off, after which the wine drank very well indeed. With air, the bouquet wafts from the glass in a pretty and red fruity nose of cherries, beetroot, herb tones, *sous bois*, coffee, orange peel and a fine topnote of summer truffles. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, soft tannins, fine focus

and grip and a long, complex and classic finish. This is really a very refined and classy bottle of 1995 premier cru from the old school master of Morey. 2012-2025+. **92.**

1995 Clos des Lambrays- Domaine des Lambrays

Thierry Brouin was quick to comment that the mid-1990s was nowhere near as successful of an era for the domaine as is the case here in the last fifteen years. The wine is starting to show nicely on the nose, with secondary and tertiary layers of complexity, but is a touch sinewy in the face of its remaining tannins and as Monsieur Brouin observes, “it is not a bad wine, but not representative of what the Clos should be in a top vintage.” The bouquet offers up a complex blend of cherries, orange peel, venison, a touch of fruitcake, forest floor, woodsmoke and incipient notes of the Clos des Lambrays signature note of sealing wax. On the palate the wine is fairly deep and quite full-bodied, with good complexity, fairly high acids, still a goodly amount of tannin and very good length and grip on the maturing finish. There will probably always be a bit of tannin to chew through here, but the wine is complex and has aged pretty well. 2016-2040. **89+.**

1995 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 1995 Clos de la Roche from Domaine Dujac is starting to drink beautifully at age twenty and offers up a complex and tertiary blend of cherries, forest floor, fresh thyme, cinnamon, gamebirds, summer truffles and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite suave structurally (particularly for a 1995), with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and tangy finish. The elegant house style here has really worked nicely to soften up those sharp edges of the vintage. 2016-2035+. **93.**

1995 Clos St. Denis- Domaine Dujac

The 1995 Domaine Dujac Clos St. Denis is another absolutely beautiful example of the vintage. The wine offers up a perfumed and very complex bouquet of strawberries, cherries, blood orange, cinnamon, gamebirds, *sous bois*, roses and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very seamless, with a fine core, lovely complexity and resolution and a very long, focused and meltingly tannic finish. Just a lovely 1995 red Burgundy! 2016-2035. **94.**

Chambolle-Musigny

1995 Chambolle-Musigny “les Fuées”- Domaine Ghislaine Barthod

The 1995 les Fuées from Ghislaine Barthod is really a very pretty example of the vintage, which still has a trace of backend tannin, but is essentially resolved and drinking at its apogee at age twenty. The bouquet wafts from the nose in a blend of red and black cherries, black truffles, gamebird, a superb base of autumnal soil tones, lavender, a touch of espresso and a bit of charred wood in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine resolution and a long, complex and very modestly tannic finish. This has aged very gracefully and is now drinking very well indeed, though it easily has a couple more decades of life ahead of it. 2016-2035, **92.**

1995 Chambolle-Musigny “les Feusselottes”- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg

The 1995 Feusselottes from Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg is a lovely example of the vintage, with the slightly sturdy tannins inherent in the vintage nicely offset by the elegance of classic Chambolle. The bouquet is deep and very complex, offering up scents of cherries, orange peel, bonfire, gamebird, summer truffle, forest floor, mustard seed and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of still very vibrant fruit,

moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. A lovely '95 that has reached its plateau, but has plenty of life still ahead of it as well. 2016-2035. **91.**

1995 Chambolle-Musigny “les Cras”- Domaine Georges Roumier

1995 was a very, very strong vintage for Christophe Roumier and the '95 les Cras is destined to be an outstanding bottle with a few more years of bottle age. The nose is deep, blossoming and outstanding in its purity and complexity, as it offers up scents of black cherries, plums, black truffles, chocolate, woodsmoke, a great base of soil tones (that include some incipient *sous bois*) and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beginning to soften nicely, with excellent mid-palate depth of sweet black fruit, moderating tannins, sound acids and outstanding transparency on the long and ripely tannic finish. A terrific vintage for this wine, the 1995 les Cras probably needs about five more years to fully drop its tannins. It should prove to be a very long-lived vintage for this bottling. 2016-2045. **93.**



Inside the busy courtyard at the Domaine de Comte de Vogüé.

1995 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine de Comte de Vogüé

I was highly critical of the 1995 vintage at Domaine de Comte de Vogüé when the wines were young, but the wines have aged far better than I ever imagined possible out of the blocks and I seriously underestimated these wines. The 1995 Bonnes-Mares offers up a lovely, musky bouquet of red and black cherries, vinesmoke, a complex base of soil tones, mustard seed, gamebirds and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and

very elegant in profile, with superb complexity, a lovely core of fruit, melting tannin and lovely length and grip on the poised and classy finish. A really lovely 1995 red Burgundy! 2015-2050. **94.**

1995 Musigny “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de Comte de Vogüé

I am not sure if it was our bottle, or typical of the wine, but the 1995 Domaine de Comte de Vogüé Musigny was showing a bit more advanced aromatics than the Bonnes-Mares at our 1995 tasting, with more autumnal elements, but still plenty of depth and complexity. The bouquet offers up a mélange of cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebirds, a touch of nutskin, fine soil nuances and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open today, with a good core, suave, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the mature finish. There is not quite the same mid-palate flesh of the 1995 Bonnes-Mares from the domaine, but this too is a very strong example of the vintage. 2015-2035+. **93+.**

1995 Musigny- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 1995 Musigny from Christophe Roumier is really a gorgeous young wine, but it is in need of at least another decade in the cellar to fully blossom and drinking bottles today is not advisable. The bouquet is deep, pure and still a bit marked by its youthful stems, as it soars from the glass in a complex constellation of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, damsons, gamebirds, a brilliantly complex base of soil tones, fresh herbs and the aforementioned touch of stemminess. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and sappy at the core, with great focus and balance, moderate tannins and simply stunning length and grip on the tangy and impeccable finish. All this stunning young wine needs is further time in the cellar to unlock its secondary and tertiary layers of complexity. Brilliant juice. 2025-2075. **97.**

Vougeot

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 still have several bottles of the 1995 Clos Vougeot from the Mugneret sisters in my cellar and I really like this wine, which I have been visiting infrequently over the last six or seven years to check on its development. This most recent bottle was generously opened at the domaine in November and showed very well, offering up a deep and blossoming bouquet of cherries, red plums, Vosne spices, coffee, venison, a dollop of mustard seed and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a very good core, fine focus and balance, still a bit of chewy tannin on the backend and lovely length and grip. This is very tasty already, but still not at its apogee, and I would keep it tucked away in the cellar another four or five years to let its tannins soften up a bit more. A lovely wine. 2020-2050+. **92+.**

Vosne-Romanée

1995 Vosne-Romanée “les Chaumes”- Maison Leroy

The 1995 les Chaumes is a *négociant* wine from Madame Leroy and not a particularly strong example of the vintage. The bouquet is a bit still-born and has not developed much complexity with twenty years' worth of bottle age, and is now starting to show the first signs of oxidation in the upper register, as it offers up scents of cherries, plums, chocolate, damp herbs and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, simple and quite firm still on the backend, with some dry-edged tannins, tangy acids and a long, chewy and charmless finish. This still needs a couple more years to soften a bit more on the finish, but though it will keep, I would not have high expectations for it anywhere down the road. 2018-2035+. **85.**

1995 Vosne-Romanée “les Beaux Monts”- Domaine Leroy

Domaine Leroy's Beaux Monts bottling is aging very gracefully and is really a wonderful drink today, but with plenty of potential for longer-term evolution. The classic nose jumps from the glass in a mix of raspberries, cherries, Vosne spice tones, a lovely base of dark soil nuances, a touch of duck, discreet cedary oak and a nice dollop of autumnal overtones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, modest, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. This is really quite a lovely example. 2015-2040. **92+.**

1995 Vosne-Romanée “les Brûlées”- Domaine Leroy

The 1995 Vosne-Romanée “les Brûlées” from Domaine Leroy is also a very fine bottle of maturing red Burgundy, and though it does not exude quite the same signature Vosne-Romanée style as the excellent Beaux Monts in this vintage, there is an awful lot to like here. The bouquet offers up some of the beetroot tones I associate more often with Morey, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, beetroot, cinnamon, *sous bois*, herb tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with fine elegance on the attack, lovely mid-palate depth, melting tannins and excellent length and grip on the blossoming finish. 2015-2035. **92.**

1995 Vosne-Romanée “Malconsorts”- Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat

The 1995 vintage here was still made by Alain Hudelot, as Pierre Navrocki did not arrive to oversee the winemaking responsibilities at the domaine until 1997. This is one of the loveliest 1995 premier crus that I tasted in preparation for this report, with tangy acids and a bit of the vintage's tannin in evidence, but also very pretty red fruit tones to go along with a fine signature of soil. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, raspberries, cinnamon, duck, orange zest, *sous bois*, bonfires and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tangy, with a very good core, fine focus and complexity and a long, vibrant and still moderately tannic finish. With food, this is already quite tasty to drink, and will be even better with a bit more bottle age. Lovely juice. 2016-2035+. **92.**

1995 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

It is very interesting to compare the profiles of the 1996 and 1995 Echézeaux from the domaine, as we did at this tasting. The 1995 is far more autumnal and tertiary on the nose than its counterpart from 1996, but on the palate the wine is still quite a bit more tannic and is in need of further bottle age, whereas the 1996 is just starting to drink well. The 1995 offers up a complex nose of forest floor, fallen leaves, brown spices, bonfire, roasted venison and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with a good core, tangy acids and still a bit of chewy tannin perking up the backend and demanding a bit more bottle age. This is

quite a masculine vintage of Echézeaux here, but this wine remains very well-balanced and it should be excellent to drink with another five years in the cellar. 2020-2050. **91+**.

1995 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1995 Mongeard-Mugneret Richebourg is one of the top examples of the vintage that I have tasted in recent times and this wine is going to be stunning when it reaches full maturity. It is still a handful of years away from that point, but offers up a beautifully promising nose of plums, cherries, forest floor, duck, Vosne spices, fresh nutmeg, a hint of mustard seed and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and almost sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, still a bit of beautifully-integrated tannin to resolve, lovely balance and a very, very long and complex finish. With the proper food pairing, I am sure this is already a great drink, but I would still give it another half dozen years in the cellar to allow it to really reach its peak- where it will remain for decades and decades to come! 2022-2075. **95**.

Nuits St. Georges

1995 Nuits St. Georges “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Alain Michelot

The 1995 Vieilles Vignes bottling from Domaine Michelot has been fully mature for a few years now and is starting to get fairly autumnal in personality, offering up a complex and lovely nose of cherries, nutskin, strawberries, summer truffles, *sous bois* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and still has just a bit of backend tannin, with solid depth at the core, good focus and a long, autumnal finish. The fruit may just be starting to fade a bit here and it is probably a good idea to drink this up in the next half dozen years or so. 2015-2020+. **87**.

1995 Nuits St. Georges “la Richemone”- Domaine Alain Michelot

In contrast to the old vine Nuits *villages*, the Michelots’ ’95 la Richemone is now at its absolute peak of maturity and drinking very well indeed. The fine bouquet offers up a complex and stylish blend of cherries, *fraises du bois*, nutskin, gamebird, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil and a pungent topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and really well-balanced, with a fine core and very good focus. The finish is long and still shows a bit of backend tannin, but the tannins are absolutely buried in the vibrant fruit of the wine and this is a very well-balanced ’95 that is drinking with charm and breed today. 2016-2035. **91**.

1995 Nuits St. Georges “les Pruliers”- Domaine Henri Gouges

The 1995 les Pruliers from Domaine Gouges is still a fairly young wine, but it is starting to stir and should prove to be an outstanding example of the vintage in another five to seven years. The deep, complex and still fairly youthful nose offers up a blend of black cherries, venison, the first vestiges of *sous bois*, deep, dark soil tones, a bit of French roast, a touch of youthful Nuits medicinal overtones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and starting to blossom, with a rock solid core, excellent soil inflection, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish. This is going to be a terrific wine, but a bit more patience is required. 2020-2060+. **92+**.

1995 Nuits St. Georges “les Boudots”- Domaine Leroy

The 1995 Boudots from Domaine Leroy is a good, solid example of the vintage, with a bit of inherent rusticity that it will probably never be able to fully shake on the backend of the palate, but good depth, complexity and sturdy structural aspects. The bouquet is a lovely blend of black cherries, forest floor, woodsmoke, venison, a touch of mushroom and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite masculine in personality, with a good core, chewy, slightly tough tannins and sound acids on the long and

autumnal finish. This is just starting to drink well and should keep for another couple of decades. 2015-2035+. **88.**

1995 Nuits St. Georges “Vaucrains”- Domaine Alain Michelot

The 1995 Vaucrains from Domaine Michelot is a bit less ready to drink than the fine la Richemone from the estate and really could do with at least a few more years in the cellar to soften up the tannins more convincingly. The bouquet is superb, offering up scents of cherries, pomegranate, *pigeon*, a touch of bonfire, a complex base of soil and a bit of nutskin still in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plenty solid at the core, with ripe, chewy tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. I suppose one should not expect a proper example of Vaucrains in a very sturdy vintage like 1995 to be ready to go at age twenty, and indeed, this is the case with the '95 Michelot Vaucrains. It is very well balanced still and should be fine with a bit more bottle age, but let it sleep another five years! 2020-2040+. **90+.**



Bertrand Chevillon of Domaine Robert Chevillon et Fils in Nuits St. Georges.

1995 Nuits St. Georges “Les St. Georges”- Domaine Robert Chevillon et Fils

The 1995 Les St. Georges from the Chevillon family is one of the finest 1995s that I tasted in preparation for this report. The wine is now absolutely at its apogee and offers up a gorgeous and sappy blend of cherries, red plums, gamebird, hints of *sous bois*, summer truffles, woodsmoke and a discreet base of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impeccably well-balanced, with a superb core of fruit, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very soil-driven finish. At age twenty, this wine is

just entering its plateau of peak maturity and should continue to drink brilliantly for at least another quarter of a century. A stunning 1995! 2016-2040. **95.**

Savigny-lès-Beaune

1995 Savigny-lès-Beaune “Narbantons” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Camus-Bruchon

The 1995 Narbantons from Domaine Camus-Bruchon was made by Lucien Camus, Guillaume Camus’ father. It is a good, sturdy example of the vintage, but it shows just a bit of the rustic side of 1995 on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is complex, but the fruit is just a touch stewy in profile, offering up scents of baked cherries and currants, *sous bois*, venison, bonfires and acorns. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately chewy, with a good core, an autumnal personality, still a bit of backend tannin on the long and fully mature finish. This is a good, solid example of the vintage, but it will never be a particularly elegant bottle of Savigny. 2016-2025+. **88.**

1995 Savigny-lès-Beaune “aux Gravains”- Domaine Jean-Marc et Hugues Pavelot

The 1995 Gravains from the Pavelot family is aging quite nicely and is now offering up plenty of more mature layers of complexity in its aromatic and flavor profiles, but with a touch of the vintage’s backend tannin still remaining on the palate. The excellent nose wafts from the glass in a mix of dark berries, cassis, *sous bois*, roasted venison, espresso, stony soil elements and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now fairly autumnal in personality, with a good core and fine length and grip on the gently chewy and complex finish. The balance here is very good, despite a bit of ‘95’s tannins still lurking on the finish. This wine is starting to drink very nicely at age twenty, but has still a couple of decades life in it and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. A very good result. 2016-2035. **89+.**

Volnay

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+.**

1995 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine Michel Lafarge

The Lafarge family did a lovely job with their 1995s and the Clos des Chênes is really drinking well at age twenty. The bouquet is deep, complex and very refined, as it offers up scents of red and black cherries, gamebirds, an exotic touch of dried eucalyptus, bonfires, *sous bois* and a topnote of black truffles. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows lovely elegance on the attack, with a fine core, tangy acids and still a bit of backend tannin perking up the long and complex finish. This is now drinking very well, but still has decades of life ahead of it and there is absolutely no reason to be rushing to open bottles at this point in time, unless time is not on your side! A superb 1995. 2016-2050. **94.**

1995 Volnay “Caillerets” Ancienne Cuvée Carnot- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

The 1995 Cuvée Carnot from Maison Bouchard Père et Fils is one of those 1995s that shows a touch of “rusty pipe” on the nose at age twenty-one, but also good depth of fruit and blossoming aromatic complexity. The bouquet is a blend of red currants, fruitcake, lovely spice tones, forest floor, a touch of venison and cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, chewy and tangy, with good, but not great depth at the core, quite an autumnal flavor palette, just a bit of dry-edged tannins and good length and grip on the complex and mature finish. The fruit here seems to be fading already and this is probably best drunk up over the next decade or so. It is a good, solid wine that works well with heartier dishes, but it is not in the same league as the more recent vintages of red wines from Bouchard Père et Fils. 2016-2025+? **86.**

RECENTLY TASTED SPANISH WINES



Tempranillo grapes ready for picking in Rioja Alavesa in October of 2014.

It has been a year since I last reported on Spanish wines and I was very pleased to start to receive samples of new releases from several of my favorite importers of wines from Spain in the last months of 2015 and in January of this year. The world of Spanish wine today is one of the most bi-polar regions in all the world, as there continues to be a vast ocean of high alcohol, overly oaky wines produced from the vast vineyard stretches of the Iberian peninsula, but as is the case in California today, there is also a growing trend to produce wines at lower octane levels and with less new overtly oaky personalities. These more classically-styled wines are still far from the majority in Spain, as the Spanish domestic market really enjoys the higher alcohol and more oaky styles of wines, and the vast majority of Spain's wines are drunk within the country, so we are probably not going to see this more over the top style of Spanish wine go away anytime soon. But, for those of us who find these types of wines less interesting, the growing underground of *terroir*-driven, lower alcohol and less oaky wines within Spain is certainly thriving and there are a large number of options available out of Spain today for those who value this style of wine. Many of these offer up truly exceptional values as well, as the prices for the more classically-styled Spanish wines, with a few notable exceptions such as López de Heredia's beautiful Rioja bottlings, generally tend to be far lower than those demanded for the more over the top and heavily-oaked wines from the country. This report is once again loaded with very

fine bottles that offer up truly exceptional expressions of *terroir* and aromatic and flavor complexity for extremely reasonable prices, and even where prices for these more classically-styled Spanish wines are not flat out steals, they still offer very competitive pricing *vis à vis* several other wine-producing countries around the globe for similarly fine wines. In short, though the oaky, heavily-extracted and high octane wines continue to be the majority of wines coming out of Spain today, their polar opposites continue to grow in number with each passing vintage and today there are some really great wines to be found amongst the amazingly wide variety of wine-producing regions of Spain.

The following tasting notes are arranged, primarily by geography, working from west to east across the northern section of the Iberian peninsula, and then passing south and again moving across the country from west to east. An exception to this is my listing all of the recent examples of Cava that I have listed first in the report, despite the fact that the vast, vast majority of Cava is produced in Cataluña on the northeastern sector of the country. As I only tasted a handful of Rosados for this report, I have also grouped them on their own, regardless of geographical origin, for ease of location in this long report. Within each geographical subsection, I have listed the wines chronologically by vintage and then alphabetically by producer. The other exception to the strict geographical grouping of the tasting notes that follow is that I have once again grouped all of the wines produced by the young winemaking team of Envínate together in their own section. Readers may recall from a previous report on Spanish wines that Envínate is a company formed by four young winemakers who met and became friends at oenology school and formed their enterprise upon graduating together back in 2005. They started out as consultants, but have now begun producing wines in conjunction with farmers in a variety of different regions who happen to have great terroirs and old vines. The wines are made in very limited quantities, but are truly exceptional and it makes sense to group them together in one subsection of the report, rather than scatter them out amongst their various geographical listings. If readers have not yet taken the time to locate and drink a few bottles of Envínate wines, I strongly urge you to do so, as they are truly stunning. I should also mention as the number of samples piled up for this report on Spain, I did not reach out to a couple of my favorite importers of old school Spanish wines this time around, as I felt this report was already going to be long enough, and consequently, I will do another article on Spanish wines a bit later in the spring and report on current releases from some of my favorite estates who are conspicuous by their absence in this feature.

Cava

The world of sparkling wine in Spain is in the midst of conflict at the present time, as several top, small producers have opted out of the official D.O. of Cava and are now marketing their wines under the new “Clàssic Penedès Sparkling Wine” D.O. I have to assume that this insurrection out of the D.O. of Cava has to do with the Spanish wine authorities deciding to extend the moniker of Cava to the entirety of Spain a few years ago. As I wrote a couple of years back, the real yardstick of quality for Cava is not where the grapes are grown in Spain, but whether or not the producer making the wine is also the farmer growing the grapes. Only six percent of Cava producers farm and harvest their own grapes, with the vast majority just buying in the grapes on the open market and putting out their own brand of sparkling wine. The difference between these two worlds of Cava is enormous and to my palate, it is only the members of the Six Percent Club whose wines really merit attention, with a few exceptions, as

their wines are truly world class sparkling wines of depth, complexity and aging potential that is second only to Champagne in the world of bubbly. Happily, this round of Cava samples came almost exclusively from members of the Six Percent Club and I was able to taste some truly exceptional bottles.

Biutiful Cava Brut Nature NV- Isaac Fernandez Selección

The non-vintage Biutiful Cava Brut Nature from Isaac Fernandez is composed of a blend of eighty percent Macabeu and twenty percent Chardonnay and was aged on its fine lees for fifteen months prior to disgorgement. The wine is bright and youthfully enticing, offering up a fine nose of green apple, lime, wild fennel, a nice base of minerality and a touch of sea salts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, frothy and focused, with a good, solid core, delicate *mousse*, brisk acids and very good length and grip on the moderately complex and very clean finish. This is a stylish, youthful bottle of Cava that is light on its feet and eminently quaffable. I can well imagine sharing a bottle of this around ten in the evening in Barcelona with tapas while trying to decide where to go out to dinner that night. 2016-2023. **88.**

Biutiful Cava Brut NV- Isaac Fernandez Selección

The non-vintage Brut bottling of Biutiful from Isaac Fernandez is the same blend as the Brut Nature- eighty percent Macabeu augmented with twenty percent Chardonnay. It is aged the same fifteen months on the fine lees, but is finished with a *dosage* that brings it up to eight grams per liter of residual sugar, in contrast to the 1.1 grams of the Brut Nature. The wine offers up a clean and vibrant nose of green apple, menthol, a touch of leesiness, salty minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and frothy, with a good core, nice mineral undertow and plenty of acids to carry its *dosage* with bounce and precision. The finish is not as long as the very top examples of Cava, but this is a well-made wine and a very good value at fourteen dollars a bottle here in New York. 2016-2023. **88.**

Biutiful Cava Brut Rosé NV- Isaac Fernandez Selección

The Biutiful Cava Brut Rosé NV from Isaac Fernandez is made entirely from Garnacha and is finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine spends fifteen months aging *sur latte* prior to release. The current bottling offers up a spicy and vinous bouquet of blood orange, quince, a touch of *garrigue*, salty soil tones and a bit of clove in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and not quite as suavely balanced as the other two Biutiful bottlings that I tasted, with fairly sharp acids, frothy *mousse* and a rather chunky finish of respectable length and grip. This is a bit coarse on the backend and the *dosage* is not seamlessly woven into the wine. Okay, but the other two bottlings are a step up. 2016-2020. **85.**

Cava Reserva “Brut de Brut” NV- Maria Casanovas (Disgorged April 2015)

Maria Casanovas is located in the heart of Cava country in Cataluña, as they are based in the village of Sant Sadurní d'Anoia. While they do not own their own vineyards, they produce their wines from vineyard parcels that they lease and farm themselves, making them part of the Seven Percent Club, as they make their wines from grapes they grow. The current release of their non-vintage Brut de Brut is a one-third each split of Macabeu, Parellada and Xarel-lo and was aged a minimum of fifteen months *sur latte*. The present bottling in the market is excellent, showing lovely complexity and focus on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine blend of tart pear, a touch of tangerine, ocean breeze, salty soil tones and a touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and frothy, with a good core, lovely balance, very elegant *mousse* and quite good length and grip on the complex and beautifully

ethereal finish. The lightness of step of the finest Cavas is very much in evidence in this classy wine. 2016-2025. **91.**

Cava “Glaç” Brut Nature NV- Maria Casanovas (Disgorged March 2015)

The Cava “Glaç” Brut Nature from Maria Casanovas is comprised of a blend of forty percent pinot noir and sixty percent a fairly equal mix of the traditional three grapes of Cava: Macabeu, Parellada and Xarel-lo. The wine is aged for at least a year and a half on its fine lees and is produced from the older vines that the family farms, with the vines ranging from twenty to thirty years of age. The current release of Glaç offers up a superb bouquet of lemon, clementine, salty soil tones, wild fennel, ocean breeze and just a whisper of bread dough. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, bright acids, elegant *mousse*, a fine base of minerality and excellent length and grip on the complex and still youthful finish. This is built to age gracefully and will be even better with a few years in the cellar, but it is already a very serious and tasty bottle of bubbly. 2016-2030+. **92+.**

Castell de Grabuac “Brut Nature” Reserva NV- Família Suriol (Disgorged August 2013)

The current release of Brut Nature Reserva from Castell de Grabuac is from the base year of 2007 and spent more than fifty months aging *sur latte*. It is comprised of a blend of Macabeu and Xarel-lo and offers up a superb nose of toasted wheat bread, baked apples, a touch of hazelnut, salty soil tones and a bit of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely snappy, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the complex finish. I like the combination here of mature aromatics and flavors and still youthful acidity, which gives the wine lift and cut on the backend. Good juice for those who like their bubbly with a patina of age to it. 2016-2025. **90.**

Cava Cygnus “1+1=3” Cava Brut NV (Disgorged August 2015)

1+1=3 is one of my favorite Cava producers in Catalunya, as they are one of the more important producers in the “Seven Percent Club” of Cava labels that produce their wine from estate-owned vineyards. Currently, the bodegas is in the process of official conversion of all their vineyards to organic certification. The current release of their fine non-vintage Brut Cava is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent Parellada and twenty-five percent Macabeu and was aged for twenty-one months *sur latte*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a deep and complex blend of tart pear, lime zest, wild fennel, complex, salty soil tones and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, poised and elegant, with frothy *mousse*, a fine core, excellent soil signature and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is one of the best Cava producers in all of Spain and the wine is an absolute steal in the realm of sparkling wine prices, as it sells for only seventeen dollars here in the US and is probably far less in Europe! Fine juice. 2016-2030+. **92.**

Cava Cygnus “1+1=3” Cava Brut NV (Disgorged November 2015)

The November 2015 disgorgement of 1+1+3 Cava is the most recent release from this fine bodegas, and it is precise and absolutely outstanding. The blend is the same traditional mix of the “Big Three” varieties of Cava, with forty-five percent of the blend Xarel-lo, thirty percent Parellada and twenty-five percent Macabeu, with the wine having spent just under two years aging on its fine lees. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex and vibrant mélange of lemon, pear, ocean breeze, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a gentle topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, bright, focused and rock solid at the core, with lovely nascent complexity, zesty acids, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the beautifully-balanced and youthful finish. For drinking over the next six months, I would look for the excellent

disgorgement from August, but this wine, once it blossoms, may land just a touch higher up on the hierarchy. Fine, fine Cava. 2017-2030+. **92+**.

Mestres “1312” Cava Brut Nature Reserva (Disgorged August 2015)

The Mestres “1312” Brut Nature Reserva has a slightly different *cépages* than their 2012 Gran Reserva, as here there is forty percent Parellada in the blend and thirty percent each of Xarel-lo and Macabeu. The wine is aged twenty months *sur latte* in the traditional manner under natural cork and the wine offers up a lovely nose of green apple, lime blossoms, a bit of ocean breeze, lovely soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. This is very tasty already and will be even better with a year or two in the cellar. 2016-2025. **90+**.



2013 AT Roca Brut Reserva Clàssic Penedès Sparkling Wine

AT Roca is a new winery that was started by the brother and sister team of Agustí and Lali Torelló Sibill, as well as Agustí's son, Agustí Torelló Roca, who handles all the viticulture and winemaking for the new sparkling wine house. These are the same family members who ran the famed Agustí Torelló Mata Cava house, who were one of the driving forces in the formation of the category in past generations and continue to make one of Spain's greatest sparklers, which they call Kripta. An internecine family argument led to the ouster of Agustí and Lali Torelló and they promptly set up on their own, contracting with eight small farmers to purchase grapes from

cooler, high altitude vineyards farmed in the proper, Six Percent Club manner. The 2013s are the first releases from AT Roca and not surprisingly, they are exceptional in quality. The 2013 Brut Reserva is a blend of the Big Three grapes of Xarel-lo, Macabeu and Parellada and offers up a superb bouquet of tart apple, bread dough, wild fennel, lovely minerality and a topnote of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and complexity and a long, perfectly balanced finish. 2016-2025+. **92+**.

2013 AT Roca Brut Rosat Reserva Clàssic Penedès Sparkling Wine

The 2013 AT Roca Brut Rosat Reserva is comprised of a unique blend of sixty percent Macabeu and forty percent Monastrell. The wine is aged for fifteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and is a lovely, pale salmon color. The bouquet is bright and classy, wafting from the glass in a mélange of blood orange, white cherries, salty soil tones, dried rose petals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with outstanding mid-palate amplitude, elegant *mousse* and excellent cut and grip on the long and racy finish. This is terrific Rosat! 2016-2025. **92+**.

2012 Júlia Bernet “Ingenius” Brut Nature (Disgorged October 2015)

When Xavier Bernet opened his winery in 2001, he named it after his newly-born daughter, Júlia. He farms his nine hectares of vineyards organically, with some biodynamic principals incorporated into his viticulture. Most of the bottlings that he produces are blends of Xarel-lo and Chardonnay, but this bottling of the 2012 Ingenius was comprised entirely of old vine Xarel-lo and spent nearly three years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a complex and elegant aromatic blend of pear, warm bread, wild fennel, salty soil tones, gentle smokiness and a touch of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core, very refined, pinpoint bubbles, great focus and grip and a very long, complex and elegant finish. This is utterly seamless and really classy Cava. 2016-2030. **92**.

2012 Mestres “Coquet” Brut Nature Gran Reserva

The Mestres family has been one of the pioneering producers of classic Cava for hundreds of years in the region. Based in the heart of sparkling wine country in Catalunya, in the village of Sant Sadurní d’Anoia, the family currently farms seventy-four hectares of their own vineyards. The 2012 Mestres “Coquet” Brut Nature Gran Reserva is comprised of a blend of thirty percent each of Macabeu and Parellada and forty percent Xarel-lo and was aged forty months under cork on its fine lees. The wine offers up a fine nose of tart pear, bread dough, a touch of lemongrass, plenty of smokiness and a fine base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with impressive mid-palate intensity, elegant *mousse*, fine soil signature and a long, vibrant and well-balanced finish. Classy juice that will age superbly. 2016-2030+. **92+**.

2010 Júlia Bernet “R-130” Brut Nature (Disgorged October 2015)

The 2010 Júlia Bernet “R-130” Brut Nature is also comprised exclusively of old vine Xarel-lo and spent nearly five years aging in its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The wine is absolutely stunning and one of the most refined examples of Cava I have had the pleasure to taste, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of white peach, tart pear, wild fennel, warm biscuits, salty soil tones and a touch of ocean breeze in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and focused, with a rock solid core of fruit, outstanding complexity and balance, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the vibrant and utterly seamless finish. Very elegant and complex juice. 2016-2030. **93+**.

Rosado

As I only tasted a handful of Rosados in preparation for this report, I have grouped them altogether in their own section, rather than isolating them in their respective regions.

2014 Lagrima de Garnacha Rosado- Bodegas Aliaga (Navarra)

The 2014 Lagrima de Garnacha Rosado from Bodegas Aliaga is a superb bottle that offers up a very floral bouquet of roses, cherries, strawberries, sandy soil tones and a potpourri of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open, with a fine core, bright acids and a long, pure and nicely vinous finish. This is Rosado that is made for the table and would be a great red wine substitute on those brutally hot summer evenings when the grill is singing, but it is too hot to drink a proper red. 2016-2018. **91.**

2014 Ginérosat- Buil & Giné (Priorat) Screwcap

The 2014 Ginérosat from Buil & Giné is quite a dark-colored Rosado and is made from a blend of eighty percent garnacha and twenty percent merlot. It is a pretty ripe Rosado at 14.5 percent, but this is Priorat. The wine is handling its closure quite well and showed no signs of reduction in its ripe nose of watermelon, rhubarb, spicy soil tones, cherry skin and a bit of dried floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite vinous in style, with a good core, sound framing acids and just a bit of heat poking out on the fairly long finish. It is a bit riper than I would typically reach for, but for those who do not mind a little octane in their Rosado, this would work very well around the grill in the heat of the summer. 2016-2018. **87.**

2014 Catajarros “Elite” Rosado- Bodegas Hermanos Merino (Cigales)

Cigales is Rosado country and the Merino brothers make one of the finest examples I have had the pleasure to taste. Their 2014 Rosado is mostly Tempranillo, with a bit of Garnacha and the white wine grapes of Verdejo and Alvillos also blended in. All of the vines here are between fifty and one hundred years of age, so this is truly old vine Rosado. The 2014 Catajarros offers up a deep, strawberry red color and a fine nose of rhubarb, strawberries, salty soil tones, orange peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and succulent, with a fine core, lovely, nascent complexity and fine length and grip on the crisp and focused finish. This bottling ages very well and more complexity will arrive with a year or two of bottle age. Fine juice and one of the best Rosados in Spain. 2016-2023. **92+.**

2014 Rioja Rosado- Bodegas Lecea (La Rioja Alta)

The 2014 Rioja Rosado from Bodegas Lecea is a young wine that will be even better to drink with a few years in the cellar, but is awfully hard not to enjoy at the present time. Since my visit to proprietor Luís Alberto Lecea in October of 2014, he has been forced out as the President of the Rioja D.O. His 2014 Rosado is comprised of a blend of seventy-five percent Garnacha and twenty-five percent Viura and is quite pale salmon in color. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of melon, orange peel, a touch of beeswax, salty soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and youthfully tight, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids and a long, pure and still quite primary finish. Give this another year in the bottle and it will really blossom, but it is already quite tasty. 2016-2025+. **89+.**

Envínate

As I noted on my last big feature on Spanish wines, Envínate is a relatively new winemaking joint-venture formed by four friends who met at oenological school at the University of Miguel Hernandez in Alicante. The four young winemakers, Roberto Santana, Alfonso Torrente, Laura Ramos and José Martínéz, after graduating from school in 2005, began their business as consultants, but have evolved into the winemaking team for several vineyard owners with fine parcels with whom they have now formed joint ventures in regions such as Extremadura, Ribeira Sacra and the Canary Islands. The team from Envínate works alongside of their vineyard-owning partners in the vines all through the season, and then turns their production into vinous treasures. Seeking to highlight the unique terroirs of each parcel of vines that they work with, they use no chemical treatments in the vineyards, harvest everything by hand, ferment solely with indigenous yeasts, eschew modern winemaking parlor tricks like extraction enzymes and the like and do all of their grape crushing by foot. The wines tend to also be on the low sulfur side of the equation, are not new oaky and are really tremendously complex and vibrant wines of great personality and breed. This was now my third vintage of wines from Envínate, and once again, I was absolutely floored by the quality and classic styling of all of these 2013s! What I like about this group of dedicated young winemakers is that they list the names of the farmers who the team works with in each region on the labels of the wines, to pay homage to the hard work these folks have done to preserve their vineyards and grow first class fruit- often from very old vines. In the article, I have omitted these farmers' names in the titles of the wines to make them a bit less complicated, but they are easily found front and center on the labels if you track down a few bottles. Rather than list each Envínate wine in its own geographical category, it made more sense to list them all together here, as they bear a strong family resemblance of excellence and uncompromising traditional styles, but each and every wine is utterly classical in its interpretation of its region's terroir and these are emphatically wines that speak of their place of origin, rather than their very talented team of winemakers!

2013 Táganan “Vinos Atlánticos” Blanco- Envínate (Tenerife)

As readers may recall from my note on the 2012 Tinto, Táganan is the local name for the vineyards on the northeastern side of the island of Tenerife, which hang perched on cliffs overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. The vineyards here are planted on rocky volcanic soils with a mixture of old vines, the origins of which are not recorded, so this is the ultimate “field blend” and no one really knows what grapes are planted here, though the white wine includes various percentages of Malvasia, Listan Blanco and Albillo Criollo amongst other indigenous varieties. The 2013 Táganan Blanco is fairly reductive when first opened (and quite Coche-Dury-like in this aspect), but with time in decanter eventually begins to offer up a youthfully complex bouquet of apple, pear, nutty tones, iodine, salty minerality, citrus oils and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, outstanding focus and grip and a very, very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. I decanted this wine for a good hour in decanter prior to drinking it and it opened brilliantly, but I would not pour it directly out of the bottle, as it is made quite reductively and needs some oxygen exposure to really blossom. It should get even better with further bottle age. Great juice. 2016-2030+. 93+.

2013 Táganan Blanco “Parcela Amogoje”- Envínate (Tenerife)

The Táganan Blanco “Parcela Amogoje” from Envínate is made from a field blend of hundred year-old, wild vines, growing on volcanic soils one hundred to two hundred meters

above the Atlantic Ocean. The vines are untrained, running wild on the ground and are on their own, indigenous rootstocks, as phylloxera has never been known on the Canary Islands. The vineyard is owned by José Angel Alonso, and the wine is now fermented in two year-old, five hundred liter oak barrels and aged one year on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2013 is an excellent follow-up to the brilliant 2012, but is quite reductive in style and fully demands an hour in decanter before it blossoms. Once it opens up, the wine delivers a superb bouquet of apple, iodine, beeswax, citrus oil, very complex, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with a youthfully complex, vibrant personality, great focus and cut and a very long, pure and electric finish. This is lovely today and will be even better with a few years of bottle age. 2016-2030+. **94.**

2013 Táganan Tinto “Parcela Margalagua”- Envínate (Tenerife)

The 2013 Táganan Tinto “Parcela Margalagua” from Envínate is produced from a field blend of indigenous grapes on the island of Tenerife. The vines are one hundred years of age and untrained, just running wild over the volcanic cliffs on this side of the island. José Angel is the farmer that tends these venerable vines and the wine produced by the team at Envínate retains all of the stems for this bottling, raising the wine in old, five hundred liter casks. The 2013 Parcela Margalagua is a gorgeous wine, with the depth and complexity found in all the Envínate bottlings, tied to the tangy acids of the island’s volcanic soils and the typical *herbacité* on the nose of the wines of Tenerife. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, new leather, plenty of herb tones, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a bit of coffee grounds in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and tangy, with marvelous transparency, a good core, excellent intensity of flavor, a fair bit of tannin and a long, vibrant and youthful finish. With food, this is already really easy to drink, but it is built for the cellar and will be even better with some bottle age. This is the finest red wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Tenerife. 2019-2040+. **94.**

2013 Tinto Amarela “Parcela Valdemedel”- Envínate (Extremadura)

As I observed last year on the note on the lovely 2012, “Tinto Amarela” is the local name in Extremadura for the Trincadeira grape, which is a difficult grape to handle, but can produce stunning wines. The Trincadeira grown in the Parcela Valdemedel benefits from the north-facing orientation of the vineyard, the five hundred meter elevation and the fine base of limestone in the soil, as this is a variety that seems happiest if it does not bake on the vine. The 2013 again comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and starts out life a bit reductive when first opened, but blossoms beautifully with air. After a bit of time in decanter, the bouquet offers up a fine constellation of cassis, blackberries, tree bark, dark chocolate, lovely herb tones (particularly fresh sage), a fine base of dark soil tones and again, Trincadeira’s signature oak leaf aromatics in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with fine focus and purity, elegant, suave tannins, excellent complexity and enormous backend energy on the very long and perfectly balanced finish. This is every bit as elegant and refined as the 2012 and is another absolutely reference point example of Trincadeira (man, I love this grape!) and if you have a tasting group and want to blind them on a brilliant wine that is from way, way beyond the lineup of usual suspects, this is the wine! 2016-2035+. **93+.**

2013 Albahra Garnacha Tintorera- Envínate (Almansa)

The 2013 Albahra Garnacha Tintorera (or Alicante Bouschet) from Envínate is an outstanding wine and one of the ripest in their lineup of wines from this vintage, coming in at an even fourteen percent alcohol. The wine is fifty percent whole clusters this year and fermented with indigenous yeasts and bottled unfiltered, after its *elevage* in older casks. The wine is another

2013 from Envínate that is a bit reductive out of the blocks and should be decanted for thirty minutes prior to serving. Once it blossoms, it offers up an exceptional bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, grilled venison, a bit of charred wood, a fine base of dark soil tones, espresso and those leafy topnotes so typical of Alicante Bouschet. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, velvety tannins and lovely focus and grip on the complex and seamlessly balanced finish. A dynamite wine that is already starting to throw a bit of sediment, so decanting serves a twofold purpose. 2016-2035. **94.**

2013 Lousas “Viñas de Alea”- Envínate (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2013 Lousas “Viñas de Alea” from Envínate is a new bottling for me this year, as I did not taste this in the 2012 vintage. Alea means “village” in Gallego and this is the name the team at Envínate takes for their blended bottling of Ribeira Sacra, as opposed to their single vineyard bottlings here. This cuvée hails from several different parcels, with all of the vines sixty years of age or more. The wine is made entirely from whole clusters, with indigenous yeasts, aged in old oak casks and bottled without filtration or further additions of SO₂. The 2013 Viñas de Alea offers up a beautiful and very complex bouquet of pomegranate, dark berries, a touch of tree bark, espresso, gentle botanicals, slate, a hint of pepper and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very soil-driven in personality, with a sappy core of fruit, stunning transparency, ripe, fairly firm tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and refined finish. This is a young buck and really deserves several years in the cellar to come into its prime. It will age long and gracefully and is a stunning bottle of Ribeira Sacra! 2018-2040. **94.**

2013 Lousas “Parcela Seoane”- Envínate (Ribeira Sacra)

The Parcela Seoane bottling of Ribeira Sacra from Envínate hails from a vineyard owned by Miguel Anxo in Amandi, which faces southwest in its exposition and is planted with vines that are in excess of eighty years of age. The 2013 is another absolutely stellar example of Mencía, wafting from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of cassis, graphite, espresso, woodsmoke, lovely herb tones, a touch of pepper and a topnote of tree bark. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with a fine core, moderate tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and still quite primary finish. Like the 2012, this wine has excellent intensity of flavor without undue weight, superb vinosity for a young wine and will blossom beautifully with a couple of years in the cellar. Very serious Ribeira Sacra. 2018-2040. **93+.**

2013 Lousas “Parcela Camiño Novo”- Envínate (Ribeira Sacra)

As I noted last year, the name of Envínate’s bottlings from Ribeira Sacra, “Lousas”, is the name in local dialect for the slate soils in this section of the region overlooking the Sil River, centered around the town of Amandi. The Parcela Camiño Novo, which is owned by Pablo González, is produced from seventy year-old vines and is a blend of ninety percent Mencía and ten percent Garnacha Tintorera. It is entirely whole clusters, aged in old, French oak barrels prior to bottling and is bottled without filtrations or additional sulfur. The Camiño Novo sits at an elevation of 430 meters above sea level, forming an amphitheater above the Sil River, and is one of the coolest sites in Ribeira Sacra. The 2013 is a marvelous follow-up to the excellent 2012 I reported upon last year, wafting from the glass in a deep and complex constellation of sweet dark berries, espresso, a touch of spit-roasted gamebird, a beautiful base of slate, fresh herb tones, graphite, just a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and really defined by its soil tones, with a superb core, outstanding complexity, ripe, moderate tannins, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and beautifully

balanced finish. This is still a young wine and, though it is irresistible in the glass today, really should be aged for at least a few years, to allow all of the secondary layers of complexity that are hovering on the horizon to fully develop. A beautiful bottle of Mencia! 2019-2040+. 94+.



One hundred year-old Albariño vines trained on their pergolas in Meaño.

Albariño- Rías Biaxas

My tastings of Albariño bottlings from Rías Biaxas this year allowed me to taste a fuller range of the wines from Alberto Nanclares, who is based in the village of Castrelo, a couple of kilometers from the unofficial Albariño capital of Cambados. This is in the Val do Salnés, which is home to some of the very finest terroir in all of Rías Biaxas, and Alberto was fortunate when he and his wife relocated here from Basque country in 1992 to buy a home that also included some old Albariño vines trained traditionally on pergolas. He is trained as an economist and his family's relocation to Castrelo was to allow a peaceful second chapter, post-career by the sea, but he was intrigued by grape growing and eventually set up a small winery in his garage. Since his arrival, his passion for wine has grown and he has acquired a few other choice parcels of vines in Cambados and Meaño and now farms organically two and a half hectares of vines,

making his wines in a very traditional style, with indigenous yeasts, no malolactic fermentation and a minimum of one year aging on the lees prior to bottling without fining or filtration. These are very limited edition wines, with some of his single vineyards only made in quantities of a bit more than two hundred and fifty bottles, but they are truly extraordinary wines and well worth a special search to find. I had very much enjoyed his 2011 version of his basic bottling, which he calls Dandelión, when I tasted it last year, as it is in its own right a very, very serious example of Albariño. However, this year his importer, José Pastor, very generously sent along some of his other cuvées and I really was able to gain an appreciation of just how brilliant his wines are today. Clearly, Alberto Nanclares belongs ranked up right at the summit of Albariño producers with such artisanal giants as Paco Dovaló López, José Pintos, Fernando Meis Otero and larger high quality estates such as Palacio de Fefiñanes and Do Ferreiro. These are simply stunning white wines that are built to age, and if one is not yet convinced of just how great an old school example of Albariño can be, I strongly recommend searching out a few bottles from Señor Nanclares!

2014 Albariño “Essencia Diviña”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)

The “Essencia Diviña” bottling of Albariño from Adegas Gran Vinum is aged three months on its lees prior to bottling. The 2014 version is a pretty and rather high-toned example of the varietal, wafting from the glass in a blend of lemon, very discreet leesy tones, ocean breeze and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and bouncy, with good, but not great depth at the core, bright acids and fine focus on the fairly long and zesty finish. This bottling does not have the mid-palate intensity of some of the top examples of Albariño that spend a far longer time nurturing on their fine lees prior to bottling, but it is a very tasty bottle that works very well at the table. 2016-2019. **88.**

2014 Albariño “Selección Especial”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)

The 2014 Albariño “Selección Especial” from Adegas Gran Vinum is produced from some of their older vines, as these are forty year-old vineyards and the wine is aged for four and a half months on its fine lees prior to bottling. The wine offers up a bright bouquet of lime, grapefruit, salty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the moderately complex finish. I get the sense that this wine is fermented with cultured yeasts and has sacrificed some complexity as a result (maybe I am wrong). The raw materials here are very good, but the wine seems just a touch too spit-polished to compete with the top Albariño producers. 2016-2020. **89+.**

2014 Frore de Carme Albariño “Envidia Cochina”- Eladio Piñeiro (Rías Baixas)

The 2014 Albariño “Envidia Cochina” from Frore de Carme is sealed with a plastic cork, but based on how nicely the 2013 version has held up under this closure (please see below), keeping this over the mid-term should not be an issue. This bottling is made in a very interesting style, as the vintage is aged for six months on its fine lees and the blended with fifteen percent of the previous year’s wine, which has been held back in stainless steel tank for a year more. The 2014 Envidia Cochina is a fine bottle of Albariño, offering up a nicely briny nose of pear, lime peel, sea salts, lemongrass and a gentle touch of leesy. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with fine mid-palate stuffing, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the focused and nicely complex finish. Lovely juice. 2016-2020+. **91.**

2013 Albariño- Avó Roxo (Rías Baixas)

The 2013 Albariño from Antonio Gondar Moldes' Avó Roxo winery is outstanding and drinking at its prime today. The beautiful nose has blossomed to offer up a lovely constellation of pear, pineapple, a touch of menthol, stony minerality, sea salts and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, bright acids and excellent length and balance on the zesty finish. Fine, fine juice in its prime. 2016-2025+. **93.**

2013 Albariño- Cabaleiro do Val (Meaño- Rías Baixas)

It had been more than a year and a half since I last tasted the 2013 Albariño from Cabaleiro do Val, and the wine has blossomed beautifully with a bit of time in the bottle. The bouquet is now wide open and offers up a fine constellation of pink grapefruit, citrus peel, bread fruit, lemongrass, salty soil tones, very discreet leanness and a fine topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great backend mineral drive, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. Along with Alberto Nanclares, Paco Dovaló López is making the very finest wines of the D.O. today. Keep in mind that 2013 is not considered a great vintage in Rías Baixas and it is just amazing what these two artisans can do with old vines and traditional winemaking principals. Great juice. 2016-2030. **94.**

2013 Albariño- Lagar de Broullón (Meaño- Rías Baixas)

The 2013 Albariño from José Pintos is outstanding and drinking with great style at the present time. The bouquet is deep, complex and classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, gentle wheat tones, plenty of smokiness, lemongrass, salty minerality, ocean breeze and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, soil-driven and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and cut, racy acids and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. A great bottle of Albariño. 2016-2035. **94.**

2013 Albariño- Lagar de Candes (Meaño- Rías Baixas)

Eulogio Gondar is the fourth generation of his family to run Lagar de Candes, and he has been taking advantage of their old vines in the hamlet of Meaño for a bit more than a decade now. His 2013 Albariño is drinking beautifully today, wafting from the glass in a blend of tart pineapple, bread fruit, salty soil tones, lemon peel, a touch of stoniness and a nice note of Atlantic brininess in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core, racy acids and outstanding backend energy and grip on the long and perfectly balanced finish. This is fine, fine juice that is now hitting on all cylinders, but will continue to age beautifully for many years to come. 2016-2025. **93.**

2013 Albariño "Dandelión"- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados- Rías Baixas)

The 2013 Dandelión Albariño from Alberto Nanclares is an outstanding example that is just starting to spread its wings and prepare to soar, with great depth and balance on both the nose and palate. The outstanding bouquet offers up great purity in its blend of pear, lemon, lovely, discreet leesy complexity, a touch of beeswax, ocean breeze, wild fennel and complex minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with an excellent core, great cut and grip, impeccable precision and a very long, youthful and extremely promising finish. I would be inclined to give the 2013 Dandelión another year or two in the cellar and allow it to fully blossom, while drinking the splendid 2012 version, which is wide open and ready for business. Señor Nanclares is making simply superb Albariño! 2017-2026+. **91.**

2013 Albariño- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados- Rías Baixas)

Alberto Nanclares is based in the Val do Salnés, which is the same sub-region of Rías Baixas where the Godfather of Albariño, Paco Dovalo has his small estate. The 2013 Albariño from Señor Nanclares is produced from vines that range from thirty to sixty years of age and it is an outstanding and still quite youthful wine, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of lime, tart pear, briny ocean breeze, lovely leesiness, dried flowers and a fine base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with a fine core, bright, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, primary and impeccably balanced finish. This is a really elegant example of Albariño and it is just a puppy today, with the best yet to come and I would tuck it away in the cellar for a couple of years and really let it blossom. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2030+. **92+**.

2013 Albariño “Soverribas”- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados- Rías Baixas)

The vineyard of Soverribas lies in the village of Meaño, on a rare soil base of clay and decomposed granite, with vines that are now thirty years of age. This is one of the three single vineyard wines that Alberto Nanclares has begun producing, and the 2013 Soverribas delivers a superb bouquet of pear, a touch of tangerine, dried flowers, just a bit of ocean breeze, wild fennel, lime zest and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and grip, bright acids and a very long, still very primary and soil-driven finish. This is like a snake coiled and ready to spring, but still tightly-knit and not yet ready for primetime drinking, but the backend energy here is enormous and in the fullness of time, this is going to be a special bottle of Albariño. 2018-2035. **93+**.

2013 Frore de Carme Albariño “Envidia Cochina”- Eladio Piñeiro (Rías Baixas)

The 2013 Albariño “Envidia Cochina” from Frore de Carme was closed up with a plastic cork, but the wine had aged very nicely under its closure and was showing beautifully as it enters into its third year. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows lovely precision in its mélange of tangerine, pear, gentle leesy tones, a touch of fresh rosemary, ocean saltiness, menthol and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with good framing acids, a fine core and very good complexity on the long, *à point* and well-balanced finish. This is the adega’s *Tête de Cuvée* bottling, which I assume means older vines and their choicest parcels, but I could not decipher this for certain from their Spanish notes on the wine on their website. The wine comes in one of the most uniquely shaped bottles I have ever encountered, which makes it fun, but it would be a bit problematic for the racks in my cellar. It is clearly very good juice and I would love to see future vintages bottled up under natural cork or Diam, as this clearly has the potential to age gracefully and I now have a bit of latent distrust of plastic corks for the longer haul. 2016-2018+? **91**.

2013 Albariño- Adega Rozas (Meaño- Rías Baixas)

The 2013 Albariño from Adega Rozas has blossomed beautifully since I last crossed paths with a bottle during my visit to the region in October of 2014. Manolo Dovalo farms the family 6.3 hectares of very old vines in Meaño and his 2013 is drinking beautifully today. The bouquet is still a touch youthfully tight when first poured, but blossoms nicely in the glass to offer up scents of grapefruit, lemon, gentle leesiness, salty minerality, lemongrass and a nice topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and zesty, with a fine core, a lovely girdle of acidity and fine length and grip on the minerally finish. A lovely bottle with years and years of life still in it. 2016-2025+. **92+**.

2012 Albariño “Dandelión”- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados- Rías Baixas)

The 2012 Dandelión bottling from Alberto Nanclares is a lovely bottle of Albariño, which as readers may recall from the note on the 2011, spends fully two years aging on its fine lees prior to bottling, despite the fact that this is Señor Nanclares’ entry level Albariño cuvée. The bouquet on the 2012 jumps from the glass in a mix of peach, gentle nuttiness from the lees aging, a touch of menthol, briny oceanic elements, stony minerality and a topnote of gentle smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a rock solid core, superb soil signature and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This has a touch more mid-palate stuffing than the lovely 2011 and is an excellent bottle of Albariño that will continue to age gracefully for many years. 2016-2025. **92.**

2012 Albariño “Soverribas”- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados- Rías Baixas)

The 2012 Soverribas bottling from Alberto Nanclares is far more open than the youthful 2013 version and is drinking already with great breed and style. The first class and complex bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of pear, tangerine, menthol, wet stones, wild fennel, lime blossoms and a gentle touch of leesiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and again, rock solid at the core, with fairly broad shoulders for Albariño, lovely focus and grip, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and still fairly youthful finish. This is quite open on the lovely nose, but it is still a youthful wine on the palate and a few more years in the cellar will allow the wine to really blossom on the palate. Dynamite Albariño. 2017-2035. **93+.**

2012 Albariño “Coccinella”- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados- Rías Baixas)

The 2012 Coccinella single vineyard bottling from Alberto Nanclares is as magical a bottle of young Albariño as I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The wine is produced in tiny quantities from a hundred year-old vine that is planted on indigenous rootstock in sandy soils, in this west-facing vineyard in Meaño. The 2012 Coccinella is still a very young wine, but its depth, precision and nascent complexity are absolutely enormous and this is clearly an Albariño for the ages! The stunning nose soars from the glass in a blend of fresh lime, green apple, *fleur de sel*, menthol, fresh fennel, gentle leesiness, dried flowers, a touch of orange peel and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crackling with energy, with a rock solid core, laser-like focus, brisk acids and stunning length and grip on the endless and very soil-driven finish. This is already a very complex wine, but it will be significantly more so with another three or four years in the cellar. I have been very fortunate to taste some brilliant examples of Albariño, but the 2012 Coccinella from Alberto Nanclares is clearly as fine as anything I have ever tasted from the region! A brilliant wine. 2019-2035+. **95+.**

2010 Albariño “Sobre Lías”- La Val (Rías Baixas)

The 2010 Albariño “Sobre Lías” from La Val is produced from thirty year-old vines and spends fully three years aging on its lees prior to bottling. The wine delivers a fine and complex bouquet of tart peach, lemon oil, a touch of nutskin, salty soil tones and a briny topnote of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite bright and bouncy, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, mature and vibrant finish. This is fully mature at age six and is drinking beautifully, but has the stuffing and cut to continue to cruise along at this high level for at least a few more years. 2016-2019+. **90.**

2010 Frore de Carme Albariño Reserve- Eladio Piñeiro (Rías Baixas) Vinolok Closure

The 2010 Frore de Carme Albariño Reserve was a bit reductive when I first opened it, but with some extended aeration started to show very well on both the nose and palate. Eventually the wine showed some lovely depth from its extended period of lees aging, wafting from the

glass in a complex blend of pear, lime peel, notes of wheat chaff from its time on the lees, salty ocean breeze, just a hint of menthol and a lovely topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with a good core, still sound acids, a wide open personality, and a bit of backend bitterness from its reductive stay under a glass closure detracting slightly from the long finish. There are really terrific raw materials here and the wine is still tasty, but I kept wondering how it would have shown if it had been bottled under natural cork and was not hampered by reductive bitterness on the finish. 2016-2020. **87.**



Ribeiro Blanco

2014 Finca Teira Blanco- Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2014 Finca Teira Blanco from Manuel Formigo is a lovely bottle. This is a blend of seventy percent Treixadura, twenty percent Godello and ten percent Alvillo. The new vintage delivers a fine bouquet of apple, pear, salty soil tones, a touch of honeysuckle and a gentle topnote of spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a fine core, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the poised and well-balanced finish. As my visit here in October of 2014 showed, this bottling ages very well (we tasted back to 2006 at that time) and this wine will continue to improve as it has some bottle age. Fine juice. 2016-2025+. **90.**

2013 Teira X Blanco- Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

I first tasted the 2013 Teira X Blanco from Manuel Formigo during my visit to the adega in the fall of 2014, and at that time the wine was very youthful and promising. The passing years have done justice and the wine today is drinking beautifully, offering up a complex nose of pear, orange peel, a nice touch of Ribeiro spiciness, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, fine focus and complexity and a long, balanced and energetic finish. This was one of the riper years for the Teira X, coming in at thirteen percent alcohol, but the wine is aging beautifully and has many, many years still ahead of it. 2016-2030. **93.**

2013 Viña de Martin “Os Pasás”- Luis Rodríguez Vázquez (Ribeiro)

The 2013 vintage of Os Pasás from Luis Rodríguez is a blend of Treixadura, Albariño, Torrentés and Lado, with readers perhaps recalling that the latter three grapes are blended into the cuvée in small percentages to take advantage of their higher acid levels than the Treixadura. This is the same *cépages* as the fine 2012 version and the 2013 offer sup lovely complexity on the nose, as it hops from the glass in a mix of pear, lime zest, green olive, Ribeiro’s signature salty soil, a bit of lemongrass, beeswax and hints of the honeycomb to come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with great palate authority, a lovely core and a long, bright, complex and very soil-driven finish. 2016-2025. **90.**

2012 A Teixa- Luis Rodríguez Vázquez (Ribeiro)

The 2012 A Teixa bottling from Luis Rodríguez Vázquez is comprised of a blend of Treixadura (by far the dominant grape in the *cépages*), Albariño and Godello. The wine is fermented and aged in *foudre* with indigenous yeasts and is bottled after a year’s worth of *elevage* in the same large casks. Señor Rodríguez also gives the wine a year of aging in bottle prior to release. The 2012 A Teixa is a lovely wine that offers up impressive depth and complexity on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, lemon, honeysuckle, salty soil tones and a nice touch of lemon oil in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, superb soil inflection, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex finish that closes with a distinct note of beeswax (which is not evident at all on the nose!) on the backend. Along with the most serious Albariño producers in Rías Baixas and López de Heredia, Luis Rodríguez Vázquez has got to be one of the most talented white wine producers in all of Spain! This is simply superb wine. 2016-2025. **93.**

2010 Viña de Martin “Escolma”- Luis Rodríguez Vázquez (Ribeiro)

I had loved the 2009 version of the Escolma bottling from Señor Rodríguez, so I was very excited to see his 2010 arrive at my stoop. As readers may recall, this is his old vine cuvée of white wine, which is produced from a mix of Treixadura, Albariño, Torrentés and Lado, but with all of the vines ranging from twenty to more than forty years of age. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and then aged in a combination of new and old, large French oak barrels. The 2010 is the current release of this long-lived Ribeiro white and delivers a pure and vibrant bouquet of lemon, white peach, apple, salty soil tones, spring flowers, just a touch of vanillin oak and a topnote of citrus oils. This really smells like a Puligny bottling from Jacques Carillon with a different base of soil type! On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with outstanding transparency, bright acids, superb complexity and excellent length and grip on the focused and perfectly balanced finish. This wine has the weight and breed of grand

cru white Burgundy and has to be one of Spain's greatest white wine cuvées! It will continue to drink beautifully for at least the next decade and maybe longer. 2016-2035+. **94.**

2001 Viña de Martín “Escolma”- Luis Rodríguez Vázquez (Ribeiro)

As readers know, I love to write about wines that have had a chance to blossom with bottle age, and I was very surprised to see that my cases of samples from the fine importer, José Pastor this year included a bottle of the 2001 Escolma from Luis Rodriguez. As my notes above will attest, I have always felt that Señor Rodríguez's white wines will age beautifully, and here is a fifteen year-old example that verifies this emphatically! The bouquet is deep, pure and tertiary in its complexity, offering up a fine constellation of gently baked peach and pear, a hint of its salty soil, beeswax, lemon oil, dried flowers, a touch of toasted almond and still just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tertiary and focused, with a fine core, still lovely acids, impressive complexity and grip and a very, very long, balanced and classy finish. This is fully mature at age fifteen, but still rock solid structurally and has plenty of life ahead of it. The 2001 Escolma is just a lovely wine, but I get the sense that today, Señor Rodríguez is making even more precise wines and the most recent vintages are going to age into even superior wines in the fullness of time. 2016-2028. **92.**

Ribeiro Tinto

2012 A Torna dos Pasás- Luis Rodríguez Vázquez (Ribeiro)

As I mentioned last year in the note on the fine 2011, the A Torna dos Pasás from Luis Rodríguez is comprised of a blend of traditional Galician red grapes, with the *cépages* consisting of forty percent Brancellao, and twenty percent each of Caiño Redondo, Caiño Longo and Ferrol (not that I am familiar with any of these grapes!), which were once the predominant grapes in Ribeiro in its salad days of yore. The vines grown on steep, south-facing granite sites and the wine is aged in old, three hundred liter barrels. The 2012 A Torna dos Pasas is just a touch lower in octane than the previous vintage (12 versus 12.5 percent) and a fine follow-up to the lovely 2011, offering up a more black fruity and very complex nose of dark berries, charred wood, coffee grounds, a touch of tree bark, slate soil tones, lovely botanicals and a touch of graphite in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and surprisingly plush at the core for its octane level, with lovely focus and grip, excellent intensity of flavor, modest tannins, sound acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This has a lot Ribera Sacra-like aromas and flavors this year, coupled with the more fleshy (and slightly less transparent) style of Ribeiro. This is really a superb bottle of wine and is drinking very well right out of the blocks. 2016-2035+. **91+.**

2010 A Torna dos Pasás “Escolma”- Luis Rodríguez Vázquez (Ribeiro)

The 2010 A Torna dos Pasás “Escolma” from Luis Rodríguez is made up of a field blend of old vine Caiño, Brancellao and Ferrol and is raised in a mixture of new and older French oak casks. The wine spends a year in barrel and is aged an additional three years in bottle in Señor Rodríguez's cellars prior to release. The 2010 Escolma offers up a fine, deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, a bit of roasted meat, dark chocolate, gentle botanicals, beautifully complex, slate soil tones and just a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a truly superb core of fruit, seamless balance, moderate, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the poised, classy and vibrant finish. This has got to be one of Spain's greatest unknown red wines! Utterly brilliant juice that is a step up from the very good 2009 version. There is really quite a bit of resemblance here to Gérard Chave's versions of Hermitage from yesteryear! 2016-2040. **95.**

2009 A Torna dos Pasás “Colleita”- Luis Rodríguez Vázquez (Ribeiro)

Luis Rodríguez likes to keep back a bit of his wines for release a bit down the road and his 2009 Colleita bottling of A Torna dos Pasás is a new release from him. At age seven the wine is beginning to show some lovely secondary layers of complexity in its aromatic constellation of cassis, pomegranate, chicory, spit-roasted game, a lovely base of slate, a touch of black pepper, crushed violets, gentle medicinal tones that recall middle-aged Hermitage and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, poised and velvety, with a good core, lovely focus and balance and a long, vibrant and complex finish. The tannins here have fallen away, but the acids are still good and this wine will continue to drink beautifully for another decade or more. Clearly I was underestimating this cuvée’s aging potential when I tasted the 2011 last year! Fine, fine juice. 2016-2030+. **93.**

Ribeira Sacra Blanco

2014 Brandan Blanco- Algueira (Doade- Ribeira Sacra)

The Brandan bottling from Algueira is comprised entirely of Godello, from steep, schist vineyards in their home region of Amandi. The wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel and the 2014 comes in at an even thirteen percent octane. The wine offers up a fine, youthful nose of pear, a touch of beeswax, citrus peel, a nice touch of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and focused, with a good core, zesty acids and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is youthfully primary on the attack, but really kicks in with fine backend intensity and is a very tasty bottle that will probably be even more complex with a bit of bottle age. 2016-2025. **89+.**

2014 Godello – Cividade (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)

This is the first time I had tasted the wines from Cividade, which are some of the smallest production wines from Ribeira Sacra to find their way to the export market. This is old school Amandi in every sense of the word, as these steep vineyards are so isolated in the towering, terraced canyon faces that line the Sil River that they are completely inaccessible except by boat, as there are no roads of any kind that can reach the top of these parcels. One arrives at the vineyard by boat, and at harvest time, the grapes are brought down to the riverside and loaded on boat to bring back to the winery. The 2014 Cividade Godello is a super bottle, offering up a deep and classic bouquet of lime zest, pear, a touch of beeswax, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core and beautiful filigree on the long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This will age beautifully, but it is going to be hard work keeping hands off of bottles and allow the wine some bottle age! 2016-2030. **93.**

2014 Adrás Godello- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribeira Sacra)

The Adrás bottling of Godello hails from vineyards in the Amandi section of Ribera Sacra that towers over the Sil River. Isaac Fernandez produces this wine from forty year-old vines, ages it entirely in stainless steel tanks and does not allow it to go through malolactic fermentation. The 2014 is again quite low in octane, coming in at the same 12.5 percent as the 2013 version and offers up bright and floral bouquet of tart pear, lime, beeswax, a touch of salty soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and bouncy, with good, but not great depth at the core, fine focus and grip and a long, youthful and sculpted finish. This is a good solid middleweight, but given that this hails from forty year-old vines, I would love to see a bit more mid-palate depth here. This seems a bit safe stylistically and is not as serious as the Adrás bottling of Mencía (which is great!), and it really should be, given

what are obviously good vineyards to work with for Señor Fernandez. Perhaps letting the wine go through malo would add a bit more gravitas here? Good solid juice, but I was hoping for a bit more, given how stellar the Adrás Mencía has been in the last couple of years. 2016-2023. **87.**

2014 Erea de Vila - Laura Lorenzo (Ribeira Sacra)

Laura Lorenzo started her own project in 2014, after having spent a decade as winemaker at one of the top local producers in Ribeira Sacra. She is based in the Val do Bibei-Quiroga subzone of Ribeira Sacra and farms just under four and a half hectares by organic methods. Her Erea de Vila cuvée is a blend of Godello, Doña Blanca and Colgadeira, which she ferments with natural yeasts and raises for a year in older French *barricas*. The wine offers up a fine nose of apple, pear, fresh almond, granitic soil tones, just a touch of beeswax and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance, fine framing acids and a very long, still youthful and soil-driven finish. This is a lovely wine already, but I get the sense that a couple of years' worth of bottle age are really necessary here to allow the wine to fully blossom. Serious juice and a superb first release from *Señora* Lorenzo. 2016-2025. **92.**



2014 Sabatellus Blanco- Primitivo Lareu (Chantada- Ribeira Sacra)

Primitivo Lareu is one of the bright young winemakers on the Miño River and his Sabatellus Blanco is outstanding in the 2014 vintage. This is a blend of sixty percent Treixadura and forty percent Godello this year and tips the scales at a cool and adult 12.5 percent alcohol.

The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, delivering a fine mélange of pear, fresh almond, beeswax, citrus oils and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids, fine grip and a long, laser-like and utterly refined finish. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2025+. **93.**

2013 Guímaro “Cepas Viejas” Blanco (Ribeira Sacra)

The Guímaro “Cepas Viejas” Blanco is made entirely from old vine Godello, which is barrel-fermented in old Burgundy casks and spends a year in *elevage* prior to bottling. The wine is a touch reductive when first opened and really needs fifteen to twenty minutes in decanter to blossom, but blossom it most emphatically does when given a bit of aeration and offers up a superb bouquet of apple, pear, nutskin, beautiful soil tones, wild flowers and just a touch of iodine in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still fairly youthful, with a fine core of fruit, lovely transparency, bright acids and fine focus and balance on the long and complex finish. Given all the fruit on the nose, there is a very nice touch of backend botanical bitterness here (akin to what one finds in many red wines from this region) that really works nicely at the table. Fine juice that should age very gracefully, while drinking very well now (with a bit of time in decanter). 2016-2030. **92.**

Ribeira Sacra Tinto

2014 Adrás Mencía- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2014 Adrás Mencía from Isaac Fernandez is a lovely example of this fine region’s red wines. As readers may recall from the note on the 2013, this bottling is produced from classically terraced, fifty year-old vineyards overlooking the Miño River and spent five months in a mixture of new and old casks prior to bottling. The 2014 offers up a fine, complex nose of black cherries, pomegranate, chicory, coffee bean, graphite and toasted hazelnuts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and poised, with a fine core, lovely complexity and balance, modest tannins, good acids and excellent length and grip on the wide open, but still fairly primary finish. This has excellent intensity of flavor, while still staying light on its feet, with just a touch of tannin to carry it far into the future. A classic bottle of Ribeira Sacra Mencía. 2016-2035+. **92+.**

2014 Mencía - Adega Algueira (Doade- Ribeira Sacra)

The 2014 Mencía from Adega Algueira is produced from vineyards ranging from thirty to eighty years of age, with the wine fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The bouquet on the 2014 is absolutely classic, wafting from the glass in a blend of pomegranate, black cherries, tree bark, slate minerality, graphite and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very transparent, with a sappy core, moderate tannins and excellent balance on the long and tangy finish. This is still quite primary in personality and will continue to blossom with further bottle age, but it is also drinking extremely well out of the blocks and is eminently quaffable in its very stylish youth. Lovely wine. 2016-2035+. **93.**

2014 Mencía- Viña Cazoga (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)

The 2014 Mencía from Viña Cazoga is another absolutely stellar wine from Jorge Carnero, who has run this small family estate with great skill since taking over from his father several years ago. The wine offers up a superb and youthfully complex bouquet of blackberries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a touch of pepper, a fine base of slate minerality and a touch of tree bark. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still fairly primary in personality, but with the complexity to come readily apparent. The wine is sappy at the core, focused and seamless in balance, with moderate tannins and outstanding length and grip on the vibrant finish.

While this is deceptively easy to drink today, it is still a puppy and I would give it at least three or four years in the cellar to start to develop some of its secondary layers of complexity. It is a great bottle of Mencía in the making! 2019-2045+. **94.**

2014 Mencía- Décima (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)

Décima is the winery of the D.O. president, José Manuel Rodríguez, who also happens to be one of the finest winemakers in the Amandi sub-region that overlooks the steepest canyons along the Sil River. Señor Rodríguez's 2014 bottling of Mencía is absolutely stellar and is destined for a long and very classic evolution in bottle. The bouquet is deep, pure and youthfully complex, jumping from the glass in a classic blend of sweet dark berries, cassis, espresso, tree bark, pomegranate, plenty of slate undertow, woodsmoke and the gentle medicinal topnotes of young Mencía. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and absolutely rock solid at the core, with fine focus, seamless balance, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the poised and vibrant finish. Great juice in the making! 2016-2040+. **94.**

2014 Azos de Vila - Laura Lorenzo (Val do Bibei-Quiroga- Ribeira Sacra)

The 2014 Azos de Vila from Laura Lorenzo is comprised of a blend of Mouraton, Merenzao, Gran Negro, Mencía and Garnacha Tintorera. The wine is fermented with wild yeasts, raised on older *barricas* and bottled unfiltered. The bouquet is deep, complex and classy, offering up a constellation of dark berries, espresso, roasted gamebird, slate, fresh herb tones, chicory and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, a seamless girdle of tannin, excellent focus and grip and a very long, soil-driven and youthfully complex finish. This is a dynamite Ribeira Sacra red that still needs a few years in the cellar to fully blossom and which should age in exemplary fashion. High class juice. 2019-2040+. **93+.**

2014 Miñato de Raña "Tinto Rústico"- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Chantada?)

The 2014 Miñato de Raña "Tinto Rústico" from Alberto Nanclares is produced from a mix of sixty percent Mencía, thirty percent Garnacha and ten percent an unknown field blend. The grapes are sourced from steep, terraced granite vineyards on the Miño River. I am not sure why the label does not state that this is a wine from Ribeira Sacra, but perhaps it is because Señor Nanclares' cellar is in Cambados? In any event, the wine is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of sweet dark berries, bitter cherry, tree bark, just a touch of black pepper, excellent stony soil tones, turmeric and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully transparent, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the tangy and classy finish. The wine is raised in older, six hundred liter *demi-muids* and shows a bit of volatile acidity when first opened and really needs decanting to blossom, but it does so with a vengeance with only a short time in carafe! This is light on its feet and packed with personality. 2016-2035+. **93.**

2013 Brancellao - Adegas Algueira (Doade- Ribeira Sacra)

The 2013 Brancellao from Adegas Algueira is produced from eighty year old vines and the wine is foot-trodden and aged in old barrels for twelve months before it is bottled. The 2013 Brancellao is a fine bottle in the making that shows some of the interplay of sweet and bitter tones that one finds in the great Montepulcianos of Emidio Pepe. The deep and complex nose pomegranate, bitter cherry, tree bark, botanicals, green peppercorns, slate and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and complex, with a good core, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the youthful and classy finish. A lovely bottle that could use a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom. 2018-2035. **91.**

2013 Merenzao - Adega Algueira (Doade- Ribeira Sacra)

As readers may recall, Merenzao is the local name for Trousseau in Ribeira Sacra, and Adega Algueira happens to have only old vines of this varietal (which was once widely planted in the region, but now is quite rare), with their vineyards nearly eighty-five years of age. The wine is raised for a year in old casks prior to bottling, and the 2013 version is decidedly lighter in color than their Mencía bottling (as one would expect with Trousseau) and comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol. The pure and very, very transparent bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of red berries, chicory, woodsmoke, a touch of pepper, gorgeous minerality and just a whisper of graphite in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and soil-driven, with tangy acids, a lovely sappiness at the core, modest tannins and a nice touch of botanicals perking up the long and very complex finish. This is a beautiful bottle of wine that will age very well, but is flat out delicious to drink right now! 2016-2035. **94.**

2013 Mencía – Cidade (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)

The Mencía vines here in the isolated Cidade vineyards are very old and inter-planted with trace amounts of other indigenous grapes to the region. The 2013 is a superb wine, wafting from the glass in a deep and pure constellation of dark berries, pomegranate, tree bark, new leather, graphite, chicory and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the complexity of the nose is echoed in its full-bodied, pure and utterly seamless palate impression, with a fine, sappy core, outstanding transparency down to the slate minerality and a very long, fine-grained and tangy finish. This is a simply beautiful bottle of Mencía that has impressive depth and intensity of flavor from what was a pretty lightweight year in the region. 2016-2040. **93+.**

2013 Mencía- Guímaro (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)

Pedro Rodríguez's family estate of Guímaro is based in the very steep, terraced slate vineyards of the Amandi sub-region of Ribeira Sacra, and the winery was one of the first to join the DO when it was formed in 1996. His regular bottling is produced from several plots of forty-plus year-old vines scattered around the Amandi section, with the wine aged entirely in stainless steel and meant for early drinking. The 2013 offers up a youthfully complex nose of pomegranate, red berries, slate, a touch of tree bark, woodsmoke, graphite and espresso. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent intensity of flavor, just a whisper of tannin and a long, complex and tangy finish. This just relishes in its slate underpinnings! 2016-2035. **92.**

2013 Mencía "Finca Meixemán"- Guímaro (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)

The Finca Meixemán was the original vineyard that the Rodríguez family began with in Amandi, which is now seventy years of age and planted on schist soils. For this old vine bottling, Pedro Rodríguez trods the grapes by foot, includes some whole clusters and raises the wine in old Burgundy casks. The 2013 Finca Meixemán is quite a bit darker in color than the ruby red regular bottling of Mencía and offers up a more primary aromatic constellation of black cherries, tree bark, espresso, black pepper, charred wood, lovely minerality and a gentle touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and again, very transparent down to its stony soils, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, modest tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is going to age beautifully, and though it is already a very, very good glass of wine today, I would strongly suggest tucking it away in the cellar for at least another five or six years and let some of its secondary layers of complexity emerge. That said, if I spot it on a wine list in the next six months, I am drinking it! 2016-2045+. **94.**

2013 Mencía “Finca Capeliños”- Guímaro (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)

The Finca Capeliños bottling from Pedro Rodríguez is handled similarly to the Finca Meixemán cuvée, with foot trodding, partial stem retention and aging in old Burgundy barrels. This vineyard is planted with ninety-five year-old Mencía vines and the 2013 is outstanding, offering up a complex and classy bouquet of cassis, licorice, woodsmoke, graphite, a gentle touch of botanicals, chicory and hints of the meatiness to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and light on its feet, with a fine core, superb complexity, tangy acids, laser-like focus and great length and grip on the moderately tannic and palate-saturating finish. The Finca Capeliños is located in mid-slope here, so is a touch lower in elevation than the Finca Meixemán and shows just a bit more mid-amplitude out of the blocks as a result. This is truly a stunning, young bottle of Mencía that just exudes complex *terroir*. 2016-2045+. **94+**.

2013 Mencía “Finca Pombeiras”- Guímaro (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)

The Finca Pombeiras is the newest single vineyard bottling from Pedro Rodríguez, which hails from a small, forty-five *ares* parcel of seventy year-old Mencía vines planted at an elevation of four hundred and fifty meters above sea level. This is up at the top of the towering slopes that overlook the Sil River, facing due south and Señor Rodríguez uses entirely whole clusters for this bottling, which is raised in old, five hundred liter *demi-muids*. 2011 was the first vintage produced of the Finca Pombeiras and the 2013 is exceptional, offering up a deep and complex nose of blackberries, darkly-roasted coffee beans, graphite, a touch of Hermitage-like medicinal tones, slate, dried eucalyptus, hints of grilled meat and a discreet topnote of botanicals that would make Emidio Pepe proud. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with great focus and complexity, moderate tannins, bright acids and stunning length and grip on the poised and palate-staining finish. This is a touch riper than the other single vineyard bottlings (fourteen percent versus thirteen and a half) and seems to have just a bit more mid-palate amplitude as a result, without sacrificing any of the transparency or precision found in the other single Finca wines. A brilliant bottle of Ribeira Sacra. I feel like Richard Olney the first time he drank Gentaz! 2016-2045+. **95**.

2013 Mencía- Val de Lenda (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)

Val de Lenda is a new addition to importer Gerry Dawes’ fine selection of Ribeira Sacra producers in the core sub-region of Amandi. The small estate is run by Victor Rodríguez, who farms some choice parcels on the steepest slate slopes of Amandi, towering over the Sil River valley. These terraced vineyards are primarily fifty years of age. Señor Rodríguez ferments and raises his Mencía entirely in stainless steel and uses only indigenous yeasts. His 2013 Mencía is stellar, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of dark berries, pomegranate, slate, espresso, graphite and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very pinot noir-like in terms of texture and bounce, with superb transparency, a fine core and impressive length and grip on the discreetly tannic finish. This will age gloriously, based on its bright acids and impeccable balance, but it is certainly accessible today and a flat out delicious bottle of wine out of the blocks. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2040. **93+**.

2013 Ora et Labora Mencía (Chantada- Ribeira Sacra)

I tasted this wine soon after bottling during my visit to Ribeira Sacra in October of 2014 and I was delighted to have an opportunity to retaste the wine this past March. As readers may recall from my article on Galicia, this is made from a tiny parcel of old vines owned by Father Mario Vázquez that had long been in his family, and which are now farmed by the young winemaking dynamo, Roberto Regal. The steep slate slope that houses this vineyard overlooks

the small village of Belesar pictured above, and probably one of the vineyards in the photo is that of Padre Vázquez. The wine is aging beautifully, as it offers up a pure and youthfully complex blend of dark berries, cassis, chicory, a touch of tree bark, a fine base of slate and a classically smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very intensely flavored, with lovely transparency and bounce, modest tannins and a very, very long, poised and complex finish. This is a terrific wine that is already drinking with great style, but will have no difficulties aging at least a couple more decades, and probably longer! 2016-2035+. **93.**



Beautifully terraced vineyards, near Belesar, overlooking the Miño River in Ribeira Sacra.

Valdeorras

2014 Godello- Hacienda Ucediños (Valdeorras)

Valdeorras is Godello country and Hacienda Ucediños makes a terrific example. Their 2014 is a classic bottle, jumping from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, a touch of acacia blossom, white soil tones and a gently spicy topnote redolent of coriander seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and cut, zesty acids and a long, poised and vibrant finish. A superb example of this underrated grape. 2016-2020. **91+.**

2014 Mencía- Adegas D. Berna (Valdeorras)

The 2014 Mencía from Adegas D. Berna is a lovely wine that beautifully captures the pinot noir-like bounce and weight of Mencía, coupled with a lovely base of soil and the classic

aromatics of this fine grape. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a juicy blend of black cherries, pomegranate, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a bit of espresso in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, modest tannins and lovely balance on the long and classy finish. This is another really fine example of just how good the values can be from the top estates in Valdeorras! 2016-2030+. **90+.**

2014 Mencía- Hacienda Ucediños (Valdeorras)

The 2014 Mencía from Hacienda Ucediños is another very fine example of this great varietal, offering up a bright and youthfully complex nose of dark berries, cassis, graphite, sandy soil tones, tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and impressively light on its feet, with a fine core, very fine focus and grip and a suave, modestly tannic and impeccably balanced finish. Fine, fine juice and another bargain! 2016-2025. **90.**

Cangas- Asturias

2014 Mencía- Albarín Negro “Novicio”- Monasterio de Corias (Cangas- Asturias)

The 2014 “Novicio” from the Monasterio de Corias is a Mencía- Albarín Negro blend and really a very pretty wine, offering up impressive complexity on both the nose and palate, with plenty of intensity of flavor and no undue weight. This is the Joven bottling from the Monasterio and made for immediate drinking. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, a touch of medicinal tones, dark soil tones, botanicals and espresso. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and complex, with good acids, lovely soil signature, very little tannin and pretty good length and grip on the light on its feet finish. This is a wine of ethereal beauty that has very little weight on the palate, but plenty of personality. Fine juice. 2016-2025. **88.**

2012 Finca los Frailes- Monasterio de Corias (Cangas- Asturias)

The 2012 Finca los Frailes from the Monasterio de Corias is comprised of a blend of Mencía, Albarín Negro, Carrasquin and Verdejo Tinto. This is a Crianza and shows more depth than the Novicio, wafting from the glass in a very complex and pure constellation of black cherries, pomegranate, graphite, tree bark, fresh herbs, espresso, campfire and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, laser-like focus, modest tannins and a very long, soil-driven and tangy finish. This is a middleweight of great purity and complexity. 2016-2035. **91+.**

2010 Corias “Guilfa”- Monasterio de Corias (Cangas- Asturias)

The Corias “Guilfa” bottling from Monasterio de Corias is comprised of old vines from two of the indigenous grapes of the region, with sixty percent of the blend Carrasquín and forty percent Verdejo Negro. The vines are eighty years of age and the wine is raised in a fifty-fifty blend of new and one year-old casks. The 2010 Guilfa is thirteen percent alcohol (considered ripe for this cool mountainous region) and offers up a deep, certifiably complex and classy nose of dark berries, a touch of tree bark, chicory, espresso, slate, gentle botanicals and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and light on its feet, with excellent transparency, a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic and tangy finish. This is an outstanding wine that is already drinking well, but will be even better with a few more years’ worth of bottle age. 2016-2035+. **93.**

Bierzo

2014 Brezo Blanco- Grégory Pérez (Bierzo)

It has been a year and a half since I last tasted the 2013 Brezo Blanco from Grégory Pérez, so I was very curious to see how the follow-up 2014 vintage was showing. The wine is 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. The 2014 is 12.5 percent octane and delivers a fine and vibrant bouquet of white peach, wild fennel, fresh almond, salty soil tones and (as was also the case with the 2013) a fine topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and fairly complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, bright acids and a fairly long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is the entry level line of wines from Señor Pérez and the 2014 Brezo Blanco offers up impressive precision and depth for a wine at such a fair price! 2016-2019. **89.**

2014 Godello- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)

The 2014 Godello from Bodegas Luna Beberide is produced from sixty year-old vines and is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The 2014 offers up a fine, youthful nose of lemon, pear, a touch of beeswax, salty soil tones and a nice touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and really shows excellent mid-palate intensity from the old vines, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is still a young wine and will be even better with a year in the bottle to develop some secondary layers of complexity, but its depth and backend energy are excellent and this is a fine, fine value at twenty-one dollars here in the states. 2016-2020+. **90.**

2014 Mencía- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)

The 2014 Mencía from Bodegas Luna Beberide is all fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks, having been sourced from vines that average twenty-five to thirty years of age. The wine is pretty ripe at 13.5 percent alcohol, but shows good freshness in its bouquet of cassis, black cherries, graphite, espresso, a touch of tree bark, lovely spice tones and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and solid at the core, with a bit of backend tannin, fine focus and grip and very good length on the nascently complex finish. This wine has excellent stuffing and depth for its price point, which is well under twenty dollars a bottle here in New York! 2016-2025+. **89+.**

2014 Mencía “Flor de Brezo”- Grégory Pérez (Bierzo)

The 2014 Flor de Brezo from Grégory Pérez is an excellent example of Mencía, coming in at a ripe, but well-measured thirteen percent octane and offering up an excellent bouquet of dark berries, tree bark, cigar smoke, a touch of graphite, dark soil tones and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very pinot noir-like in terms of weight and transparency, with a fine core of fruit, impressive nascent complexity, lovely focus and grip, excellent soil signature and a long, poised and modestly tannic finish. This is high class middleweight that will be even better with some bottle age, but is drinking great out of the blocks and is a superb value. 2016-2035. **91+.**

2014 Viña Barroca Mencía- Bodegas Ardià (Bierzo)

The 2014 Viña Barroca Mencía from Bodegas Ardià is a lovely example of this varietal and a ridiculously fine value, as this wine sells here in the US from fifteen dollars or less a bottle! The classic nose offers up a fine blend of pomegranate, graphite, cigar smoke, a touch of tree bark and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite suave on the attack, with a good core of fruit, just a whisper of backend tannin and a long, bouncy and

beautifully balanced finish. For an everyday bottle of Mencía, one probably cannot find a better bargain out there! 2016-2023. **89.**

2012 Finca la Cuesta (Mencía)- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)

The 2012 Finca la Cuesta from Luna Beberide is quite a ripe example of Mencía, tipping the scales at a full 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine is produced from sixty year-old vines and raised in a fifty-fifty blend of new and one wine French casks. The 2012 offers up a deep and complex nose of sweet dark berries, slate, espresso, gentle botanicals and lead pencil-like new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely Mencía poise and a long, slightly warm and discreetly tannic finish. These old vines have really produced fine raw materials, but I am not really sure what the French oak influence brings to the party, as it seems to obscure much of the soil flavors here, while poking out with just a touch of tannin as well on the backend. If the team at Luna Beberide will just keep using the same casks for the next ten years, the wood should integrate even better and the soil elements here (which hover in the background) could more fully take their proper place and the wine would really shine! I assume the 14.5 percent alcohol level here is simply reflective of the extraordinary nature of the 2012 vintage, as it is a bit too high for greatness, and I look forward to tasting future vintages, which I hope to see in the thirteen percent range. This is a very good wine in 2012, but it could be spectacular with just a bit less octane and makeup! 2016-2025+. **90+.**

Monterrei

2014 Godello- Bodegas Triay (Monterrei)

Antonio Triay and his wife Puri farm their family's vineyards in Monterrei, having taken over from Puri's father, Isaac García a few years ago. They only produce Godello and Mencía and both wines are excellent examples of their respective varietals. Their 2014 Godello is a classic bottle, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pear, fresh almond, salty soil tones, acacia blossoms and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with a fine signature of soil, bright acids and impeccable balance on the long and focused finish. Fine juice. 2016-2023. **91.**

2014 Mencía- Bodegas Triay (Monterrei)

The 2014 Mencía from Bodegas Triay is a lovely middleweight, with its 12.5 percent alcohol resulting in a wine of fine bounce and intensity of flavor without undue weight on the palate. The bouquet is bright and nascently complex, offering up scents of dark berries, tree bark, espresso, a nice base of soil and a touch of youthful medicinal notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and juicy, with good acids, little tannin and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is not the most complex example of Mencía one can find, but it hits all the right notes. 2016-2023. **89.**

Tierra de León

2014 Tempranillo "Sensible"- Isaac Fernandez Selección

The 2014 Tempranillo "Sensible" from Isaac Fernandez is sourced from relatively young tempranillo vines (under fifteen years of age) in the sub-region of Tudela de Duero. The wine is plenty ripe at 14.5 percent alcohol and offers up a deep bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, gentle balsamic tones and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and nicely light on its feet, with good, but not great depth at the core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and just a whisper of backend heat on the long finish. This is not overly

complex, but it is very well-balanced and tasty. I have had far more egregiously over the top examples of Ribera del Duero that sell for five or six times the cost of this wine, which sells for just thirteen dollars a bottle here in the states! Not bad at all! 2016-2025. **88.**

Toro

2013 Toro- Bodegas Elias Mora (Toro)

The 2013 regular bottling of Toro from Elias Mora is fermented in stainless steel and spends six months aging in entirely new, American oak casks prior to bottling. The vintage comes in pretty ripe, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol, but offers up pretty good freshness in its bouquet of red and black cherries, brown spices, a touch of wild fennel and a fairly judicious serving of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and slightly hot on the backend, with a good core and focus, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the heady finish. I know Toro is a very hot region, but it seems that here, like in the Alentejo in Portugal, the cutoff for really top flight wines might be fourteen percent alcohol, and once over this threshold, one reaches a point of diminishing returns. This is very well-made in its style, but just a bit too ripe for its own good. 2016-2030. **87+.**

2013 Prima Tinto- Bodegas Maurodos

The 2013 Prima Tinto from Bodegas Maurodos is comprised of a blend of ninety percent tempranillo and ten percent garnacha. This is, not surprisingly for the hot region of Toro, a ripe wine at fourteen and a half percent alcohol, but the wine is pretty well-balanced on the palate and does a respectable job of handling its alcohol as well as can be expected. The bouquet is deep and a tad overripe, offering up notes of baked blackberries, coffee grounds, balsamic tones, a bit of spicy new wood and a touch of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with more soil character than the nose suggests, chewy, slightly gritty tannin and good length and grip on the borderline hot finish. There is a coarseness here to the backend structure from the combination of alcohol and wood tannins, which may ameliorate with bottle age, but I would have opted for either no new wood (one and two wine casks might work really well here) or lower octane, to get a bit more polish to the textural finish. The raw materials are strong and this would still be perfectly serviceable with grilled or braised red meats, but it would be more interesting if it were a tad less ripe and saw less or no brand new wood. 2016-2025. **86+.**

2012 Crianza- Bodegas Elias Mora (Toro)

The 2012 Crianza from Bodegas Elias Mora is made entirely from tempranillo and is aged half in new casks hailing from French forests and half in one wine barrels from American sources. The wine tips the scales at a hefty fifteen percent in 2012 and offers up a ripe and jammy nose of marinated black cherries, chocolate, balsamic tones and a fairly modest seasoning of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plump at the core, with impressive focus for its octane, some backend gritty tannins and a fair bit of heat poking out on the quite long finish. This is much higher in alcohol than most wines I would drink, but it is really pretty well-balanced for this octane and is quite well made in its style. That said, it would be so much more serious at fourteen percent alcohol! 2016-2025. **87.**

2012 San Román- Bodegas Maurodos (Toro)

The San Román bottling from Bodegas Maurodos is comprised entirely of tempranillo, which here is known as Tinta do Toro, with the vines ranging from sixty to ninety years of age. The wine is raised in a mixture of French and American *barricas*, with fifty percent of the casks

renewed each year, and the 2012 San Román tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine is quite modern in style, but done beautifully in its idiom, offering up a deep and complex nose of black cherries and plums, mocha, discreet spice tones, a touch of coffee grounds and a nice blend of vanilla and coconutty oak tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and plush on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, firm tannins and very good length and grip on the suave and ever so slightly hot finish. As readers know, this is not a style that resonates with me and the wine has to be really well done to score highly, but the 2012 San Román from Bodegas Maurodos is really that well-crafted. I would love to see this wine at fourteen percent octane, as it would be spectacular if just a little less ripe, but even at this octane, it is superb juice. 2016-2030+. **92.**

Rueda

2014 Nosis (Verdejo)- Buil & Giné (screwcap)

The 2014 Nosis from Buil & Giné is a very pretty and stylish wine that has only one flaw- its closure. The wine was showing just a touch of the onset of reduction when I tasted it at the end of September, which is too bad, as there is a really fine wine here underneath its screwcap. The bouquet is still quite clean and bright and not particularly affected by the closure, as it offers up scents of lime, green apple, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a just a touch of green olive. On the palate the wine is medium-full and already starting to get a bit “pinched” on the backend from the reduction, with bright acids, a touch of metallic minerality just starting to develop and a rather clipped finish. I love the wine, but the closure is a problem. 2015-2016. **85** (with an 89 or 90 point wine underneath).

2014 Sauvignon Blanc- Bodegas José Pariente (Rueda)

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc from Bodegas José Pariente is a very pretty example of this underrated varietal, offering up a bright and grassy nose of grapefruit, lime, salty soil tones, fresh-cut grass, a touch of orange peel and a bit of Pouilly-Fumé-like petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and elegant, with a good core, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and nicely complex finish. Good juice. 2016-2020+. **90.**

2014 Verdejo- Bodegas José Pariente (Rueda)

While Victoria Pariente and her talented son and daughter make excellent Sauvignon Blanc, it is their stunning Verdejo on which the reputation of the winery has been built since 1998 across Spain. Their 2014 Verdejo is an outstanding bottle in the making, offering up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of tart pear, lime, wild fennel, a hint of green olive, salty soil tones and a discreet note of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with crisp acids, impressive soil signature and a very long, primary and beautifully balanced finish. Verdejo simply does not get any better than this lovely wine, which is still a puppy and will be far more complex with a year or two in the cellar. 2016-2025. **93.**

Ribera del Duero

2014 Bodegas Arrocal Tinto (Ribera del Duero)

The 2014 Bodegas Arrocal Tinto is comprised entirely of tempranillo, produced from a pair of twenty-five year-old vineyards owned by the estate. The wine is raised in a blend of eighty percent French and twenty percent American oak, with twenty percent of the casks new each year (presumably the French barrels). The 2014 was bottled unfiltered and tips the scales at fourteen percent, offering up a youthful bouquet of red plums, black cherries, chocolate, a nice

touch of soil and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet for its octane, with a good core, sound balance and good length and grip on the moderately tannic and still quite primary finish. This is still a young wine and will improve with bottle age, as today, it is not overly complex, but has a good foundation and could blossom nicely with a bit of time in the cellar. At under twenty dollars a bottle here in the states, it is a good value from the region. 2018-2030+. **88+**.

2014 Rios de Tinta- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribera del Duero)

The Rios de Tinta from Isaac Fernandez is an entry level bottling of Ribera del Duero, which means it was raised entirely in stainless steel tank and saw no oak during its *elevage*. The 2014 Rios de Tinta comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a vibrant nose of black cherries, cassis, a bit of dark chocolate, lovely soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and bouncy, with a fine core, lovely balance, just a bit of backend tannin and really quite fine length and grip on the moderately complex finish. This is made for early drinking, but it is very nicely balanced and will also age quite well. Good juice. 2016-2030+. **89**.

2014 Finca La Mata- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribera del Duero)

The Finca La Mata bottling from Isaac Fernandez is produced from sixty to eighty year-old vines. As readers may recall from the note on the 2013, it is fermented with indigenous yeasts and is raised for twelve months in a combination of eighty percent French and twenty percent American oak casks, with one third of the barrels renewed each year. The 2014 Finca la Mata is fourteen percent octane and delivers a fine, young bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, gentle balsamic tones, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil and a stylish framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with lovely focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and bounce on the nascently complex and very poised finish. The 2013 version last year struggled to carry its serving of new oak and had not yet integrated its wood tannins completely at the time I tasted it, but this is most emphatically not an issue with the lovely 2014 Finca La Mata. This is a very tasty Ribera del Duero that is light on its feet and really performs well at the table. It should age very gracefully for at least the next fifteen years, but is already very tasty. 2016-2030+. **89+**.

2013 Crianza “Victor Balbas”- Bodegas Balbas (Ribera del Duero)

While I have not tasted the entire lineup from Bodegas Balbas, the importer of their Crianza cuvée called “Victor Balbas” ensures me that this is the only wine that they produce that I would like, as it is on the only one that is not made with a ton of new wood. This bottling is in homage to their grandfather who started the estate back in the day, Victor Balbas, and the family produces the wine in his style, with no new oak utilized and the wine only spending five months in older casks prior to be racked into tank prior to bottling. The 2013 is a stellar wine, offering up a superb and youthful bouquet of black plums, pomegranate, cocoa powder, lovely soil tones and just a whisper of vanilla from its stay in older casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and classy, with a lovely core of sappy fruit, velvety tannins and a very long, light on its feet and complex finish. This harkens back to those great old days for Ribera del Duero in the ‘70s and ‘80s, when the wines routinely showed this level of soil signature and elegance! Fine juice. 2016-2030+. **92+**.

2013 El Pedrosal- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas (Ribera del Duero)

El Pedrosal is a relatively new bottling from Bodegas Pérez Pascuas, who is better known for their very fine Viña Pedrosa lineup. This is a Joven bottling that is fermented in stainless steel

and sees a modest quantity of new oak and is made to be drunk on the early side. The 2013 El Pedrosal is typically ripe at fourteen percent (as is the style of Ribera del Duero these days), but also poised and balanced on both the nose and palate. The fine bouquet delivers a fine blend of plums, cocoa powder, a nice signature of soil, fresh nutmeg, tempranillo spices and a stylish framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a lovely core, ripe tannins and a bit of uncovered alcohol currently poking out on the long finish. This seems just a touch higher in octane than its label indicates, and while it is not egregiously over the top, I would have loved to have seen this wine at least a half point lower in alcohol. It is a beautifully crafted wine in its style, but it is a bit hotter than the 2012 version and not quite in the same league as a result. 2016-2025. **89.**

2013 Viña Pedrosa Crianza- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas (Ribera del Duero)

The 2013 Viña Pedrosa Crianza is raised in a mix of French and American oak casks for eighteen months prior to bottling and comes in at 13.5 percent octane in this vintage. The wine displays an excellent bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, a touch of nutmeg, toasted coconut and cedar. The wine is quite interesting in that it shows its coconutty American oak when first poured, and then the cedar from the French wood comes out as it sits in the glass. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully light on its feet, with a good core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and lovely length on the pure and classy finish. Happily, this is not a blockbuster, but a wine of youthful complexity and elegance. It will age very nicely and will be even better a few years down the road, though it is quite tasty right out of the blocks. Fine juice. 2016-2030+. **91+.**

2012 El Pedrosal- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas (Ribera del Duero)

The 2012 El Pedrosal comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a really lovely nose of black plums and black cherries, cocoa, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of cigar smoke and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a good core, fine-grained, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. This is extremely tasty today, but clearly built to also age gracefully for at least the next decade and will be even better with a bit of bottle age. Impressive juice for the reasonable price tag. 2016-2030+. **90.**

2011 Bodegas Arrocal Selección (Ribera del Duero)

The 2011 Selección bottling from Bodegas Arrocal is made entirely from forty year-old tempranillo vineyards and aged entirely in French casks, with half of the barrels new each year. The wine is fourteen percent alcohol in 2011 and offers up a fine, new oaky nose of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, balsamic tones and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and chewy, with a fine core of fruit, very good focus, a fair bit of tannin, but good stuffing to carry the backend tannins on the long finish. This is still quite primary in personality and needs bottle age to develop some additional complexity, but it is pretty well-balanced and should blossom nicely with a bit of cellaring. Though it was only raised in fifty percent new wood, I would guess the other fifty percent are one wine barrels, as this still has some wood tannin on the backend in need of absorption. 2020-2040. **89+.**

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.

2012 Vivencias- Pago el Almendro (Oscar Hernando)

As I mentioned last year, the Vivencias bottling from Oscar Hernando's Pago el Almendro winery hails from his 1.4 hectare vineyard, planted on stony limestone soils and located at nearly a thousand meters above sea level to Tempranillo. In these warmer climes, the higher altitude is important for cooler evenings that assist in keeping shape in the wine. The 2012 was raised in one-third new oak and comes in at fourteen percent octane (which is a touch cooler than the 2009 I reported on last year). The wine offers up a lovely, youthful nose of dark berries, bitter chocolate, woodsmoke, espresso, a touch of balsam bough, cedary wood, a good base of soil and a fine touch of botanicals adding complexity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip, ripe, sturdy and well-integrated tannins and fine length on the still quite primary finish. This is a fine wine in the making, but it is built for the cellar and will need a proper four or five years of bottle age to start to blossom. As I observed last year in my note on the 2009, this is better (and far lighter on its feet) than dozens of more famous (and expensive) wines from neighboring Ribera del Duero, but I would like it even better if the older two-thirds of the casks used were a bit older (they are all one wine and two wine barrels right now), as this is a wine that could be even better with a slightly more gentle base of oak. There is serious *terroir* here and perhaps one-third new wood and two-thirds of five to ten year-old casks would allow it to shine through even more precisely. That said, this is still very, very good wine! 2020-2040+. **91+**.



Vineyards in the picturesque region of Txakolina.

Txakoli

2015 Getariako-Txakoli- Antxiola

I had been very impressed with the 2013 vintage of 2015 Getariako-Txakoli from Antxiola and the 2015 is a fine follow-up. The wine still has a touch of its dissolved CO₂ in it, which is what Getariako-Txakoli is prized for in its home region. The wine offer up vibrant scents on the nose of lime, green apple, salty soil tones, lemongrass and a lovely touch of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and rock solid at the core, with fine focus

and grip, bright acids and good length and grip on the quite complex finish. This is every bit as good as the fine 2013 and another really excellent value. 2016-2020. **90.**

2013 Txakoli de Álava “Luzia de Ripa”- Arzabro Txakolina

The 2013 Txakoli de Álava “Luzia de Ripa” bottling from Arzabro Txakolina is a lovely middleweight, with fine complexity on both the nose and palate and a long, zesty finish. When first opened, there is a touch of reduction on the nose here (which takes some swirling to encourage to depart), but the wine eventually offers up a complex and vibrant blend of grapefruit, lime, menthol, a nice touch of salty soil tones and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip and an impressively long, bright and well-balanced finish. This is only twelve percent alcohol, which gives the wine really nice vinosity on the backend and helps it partner beautifully at the table. Good juice and a fine value. 2016-2018. **89.**

2013 Getariako-Txakolina- Bengoetxe

The 2013 Getariako-Txakolina from Bengoetxe is a bright and vibrant middleweight that really works beautifully at the table. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of green apple, lime peel, wild fennel, a fine base of salty soil, just a whisper of beeswax and a bit of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and a long, bright and zesty finish that still seems fairly primary in profile and should get even better with a bit more bottle age. It has a better core than the 2011 version I tasted a bit more than eighteen months ago and is really a lovely bottle of wine. 2016-2020+. **91.**

2012 Getariako-Txakoli- Bengoetxe

The 2012 Getariako-Txakoli from Bengoetxe is a lovely wine that has retained plenty of freshness and crispness, though at age four, almost all of its youthful spritz has now dissipated. The bouquet is bright and complex, offering up scents of pear, ocean breeze, lemongrass, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and nicely balanced, with a good core, lovely transparency and fine length and grip on the wide open and bouncy finish. A fine bottle with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2016-2019. **90.**

Navarra

2014 Sauvignon Blanc “Doscarlos”- Bodegas Aliaga

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc “Doscarlos” from Aliaga is a bright and grassy example of the varietal that revels, rather than shrinks from all the personality that can be found in this grape. The vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blend of tangerine, lemon, fresh-cut grass, white soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, sound framing acids and very good length and grip on the fairly complex and juicy finish. A lovely example. 2016-2018. **88.**

2014 Garnacha- Lurra

The 2014 Garnacha from Lurra is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks and comes in at a relatively cool 13.5 percent octane. The wine offers up a bright and spicy nose of raspberries, *garrigue*, a bit of roasted meats, a nice touch of soil, sandalwood and other spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and broad-shouldered, with a good core, moderate tannins and good focus and grip on the long and robust finish. This is honest garnacha, with plenty of muscle, but not pumped up by wood or overripeness. Good juice, but I would love to see it sealed under natural cork, rather than a plastic cork. 2016-2025. **88+.**

2002 Viña Aliaga “Antonio Corpus”- Bodegas Aliaga

The 2002 Viña Aliaga “Antonio Corpus” bottling is comprised entirely of very old vine Garnacha, and this fourteen year-old wine is one of the current releases from this fine Navarra estate, which holds back a significant percentage of their red wines to release when they are fully mature. The wine comes in at 13.9 percent octane and offers up a fine, mature nose of ripe blackberries, roasted game, new leather, cigar ash and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and nicely resolved, with velvety, fading tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. Good juice and a fine value for a fourteen year-old wine! 2016-2025. **90.**

2001 Viña Aliaga “Vendimia Seleccionada”- Bodegas Aliaga

The 2001 Viña Aliaga “Vendimia Seleccionada” is made up of a blend of seventy percent Tempranillo and thirty percent Cabernet Sauvignon. This wine is still a tad chewy on the backend, but is really drinking with style and breed at age fifteen, as it wafts from the glass in an aromatic constellation of black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of toasted coconut, wild fennel, a lovely base of soil and a touch of pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered in personality, with a superb core of fruit, lovely focus and balance and a very long, modestly tannic finish. This is just reaching its plateau today and will continue to cruise along for many years to come. A great value! 2016-2030. **92.**

La Mancha**2014 Fatum Blanco (Airen- Sauvignon Blanc- Moscatel) – Manuel Manzaneque Suárez**

The 2014 Fatum Blanco is primarily made up of the Airen varietal (eighty percent), with fifteen percent of Sauvignon Blanc and five percent of Moscatel. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel and sees now oak. The wine offers up a bright nose of lime peel, pear, salty soil tones, a touch of wild fennel and gentle floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and tasty, with a perfectly good core, bright acids and sneaky length and grip on the finish. This is only twelve dollars here in the US and a very good value. 2016-2018. **88.**

2014 Fatum Tinto (Tempranillo-Bobal) – Manuel Manzaneque Suárez

The bottling of Fatum from Manuel Manzaneque Suárez is a fifty-fifty blend of Tempranillo and Bobal that is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling. The 2014 vintage comes in at a very reasonable 13.5 percent octane and offers up a fine nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, sandy soil tones, a bit of tree bark and lovely upper register botanicals that recall top flight Montepulciano. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and well-balanced, with an impressive core of fruit, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the complex finish that again closes with a nice note of botanicals. There is a very nice interplay here between sweet fruit and a closing note of bitterness that again recalls several different wines from Italy. The 2014 Fatum has lovely purity and personality and really is a great bargain. 2016-2025. **89.**

2013 EA! – Manuel Manzaneque Suárez

This is a relatively new project by Manuel Manzaneque Suárez, who also works at his family’s winery in La Mancha. EA! is a bottling that he produces from purchased, old vine Tempranillo grapes that he sources throughout the region, with the vineyards ranging from forty to seventy years of age. The wine receives a four day “cold soak” prior to fermentation and is aged in a combination of French and American wood. The 2014 tips the scales at fourteen percent and offers up a superb nose of black cherries, coffee bean, dark soil tones, wild fennel

and a gentle framing of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with moderate tannins, fine grip and a long, youthful and very well-balanced finish. This is still a young wine and really deserves a few years in the cellar to more completely blossom, but it has impressive depth and nascent complexity and already offers a pretty good glass of wine for those who do not wish to wait. Impressive juice and a fine value. 2016-2030+. **90.**

Campo de Borja

2014 Garnacha- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

The 2014 Garnacha from Legado del Moncayo is produced from vines that are twenty-five years of age and the wine is raised entirely in stainless steel and see no wood. The wine offers up a classic and youthful interpretation of Garnacha, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black raspberries, *garrigue*, coffee, meaty tones, turmeric, a bit of bonfire and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with a fine core, modest tannins and impressive length and grip on the gently chewy finish. This is really outstanding, unembellished Garnacha that perfectly captures the charm of this varietal. It is a stunning value, as it sells here in the US for ten dollars and is probably less than five euros closer to Spain! 2016-2025. **89.**

2014 Garnacha “Montaña” Old Vines- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

The 2014 Garnacha “Montaña” Old Vines from Legado del Moncayo is made from forty year-old vines and aged for seven months in cask prior to bottling. The wine comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a bright and impressively complex nose of baked raspberries, pepper, a touch of fruitcake, woodsmoke, dried eucalyptus and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, robust and well-balanced, with fine focus and grip, some backend chewy tannins and impressive length on the finish. This is like a Spanish version of Châteauneuf du Pape the way it used to be back in the 1980s, before the over the top club ruined the appellation. Fine juice and a great bargain at under fifteen dollars here in the US! 2016-2025+. **91+.**

Calatayud

2014 Acentor Garnacha- Isaac Hernandez Selección

The 2014 Acentor Garnacha from Isaac Hernandez Selección is made from fifty year-old vines that are fermented in cement tanks and raised in older barrels, of both French and American oak origin. The wine is fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a ripe, classic nose of black raspberries, cherries, pepper, roasted game, a bit of coffee grounds and a topnote of sandalwood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a good core, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the moderately complex and well-balanced finish. A very good bottle of Garnacha. 2016-2024. **88.**

2012 Roque Colás

The 2012 Roque Colás is comprised of a blend of thirty-five percent Garnacha, thirty percent Tempranillo, thirty percent Cabernet Sauvignon and five percent Merlot. The vineyards are all tended organically, with the vine age ranging from seventeen up to eighty-five years of age. The 2012 is a ripe wine, coming in at a full fifteen percent, with the wine raised in ten percent new oak, with the remainder of the casks of varying ages and predominantly French in origin. The wine is impressively well-balanced for its octane, offering up a deep and complex nose of ripe black cherries, black raspberries, dark chocolate, discreet balsamic tones, woodsmoke, chicory, a dollop of *garrigue* and just a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the

wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with some chewy tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, slightly warm finish. 2012 was quite the short crop and perhaps in other vintages, the octane of this very well-made wine is a bit lower. At fourteen percent alcohol, this would be utterly brilliant, but fifteen percent is a pretty heavy cross to bear. Still, this wine is pretty light on its feet for its octane. 2016-2025+? **89.** (For those who do not mind this level of alcohol, add fully four points here, as this wine is very well-made in its headier style.)

Mallorca

2012 Mantenegro- Suñer-Bibiloni (Vinyes I Vins Ca Sa Padrina)

I have had the pleasure to taste this lovely red wine from Mallorca in the 2007 and 2010 vintages, but I always seem to be listing it as from a different producer, based on its back label, so have included both producer name options in the listing above, as I am not really sure which is the name of the winery. In any case, the grape is Mantenegro and the wine is lovely in 2012, offering up a very pretty nose of plums, black cherries, a touch of fresh nutmeg, sandy soil tones and chocolate. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a good, sappy core, a nice touch of soil nuance, modest tannins and a long, tangy and really quite complex finish. Fine juice. 2016-2023+. **89.**

Blancos Cataluña

2013 Ximenis- Genium (Priorat)

The 2013 Ximenis from Genium is made up of a blend of ninety percent Pedro Ximénez and ten percent Garnacha Blanca, all from vines that range from forty to forty-five years of age. The wine is barrel fermented in new French oak casks, spends three months' *elevage* in the same barrels, with frequent *battonage* and tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol in this vintage. Despite the ripeness level, the nose is actually quite fresh and pure in its blend of pear, fresh almond, salty soil tones, dried flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite fresh on the attack, with a good core, a nice bit of mineral drive, but some overt heat poking out uncovered on the fairly long finish. This is headier than I would like, but is really pretty well-balanced for its octane and I am really impressed with how well the new wood is managed here. At 13.5 percent alcohol, this would be a really pleasurable wine, but at a full degree higher, it is just a bit too hot for its own good. 2016-2019. **87.**

Cataluña Tinto

2014 Trepas del Jordiet- Rendé Masdéu (Conca de Barberà)

The 2014 Trepas del Jordiet from Rendé Masdéu is fermented and raised in amphora and is quite low in alcohol, tipping the scales at only 11.5 percent alcohol in this vintage. The color is quite light and the wine offers up a bright and classy nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, peppercorn, a bit of woodsmoke, tree bark and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is only medium-bodied, but bright and bouncy, with nice intensity of flavor and complexity, a discreet core, very little tannin and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is unapologetically light and ethereal in style, but has lovely personality in its low fat profile. Good juice in a very, very old-fashioned style (as I imagine this is how wines from Cataluña tasted back in Roman times). 2016-2020+. **89.**

2013 "Giné Giné"- Buil & Giné (Priorat)

The 2013 Priorat from Buil & Giné is a hefty boy, tipping the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol. The blend is made up of forty percent Garnacha and sixty percent Cariñena. The

wine offers up a ripe, but well-balanced nose of black raspberries, pepper, hung game, *garrigue* and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a nice window of soil, ripe tannins and some heat on the backend. The finish here is long and focused and the wine shows good nascent complexity, but fifteen percent is pretty heady juice. This is extremely well-made and quite restrained for its octane, but it cannot completely cover the alcohol on the backend. 2016-2025. **88.** (Add four points if you are a fan of higher octane juice, as this is a very well-made wine!)



2010 Genium Tinto (Priorat)

The 2010 Genium Tinto is the bodegas basic bottling is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent garnacha, twenty percent each of syrah and merlot, ten percent carinena and five percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine is aged in French casks, with twenty percent new each year. The 2010 vintage tips the scales at a hefty 15.5 percent alcohol and the wine offers up a ripe and complex nose of raspberries, *garrigue*, grilled meats, coffee and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fairly hot, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, heady and powerful finish. In the context of Priorat wines, this is certainly not over the top, but at 15.5 percent alcohol, it is way past my threshold. It is very well-made in the modern day idiom of Priorat, and for folks with a stauncher constitution than mine, add five points, as it is very well-made in its style. 2016-2025. **86.**

2010 Genium “Poboleda Vi de la Vila (Priorat)”

The Poboleda bottling from Genium is a touch lower in octane than their standard tinto, coming in at an even fifteen percent. The *cépages* of this cuvée is seventy percent garnacha, twenty percent carinena and ten percent merlot. The 2010 version offers up a ripe bouquet that threatens some *sur maturité* notes in its blend of backed black raspberries, coffee grounds, chicory, damp soil, cloves and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows a bit of backend, uncovered oak tannins, with a good core, sound complexity and a bit of backend heat on the long finish. This is okay, but a bit heavy-handed in style and my gut feeling is that the oak tannins are going to become more prevalent, not less with further aging, so this is probably a wine to drink over the next few years. It is not bad, but again, needs to come in at a lower octane level to score more highly. 2016-2020. **86.**

2010 Genium “Ecologic” (Priorat)

The 2010 Genium “Ecologic” bottling is a tad cooler in octane than the two wines above, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine is a blend of fifty percent garnacha, twenty-five percent merlot, twenty percent syrah and five percent carinena, with all the grapes hailing from the same three hectares of vines that the bodegas farms organically. The wine offers up a ripe and complex nose of black cherries, roasted game, coffee, dark soil tones, a hint of licorice, sandalwood and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with the hint of some plushness on the attack, but a firm, youthful backend of chewy tannins and a bit of backend alcohol burn. I like the balance here better than in the previous two Genium wines, but at 14.5 percent this is still a big boy and it is a bit challenged on the finish trying to manage its high alcohol and wood tannins. But, that said, this has the best cellaring potential of the Geniums I tasted for this report and is really a pretty solid effort. 2018-2030+. **88.**

2010 Genium “Costers vi de Guarda” (Priorat)

The 2010 Genium “Costers vi de Guarda” is the estate’s old vine cuvée, as these vineyards average ninety years of age. The *cépages* of the 2010 is fifty percent carinena, thirty percent garnacha and ten percent each of merlot and syrah (which are presumably not as venerable in age as the other two varietals). The wine comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol and delivers a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, black raspberries, braised beef, dark soil, a touch of licorice, cloves, wild fennel and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and starting to show some secondary layers of complexity, with a good core, fine complexity and a long, moderately chewy and really quite well-balanced finish. This is the coolest of the four bottlings from Genium that I tasted, and though the wine has a touch of rusticity to its structure, there is plenty of depth and complexity here and this is really a fine bottle of Priorat. It is drinking quite well, but a few more years will allow more of the tannins to completely fall away. Good juice. 2016-2035+. **90.**

2007 Pleret- Buil & Giné (Priorat)

The 2007 Pleret from Buil & Giné is made up of a blend of Garnacha, Carinena, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. The 2007 is the current release and tips the scales at fifteen percent alcohol. The bouquet is superb, offering up scents of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, a touch of cigar wrapper, slate soil tones, *garrigue*, cedar and a bit of *pain épice* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a fine core, excellent complexity, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the gently warm finish. The 2007 Pleret really shows off some elegance, which I never thought I would write about for a fifteen percent wine! For whatever reason, this seems cooler in the mouth than the 2013 Giné

Giné bottling, despite their hitting the same octane level, and really is one of the best recent wines I have tasted from Priorat. Bravo. 2016-2030. **93.**

Jumilla

2014 Monastrell “Old Vines”- Porta Regia

The “Old Vines” bottling of Monastrell from Porta Regia is raised entirely in stainless steel and hails from vineyards averaging twenty-five years of age. the 2014 bottling comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and is a terrific value with its price tag of thirteen dollars a bottle retail here in the states. The bouquet is bright, complex and classy, offering up scents of black cherries, a touch of dark berry, woodsmoke, chicory, a hint of grilled beef and spicy soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and generous at the core, with tangy acids, a bit of backend tannin and excellent balance on the long, impressively complex and serious finish. This really has stuffing and length for its price point and is a fine value, which may be even better with a year or two in the cellar to allow the tannins to fall away a bit more and the wine to really blossom. It has the balance to age at least a decade, but the bottle is sealed with a plastic cork, which always makes me worry about longer-term cellaring. Would love to see the next vintage bottled up with a agglomerated cork, as it would be the same price and probably offer more secure longevity for those of us who might like to tuck it away in the cellar for a bit. Other than the choice of closure, this is great juice for the price. 2016-2025+. **89+.**

2014 Monastrell “Barrica 5 Mesas”- Porta Regia

The 2014 Monastrell “Barrica 5 Mesas” from Porta Regia is sealed up with a natural cork and comes in a heavier glass bottle than the Old Vines rendition, but its price is only a couple of dollars more a bottle, so this is still a serious value. The wine spends five months in a mix of seventy percent American and thirty percent French casks, with the wines all one wine barrels. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of red and black cherries, spices, a bit of bonfire, lovely, spicy soil tones, a touch of autumn leaf and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, fine balance and moderate, well-measured tannins perking up the long and quite classy finish. The one wine barrels are really nicely handled here and give the wine a touch more refinement than in the 2014 Old Vines bottling, with the same depth and balance. This too is a superb value. 2016-2025+. **90.**

2013 El Molet- D’Este Vinos (Joaquim Galvez)

The 2013 El Molet from Joaquim Galvez is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent Monastrell (forty-plus year-old vines), forty percent Tempranillo, ten percent Syrah and five percent Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine was aged for six months in French casks and tips the scales at fourteen percent octane. The bouquet offers up a deep and youthful blend of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of coffee bean, gentle balsamic tones, lovely spice tones and a dollop of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and well-balanced, with plenty of mid-palate stuffing, ripe tannins and just a hint of heat poking out on the long and primary finish. This handles its octane quite well and really is a very well-made wine. It retails for seventeen dollars here in the states (and probably far less in Europe) and really is a fine value, which seems likely to age pretty well over the medium-term and will probably be a better drink with a few years in the cellar. I would love to see it just a touch lower in alcohol, just to see if a bit more soil signature could be introduced into the equation. 2016-2030+? **89.**

Utiel-Requana and Manchuela

2014 Bovale- Isaac Hernandez Selección

The Bovale bottling from Isaac Hernandez is comprised entirely of old vine Bobal, which is one of the indigenous grapes of Utiel-Requana and is capable of producing quite long-lived wines. These sixty year-old vines lie at an altitude of three thousand feet, which allows for a good diurnal variation and kept the alcohol down to fourteen percent in this vintage. The wine is raised in a combination of seventy percent French oak and thirty percent American casks for six months prior to bottling. The wine is ripe and black fruity in personality, but nicely light on its feet for its octane, and offers up a deep nose of black cherries, chicory, a touch of bonfire, a nice base of soil and a bit of peppercorn in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with good nascent complexity, moderate tannins and good bounce on the long and ripe finish. This is certainly approachable today, but a few years of bottle age will allow secondary layers of complexity to emerge. A good, solid bottle that should age quite well over the next dozen years or so. 2016-2030+. **88+**.

2013 Bobal- Temperamento

The 2013 Temperamento Bobal is also produced from sixty year-old vines, with the wine undergoing malo in cask and raised in French *barricas* for six to eight months. The vintage tips the scales at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a ripe nose of black cherries, chocolate, balsamic tones, lovely spices, a touch of damp soil and a fair bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip and just a bit of oak tannin currently poking out on the youthful finish. Bobal is a varietal that I quite like and this bottling shows nice old vine sappiness, but here, I do not really see (yet?) what the French oak barrels bring to the equation, as the wood is not presently integrated and is a bit detached from the rest of the wine. Perhaps it just needs a bit more bottle age, but maybe all older casks would allow the varietal personality of Bobal to keep the upper hand in the equation? If the wood is absorbed seamlessly with further bottle age, this will merit a score at the top of the range. If it continues to go its separate way, then the lower score is probably reflective of how it will drink. There are some excellent raw materials here, so I will be hoping for full oak integration with more bottle age! 2018-2030+? **86-92**.

Alicante

2014 Curii Uvas Y Vinos “Giro”- Alberto & Violeta (Alicante)

Giro is the local name for a clone of Garnacha, from which Alberto Redrado and Violeta Gutiérrez de la Vega produce this old vine bottling. The 2014 Curii Uvas Y Vinos “Giro” from is 14.5 percent octane and offers up an absolutely beautiful and very precise nose of raspberries, cherries, sandalwood, cinnamon stick, mincemeat, cedar and a discreet topnote of peppermint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and complex, with a great core of fruit, plenty of well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. There is a touch of volatile acidity here that needs to blow off with some time in decanter, but once it does, this wine has the depth, dimension and complexity of some of the most famous wines in Spain. It is a lot like crossing Heitz Martha’s Vineyard and Chambolle-Musigny! Great juice. 2019-2040. **93+**.



Rioja Blanco

2014 Viña Otano Rioja Blanco “Fermentado en Barrica”

The 2014 Viña Otano Rioja Blanco “Fermentado en Barrica” is fermented and raised entirely in new casks, with seventy-five percent French wood and twenty-five percent new acacia barrels. The wine only spends four months in cask after fermentation for aging before being racked out of the new wood. The blend on the 2014 is seventy-five percent Viura and twenty-five percent Tempranillo Blanco and the wine offers up a fine nose of pear, white flowers, a touch of almond, salty soil tones and a nice blend of vanillin and butter wood tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with the wood here quite understated (particularly for one hundred percent new) and very well-integrated into the fruit of the wine. The acids are bright, the wine is long and nascently complex and seems to have good potential for medium-term cellaring, though it is very tasty right out of the blocks. Good juice. 2016-2025. **89.**

2014 Rioja Blanco- Señorío de P. Peciña

The 2014 Rioja Blanco from Señorío de P. Peciña is a lovely wine, offering up a bright and vibrant nose of pear, fresh coconut, salty soil tones, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and still quite primary, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, bright acids and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is still a puppy and will age long and gracefully, but it is already quite tasty and a pleasure to drink in its youth. 2016-2035. **90.**

2000 Viña Tondonia Blanco Rioja Reserva- López de Heredia

The 2000 Viña Tondonia Blanco Rioja Reserva from López de Heredia is the current release from this great old school bodegas and the wine is outstanding. The nose offers up a deep and complex blend of white cherries, marinated orange peel, beeswax, white soil tones and a lovely touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the ripe and very well-balanced finish. This is 12.5 percent alcohol, but shows lovely ripeness and precision and is destined to age long and gracefully. A fine, fine bottle. 2016-2035. **92.**

Rioja Tinto

A few years ago, the new Rioja producer who blew me away with the classical styling and impeccable quality of their wines was Señorío de P. Peciña (Pedro Peciña was the long-time managing viticulturist for Bodegas La Rioja Alta, so the traditional basis of his winemaking is very understandable), and last year, the new revelation for me in the world of old school Rioja was Bodegas Lecea, who I had the pleasure to visit during my October 2014 trip to Spain. This year, another new estate to me has popped up from the ultra-traditional camp in Rioja- Bodegas Akutain, who like these other two producers, is based in the La Rioja Alta sub-region. This is a small, family-owned bodegas that farms a bit more than six hectares of vines making truly outstanding wines in the classic mold. With the lineup of relatively new estates popping up to swell the ranks of old school traditionalists like López de Heredia, Cuné, La Rioja Alta, Marqués de Murrieta and Bodegas Riojanas, it is hard not to get hopeful that the long dark night of over-extracted, French oaky and dense Rioja is starting to come to an end and a new dawn may be on the horizon in the finest of all Spanish wine regions!

2014 Corazón de Lago Rioja- Bodegas Lecea (Rioja Alta)

As readers may recall from my visit to Bodegas Lecea back in the fall of 2014, the Corazón de Lago bottling here is quite unique, as it is fermented using carbonic maceration in large, open top stone fermenters. The original intention was to make a Rioja bottling that was accessible right out of the blocks, but during my visit, we tasted an example of Corazón de Lago that was more than thirty-five years of age (the vintage neck label had deteriorated, so we were not sure of just how old it was!) and the wine had aged beautifully. Tasting the 2014 version of Corazón de Lago, it seems pretty clear to me that although this wine is intended for early consumption, it is far too serious and structured out of the blocks to not really give some bottle age prior to opening. The wine offers up a deep and primary bouquet of black cherries, blackberries, pepper, soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and peppery today, with a fine core, ripe tannins and a long, youthfully robust and very promising finish. The palate is more delineated than the nose out of the blocks, but this is a wine that will be terrific with a couple of years in the cellar. 2018-2035+. **90.**

2014 Rioja Tinto- Señorío de P. Peciña (Rioja Alta)

The 2014 Rioja Joven from Señorío de P. Peciña is really a lovely young wine, with plenty of sappy fruit in evidence in its vibrant bouquet of black cherries, red plums, Rioja spice tones, a nice base of soil and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and already fairly velvety, with a nice core, fine focus and grip, just a bit of tannin and very good length and grip on the classy finish. This is still quite primary and will blossom with more complexity over time, but it is made to be drunk young and is already very tasty. 2016-2025+. **88+.**

2012 Rioja Crianza- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)

Bodegas Akutain is a new producer to me. The family farms just over six hectares of vineyards in the Rioja Alta region, with their cellars based just outside of Haro. The estate is old school in the best sense, picking by hand, fermenting everything with wild yeasts and raising the wine exclusively in old, American oak casks and bottled unfiltered in the great traditions of the region. Their 2012 Crianza is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, toasted coconut, woodsmoke, a touch of sweet nuttiness and a topnote Rioja spice tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and wide open, with a velvety attack, a sappy core, lovely soil signature and a long, refined and meltingly tannic finish. Utterly classic and flat out delicious. 2016-2030+. **90.**

2010 Rioja Crianza- Señorío de P. Peciña (Rioja Alta)

At age six, the 2010 Rioja Crianza from Señorío de P. Peciña is really starting to drink beautifully. The pure and complex nose delivers a fine aromatic constellation of plums, black cherries, toasted coconut, a bit of cigar smoke, a fine signature of soil, nutmeg, hints of mustard seed and incipient nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and seductive on the attack, with a fine core, modest tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, meltingly tannic and perfectly balanced finish. Fine, fine juice at its apogee and with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2016-2030. **90.**

2009 Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Lecea (Rioja Alta)

The 2009 Rioja Reserva from Bodegas Lecea is an outstanding wine, offering up a deep, pure and still quite primary bouquet of black cherries, Rioja spice tones, a touch of meatiness, salty soil tones and a gentle topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and velvety on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, suave tannins and a long, bright and perfectly balanced finish. This is old school Rioja in the best sense of the term. The wine is starting to drink very nicely at age seven, but clearly will continue to improve with further bottle age. 2016-2040+. **92.**

2009 Rioja Reserva- Señorío de P. Peciña (Rioja Alta)

The 2009 Rioja Reserva from Señorío de P. Peciña is a lovely example of this ripe vintage in the region, as it comes in at a very civilized 13.5 percent alcohol, which was no small feat in this hot summer in Rioja. The wine is wide open and really expressive on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a fine blend of sappy red and black cherries, toasted coconut, cloves, cigar ash, a complex base of soil, a bit of meatiness and a potpourri of Rioja spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, still a bit of backend tannin, excellent focus and grip and a long, poised and complex finish. A lovely bottle that is just starting to hit on all cylinders, but will age very long and gracefully and there is absolutely no hurry to be cracking bottles of this excellent Rioja. 2016-2050. **93+.**

2006 Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)

The 2006 Rioja Reserva from Bodegas Akutain includes a bit of garnacha in the blend and was aged three years in old American oak barrels prior to bottling. The wine offers up an outstanding bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar ash, excellent soil tones, a bit of bay leaf and a discreet base of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced with a fine core, still a bit of backend tannin and excellent grip and

focus on the very long and classy finish. This is bottled unfiltered and unlike most ten year-old bottles of Rioja, this is best decanted off of its sediment. An excellent bottle from this very exciting classical Rioja estate! 2016-2030+. **92+**.

2004 Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)

The 2004 Rioja Gran Reserva from Bodegas Akutain is a lovely the elegant side of Rioja Alta fruit, as it offers up a complex and utterly classic bouquet of plums, raspberries, cigar smoke, an impressively complex base of soil tones, cloves and toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and vibrant, with a great core of fruit, impeccable balance, lovely complexity and a very long, bright and classy finish. Just a great bottle of old school Rioja! 2016-2035+. **94**.

2004 Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Lecea (Rioja Alta)

The 2004 Rioja Gran Reserva from Bodegas Lecea is a great young wine. The superb and utterly classic bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, coconut, a touch of fresh sage, cocoa, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil, gentle smokiness and a touch of eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a sappy core, lovely soil signature, velvety tannins and a very long, focused and utterly refined finish. Great juice. 2016-2040. **94**.

2004 Castillo Ygay Rioja Gran Reserva Especial- Marqués de Murrieta

The 2004 Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial from Marqués de Murrieta is a lovely young Rioja, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of raspberries, cherries, coconut, a fine base of salty soil tones, cigar smoke and a topnote of Rioja spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and tangy, with a good core, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and still quite primary finish. This needs at least another four or five years to really start to blossom and is at least a decade away from its true apogee. 2020-2050. **93**.

2003 Viña Tondonia Rioja Reserva- López de Heredia

The 2003 Viña Tondonia Reserva is a very nice example of this warm weather vintage, with the wine showing a bit of a “baked fruit” quality (a bit like 1982 Rioja out of the blocks), rather than any overt signs of *sur maturité*. The quite red fruity bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of baked cherries and red plums, *garrigue*-like spice tones, a nice touch of meatiness, a classic base of soil tones (that will get salty as time goes by) and a very discreet framing of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, broad on the attack and velvety, with moderate tannins, a good core and fine length and grip on the still fairly primary, but quite wide open finish. There is a bit of Garnacha influence showing on the backend today, but this is quite a tasty example of the summer of 2003 and far more emblematic of its vineyard than its vintage. Despite it being quite open and drinkable, I would opt for giving it a couple of years more in the cellar to allow some of its primary character to blossom. 2015-2035. **89+**.

1978 Viña Albina Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1978 Viña Albina Reserva is a very pretty wine that has been fully mature for years, but continues to drink very nicely. I should note that this bottle had a particularly soft and fragile cork, so perhaps it was a touch more *tendre* in style as a result of this and there may be slightly more robust bottles out there still. The bouquet is very pretty, wafting from the glass in a mature blend of baked cherries, lovely meaty tones, nutskin, Rioja spices and cocoa powder. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very silky in texture, with a good core, tangy acids

and good length and grip on the slightly four-square, but quite tasty finish. A very tasty bottle, but the 1978 is not amongst the top older vintages of Viña Albina Reserva that I have had the pleasure to drink over the years. 2015-2025+. **89.**

1973 Rioja “Imperial” Gran Reserva- Cuné

I wrote up the 1973 vintage of Imperial Gran Reserva for the feature on Cuné back at the end of 2014, and looking through my notes, I am surprised to see I have drunk this wine on three more occasions since that time! Life is good. This most recent bottle was absolutely lovely and quite a bit more red fruity than the example I reported on back in December of 2014, offering up a pure and complex nose of strawberries, cherries, toasted coconut, Rioja spice tones, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a pungent topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety, with a lovely core of fruit, superb complexity and balance and a very long, suave and *à point* finish. This is one of my favorite vintages of Imperial for current consumption. 2016-2040. **94.**

1973 Viña Albina Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1973 Viña Albina Rioja Gran Reserva is a beautifully elegant and perfumed wine that is now at its peak of maturity. The bouquet offers up a lovely constellation of strawberries, cherries, coconut, fresh nutmeg, rose petals and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and velvety, with bright fruit at the core, bouncy acids and lovely length and grip on the suave and very refined finish. My only, very minor complaint with this very pretty wine is that it is not quite as complex as the very top examples from this great Rioja vintage. 2015-2035+. **92.**

Vinos de la Tierra de Castilla

2014 Tempranillo “Sinfonía”- Bodegas Abanico

The 2014 Tempranillo “Sinfonía” from Bodegas Abanico hails from forty year-old vineyards planted on sandy, clay and limestone soils in the torrid region outside of Madrid. The wine comes in at fourteen percent octane in this vintage and offers up a ripe, but quite pure nose of cassis, black cherries, balsamic tones, cigar ash and a nice, judicious touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and very good length on the finish. This does not show the complexity it might if it hailed from a cooler region, but it is very well done in its style and is not heavy-handed or jammy in the slightest and really is quite tasty. 2016-2025. **89.**

Vinos de Madrid

2013 4 Monos “Albillo Real”- La Tintoreria (Viños de Madrid)

The 4 Monos label was started by four wine-loving friends- Javier García, Laura Robles, David Velasco and David Moreno- in the Gredos Mountains, west of Madrid. They work five and a half hectares of organically-farmed vines, with the primary grapes planted being Abillo, Garnacha and Cariñena. The wines are all fermented with natural yeasts, after foot-trodding and are bottled without filtration. Their 2013 Albillo Real is an excellent wine, jumping from the glass in a complex aromatic constellation of pear, beeswax, white soil tones, dried flowers, fresh almond and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and light on its feet, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, fine complexity and a long, waxy finish that is really unique and captivating. Fine juice. 2016-2020. **91.**

2013 4 Monos “Car”- La Tintoreria (Viños de Madrid)

The 2013 4 Monos “Car” from La Tintoreria is the estate’s Cariñena bottling, and it is a beautiful wine that offers up excellent complexity and breed on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of dark berries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, Christmas spice tones and sandalwood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and low fat, with fine intensity of flavor, moderate tannins, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. At 12.5 percent octane, this wine is light on its feet and beautifully transparent. It is certainly approachable today, but clearly will be better with a couple of years in the cellar. 2019-2035. **91+**.

Almansa

2014 Garnacha Tintorera “Altitud 1.100”- Bodegas Santa Quiteria

As readers may recall from the note on the 2013 Altitud 1.100 that I liked last year, Garnacha Tintorera is the native name for the Alicante Bouschet grape. The wine hails from vineyards planted at an altitude of eleven hundred meters, from which it takes its name. The 2014 is also only 12.5 percent octane and was raised entirely in stainless steel tanks (as was the case with the 2013). The 2014 Altitud 1.100 offers up a vibrant bouquet of black cherries, woodsmoke, chicory, lovely spice tones, a bit of bitter chocolate, gentle leafiness and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, just a bit of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the tasty finish. This seems just a touch riper in personality than the 2013, but it is quite cool in the mouth and finishes with that same touch of gentle bitterness of the previous vintage and recalls serious Montepulciano. This is really a very good bottle of wine, and at the ten dollars per bottle it retails at here in the US, a superb value. There are not many wines at this price point that can deliver this type of authentic personality! 2016-2025. **89+**.