

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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## KALIN CELLARS PART TWO CALIFORNIA'S GREAT ICONOCLAST



Kalin Cellars is one of the greatest old school producers in the world of California wine, and with each passing year, my love for these wines grows. As readers may recall from my historical feature on Kalin back in January of 2013, when Terry and Frances Leighton so kindly organized a tasting of their older vintages to “fill in a few holes” in my tasting experience with their wines, we did not finish all of the bottles that they had pulled from the cellar, due to both their extraordinary generosity and my starting to succumb to jet lag on that particular evening. Terry Leighton had laughed at the time when I demurred that I might not make it through the remainder of the lineup without falling asleep at the table, “no problem, we can just save these bottles for a ‘part two’ tasting the next time that you are out here in Livermore.” I had never imagined that three and a half years would elapse before I would make it back out to that part of California wine country and have the pleasure to sit at the table again with Terry and work through those remaining bottles from our first tasting, but time flies. So, when I was out in the San Francisco area for a tasting in the fall of last year to taste through a fine lineup of 1985 northern Rhône wines, which I reported on a couple of issues back, I made a point to schedule in a few extra days to make visits to a handful of my favorite producers in the region- both north and southeast of the city- and amongst these visits was our long-delayed second part of the Kalin

Cellars archeological dig. Terry and I met for dinner at the fine Livermore restaurant of Uncle Yu's in the center of town, where we had gotten together for our first tasting back in 2013, and where, as far as I am aware, more Kalin Cellars wines can be found on the deep wine list than anywhere else in the world. The food here is outstanding and marries brilliantly with the Leightons' wines and I cannot recommend the restaurant highly enough to anyone who might be able to make the trip to Livermore to delve into the wine list and enjoy the superb cuisine.

Terry Leighton had characteristically augmented what was left over from our previous tasting with several other bottles that he felt would be fun to taste at our September dinner, and it was once again another *tour de force* of great California wine. As many readers will already know, Kalin Cellars produces wines that are deeply complex, individual and as highly reflective of their underlying *terroir* as any wines to be found around the globe, but of course, one would expect this from the Leightons, who have after all been also producing wines in Burgundy since the vintages of the late 1990s! In addition to what Terry had assembled in the cellars at Uncle Yu's for our September dinner, I have also been able to augment this report with a fairly significant range of Kalin wines out of my own cellar, as I had taken my own advice to heart since Part One on Kalin Cellars had been written in early 2013 and I had been keen-eyed for picking up well-stored older bottles of Kalin wherever and whenever I could find them. Thanks to a bit of insider information from Terry Leighton himself, I had been able to pick up a nice range of truly older wines from a cellar made available in Palo Alto back in the spring of 2015, from which many of the notes on the oldest wines below originated. Happily, as the wines were being shipped from the west coast to New York, I was content to let the wines rest in my cellar for nearly two years before opening them, which allowed the old wines to properly settle back into balance after their trans-continental voyage. So it was not until the tail end of February of this year that I organized a vertical tasting of the Cuvée DD Pinot Noir from Kalin, the bottles of which originated primarily from this Palo Alto cellar.

As Terry Leighton had very generously supplied a nice range of older chardonnays for our September dinner, I started out the vertical Kalin tasting in February focusing on sauvignon blanc as our white wine varietal of the evening, and this allowed for a moment of brief revelation, as the last bottle of the 1997 Sauvignon Blanc Reserve out of my cellar was paired up with the current release from 2001. Readers may recall that I had been relatively lukewarm on the 1997 Sauvignon Blanc Reserve, as I had found the wine a bit evolved for my tastes when it was released three or four years ago and had "only" given the wine a score of 89 points, which is low on my scale for this bottling from Kalin Cellars. However, after the wine had rested comfortably in my cellar for a few years, it was a completely different animal- fresh, vibrant, beautifully complex with maturity, but still at the peak of its powers, and the dramatic improvement that the wine had shown once it had a chance to rest in my cellar and recover from its release and shipment around the country was very educational. I realized that despite new releases from Kalin Cellars these days having spent their entire lives comfortably in the winery's cellars, the wines are inevitably older wines when they are released, and they too need to be given some extended time after shipping to recover their equilibrium and start to show with all of their true quality. Terry had mentioned this to me at the start of this year, when I tried to order a few of the current releases on their mailing list for inclusion in this article, as there are several wines that I had not yet tasted which are presently available for mailing list clients of the winery. Terry had cautioned that even if there were not currently issues with shipments of wines from

California to New York, the wines would not suit my present needs, as they should be given sufficient time to recover from shipping prior to tasting, and he had suggested that their resting a year in the cellar would be prudent. The brilliant recovery of the 1997 Sauvignon Blanc Reserve in my cellar simply emphasized this point of view, so I will just have to be content to let more recent arrivals of Kalin Cellars wines in my collection rest comfortably and plan on a part three of my Kalin research project for some time down the road.

### ***Sauvignon Blanc***

#### **2001 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Livermore Valley)**

The 2001 vintage is the first bottling to be released from this parcel of one hundred year-old sauvignon blanc vines that the Leightons have found in Livermore Valley. The wine is drinking very nicely, but given my experience with the 1997 Sauvignon Blanc (please see below), I suspect that this wine is going to be even better with a bit more time to settle in after its departure from the cellars and its subsequent shipping. The bouquet today has a nice sheen of honey to its aromatic constellation of apricot, tangerine, gentle notes of petrol citrus peel, a delicate touch of walnut, lovely soil tones, just a whisper of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely tertiary in profile, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, poised and very well-balanced and complex finish. This is very tasty today and my gut instinct is it will be even better a year or two down the road. 2017-2035. **92+.**

#### **1997 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Potter Valley)**

I last reported on this wine three or so years ago, when I was writing up my first piece on Kalin Cellars, at which time this was the current release of the wine. At the time I felt the wine was in the good, but not great camp, as it seemed just a tad more evolved to my palate than the sweet spot in its evolution where I would have loved to have caught it. Of course, now that it has had adequate time to recover from its initial shipment around the country, the wine has come back into its perfect balance and is drinking stunningly well! The 1997 Kalin Sauvignon Blanc Reserve is now pure, complex and simply beautiful, wafting from the glass in a blend of toasted almond, tangerine, gravelly soil tones, a touch of beeswax, orange peel and a lovely smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with bright acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, poised and very classy finish. Kalin wines take some time to recover from shipping after they are released, as they are at that point, after all, already quite mature wines. This is a perfect example of how richly patience is rewarded with the Leightons' wines! Needless to say, I completely underrated this wine three years ago. 2017-2030. **94.**

#### **1991 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Potter Valley)**

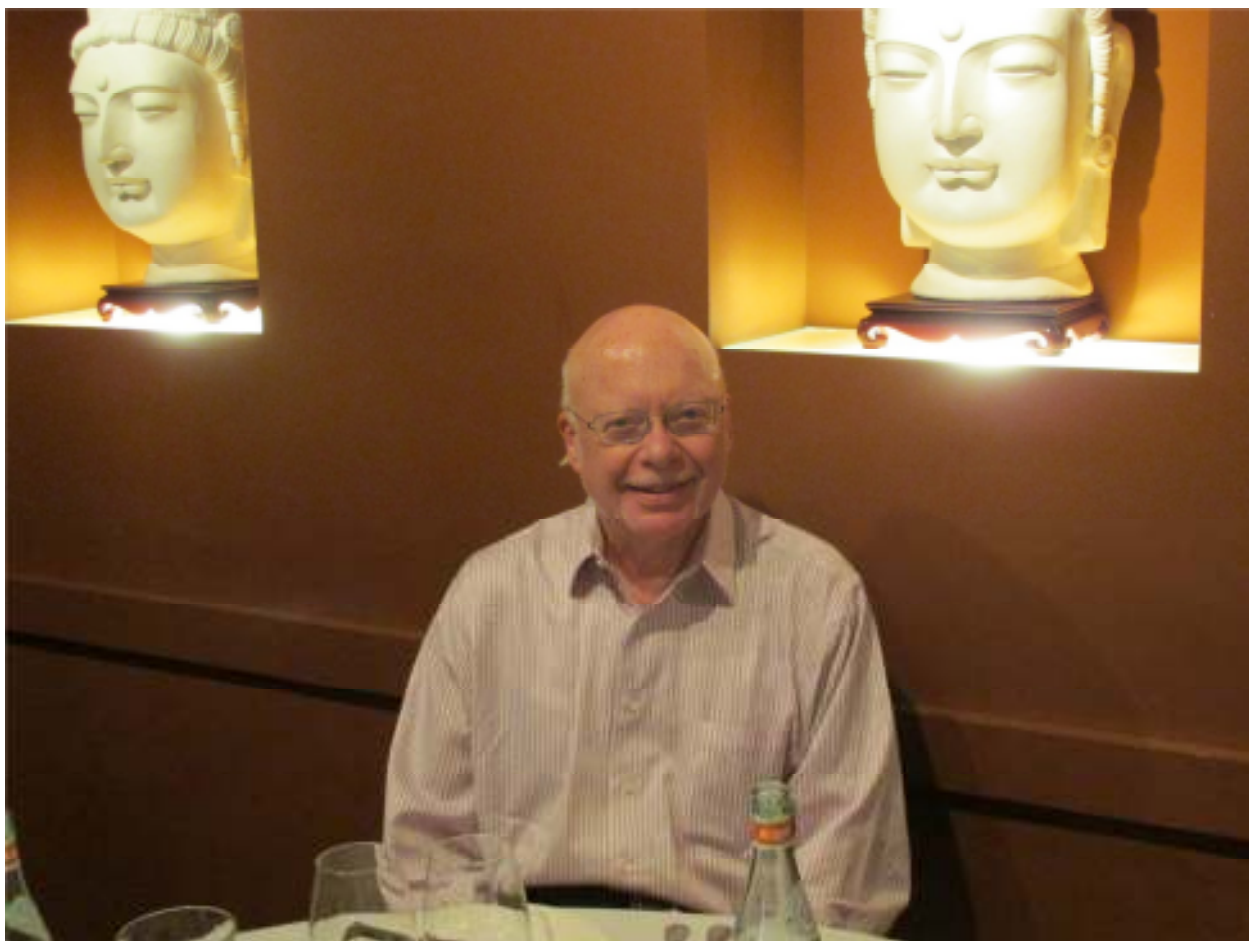
The 1991 Sauvignon Blanc Reserve from Kalin Cellars is one of the greatest vintages I have ever tasted of this iconic wine, with the high acids of the vintage keeping the wine fresh and still a tad on the youthful side at age twenty-five! Just take a look at the color of the wine in the photo above! The wine actually takes a bit of time in the glass to blossom, as there remains marvelous structural elements here and this wine still has decades of life ahead of it. Eventually, the bouquet jumps from the glass in a fresh and vibrant blend of lemon, a touch of tangerine, gentle notes of anise, salty soil tones, lemon oil and a delicate topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very complex, with a fine core of fruit, bright, seamless acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long and refined finish. Amazingly, this great bottle of sauvignon blanc probably has another quarter of century of life ahead of it! Brilliant wine. 2016-2040. **95+.**

## ***Sémillon***

On my most recent visit to Livermore to taste with Terry Leighton in September of 2016, he related a bit more about his and Frances' first couple of years working with the vines on the old Ruby Hill ranch in Livermore. When they first found out about these very old vines here, the property was being overseen (so to speak) by a hippie commune in the area, with the hippies not all that interested in pruning or tending the vines during the growing season, so the land was a bit of a wilderness. In fact, the ground squirrels were so well ensconced and consuming so many grapes, that Frances Leighton had to call the county pest control office to get a handle on the little critters, once the Leightons had contracted to buy the production here and started to get out in the vines. The veteran officer came out to look at the property and told the Leightons that over the course of his career, he had never seen such a heavy infestation of ground squirrels, and it was going to take a couple of years to get the population here under control. This was in the summer of 1977, so in the vintages of both '77 and '78, there was a very, very small quantity of grapes that could be used for wine (though a lot of well-fed ground squirrels) and there were no commercial releases from Kalin Cellars of their Sémillon. Finally, the efforts of the local officials succeeded in driving out the majority of the ground squirrel population, which made possible a proper crop load and the first "official" vintage of Kalin Cellars Sémillon was released in the 1979 vintage. As I noted in Part One of my Kalin Cellars history, there were only three commercial vintages produced of this wine from the hundred year-old vines that had been planted here by Charles Wetmore from cuttings that he brought back from Château d'Yquem, as the property was sold in 1982 and the historic old vineyard destroyed. By the time of the 1983 vintage, the Wente Brothers Winery had stepped in to offer the Leightons some old vine Sémillon grapes that they had on their property, so the only lost vintage of the Sémillon bottling from Kalin Cellars was the 1982. But, the Wente Brothers' vines were not quite as old as those that had been on Ruby Hill (planted in 1909, rather than the 1880s), so the first three vintages of 1979, 1980 and 1981 are unique in their Ruby Hill vineyard source of the original old vines planted by Charles Wetmore.

### **1981 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)**

The 1981 vintage of Sémillon from Kalin Cellars was the very last of the wines made from the original hundred year-old vines that the Leightons resurrected when they discovered the old Ruby Hill property. The vines would be razed the following year, when Computerland bought the property to put in an executive retreat in the hills of Livermore. At this time, the property had only two white grapes planted on it, sémillon and sauvignon vert, so about twenty percent of the blend was the latter, more working glass grape, which at least supplied a nice chassis of acidity for the wine to age on, and now thirty-five years out from the vintage, the 1981 remains fresh and zesty. The bouquet offers up a mature and very complex blend of orange, beeswax, a gentle touch of honey, fading petrol, a bit of almond, gently chalky soil tones and a bit of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully bright and bouncy, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a very long, light on its feet finish. This wine is now thirty-five years of age and at a beautiful point in its evolution for drinking, but it is emphatically not in any hurry to start to decline and will probably be a fine glass of wine for at least another couple of decades. 2016-2035. 94.



*Terry Leighton, holding court at Uncle Yu's Restaurant in Livermore, during round two of our Kalin Cellars tasting.*

### ***Chardonnay***

#### **1991 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée LR” Chardonnay (Sonoma County)**

The 1991 vintage was the very last produced of the Cuvée LR chardonnay by Kalin Cellars. This is a section of Long Vineyards that rises up right from the Dry Creek River banks, but which succumbed to Pierce's Disease and the vines were dug up after this vintage. The wine is outstanding, offering up a complex and mature constellation of apricot, hazelnuts, browned butter, a superbly complex base of soil, notes of salinity and an exotic touch of caramelized banana in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a bright, zesty finish that closes with impressive length and grip. 2016-2030+. **93.**

#### **1990 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Chardonnay (Sonoma County)**

The 1990 chardonnay from Dave Demostene's ranch is a beautiful wine at its peak of maturity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, musky floral tones, a touch of browned butter, salty soil and a discreet topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully resolved, with fine framing acids, good depth in the mid-palate and very good focus and grip on the long, complex and mature finish. A lovely wine in full bloom, but still with decades ahead of it. 2016-2035. **93.**



### **1988 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée LV” Chardonnay (Sonoma County)**

The 1988 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée LV” Chardonnay is an utterly brilliant wine and one of the best bottles from this variety that I have tasted from anywhere in the last few years! Back in the late 1980s, this cuvée designation was used for fruit sourced from the cool, foggy Lorenzo Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast (which became part of the Marcassin lineup in years to come). The 1988 Cuvée LV is drinking brilliantly today, soaring from the glass in a complex and vibrant blend of tangerine, fresh apricot, salty minerality, a touch of lime zest and a gently floral topnote redolent of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a racy personality that belies its twenty-eight years of age, a great core and a very long, stunningly complex and electric finish. This wine has everything- perfect balance, laser-like focus and great backend energy! 2016-2045. **97.**

### **1986 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée MV” Chardonnay (Potter Valley)**

The 1986 vintage was the only one where a chardonnay was produced by the Leightons from the Matthau Vineyard in Potter Valley. At thirty years of age, this wine has entered into a very exotic, tertiary stage of development, as it offers up an idiosyncratic nose of walnut, gentle notes of orange peel, salty soil tones and some lemony aspects that remind me of wines aged under *flora*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively fresh and vibrant, which comes as a bit of a shock, after the relative dearth of fruit elements remaining on the nose! The wine is plenty deep and has good length on the well-balanced finish, and has simply moved onto a stage of complexity beyond fruit, but still with plenty of life in it. This is one of the most unusual mature Kalin Cellars chardonnays that I have ever tasted, but it is quite enjoyable to drink now and is not going to go over the hill anytime soon! 2016-2030+. **89.**

### **1986 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée LD” Chardonnay (Sonoma County)**

The Cuvée LD bottling of chardonnay from Kalin Cellars is of course from the well-known Long Vineyard in Dry Creek, from which the Leightons have produced a couple of different bottlings from various sections of the vineyard. The Cuvée LD hails from a hillside section that had previously been pine forest and was cleared and planted in the late 1970s according to Terry Leighton, and which only gets morning sun. The 1986 Cuvée LD is one of the finest vintages of this wine that I have had the pleasure to taste, and at age thirty, it is right in the heart of its apogee, wafting from the glass in a beautifully expressive aromatic constellation of apple, tangerine, complex soil tones, hints of nuttiness, orange peel and an exotic topnote of laurel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and absolutely *à point*, with a fine core, bright, zesty acids and a very long, ripe and complex finish. A perfectly balanced beauty! 2016-2040. **94.**

### **1985 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée BL” Chardonnay (Potter Valley)**

The 1985 Kalin Cuvée BL chardonnay hails from the same BJJ Vineyard as their superb sauvignon blanc bottling, which is planted on an old, dried up river bed in Potter Valley. Soils here are a blend of clay and limestone. I had previously reported that the Leightons only produced a chardonnay from this vineyard in the 1986, 1987 and 1988 vintages, but clearly there was one more waiting in the wings in the cellars! This is a stunning bottle of chardonnay at its absolute apogee today, delivering a superb bouquet of peach, hazelnut, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, dried flowers and a lovely topnote of butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly seamless in its balance, with a fine core, lovely framing acids and

excellent length and grip on the complex and vibrant finish. This is drinking with style and breed. 2016-2030+. **92.**

### **1985 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée L” Chardonnay (Sonoma County)**

The Cuvée L chardonnay hails from a warmer section of Long Vineyard in Dry Creek Valley, where the sun is principally of the afternoon variety, and like the cooler section where the “Cuvée LD” comes from, this is planted with Wente clones. The 1985 Cuvée L is a lovely bottle, with a slightly more fruit-driven personality from the predominance of afternoon sun in this section of the vineyard. The bouquet delivers a fine blend of fresh apricot, baked peaches, a nice touch of soil, a bit of citrus zest and a topnote of toasted walnut. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seamless, with a lovely core, a very refined personality, great balance and a very long, refined finish. This is more elegant than the 1986 Cuvée LD served alongside of it (differences in vintage character?), but the 1986 Cuvée LD is the slightly more complex of the two wines today. 2016-2035. **93+.**

### ***Pinot Noir***

This second report on the wines of Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir includes a fine range of vintages of their flagship bottling of this varietal, the Cuvée DD, which hailed from Dave Demostene’s Alexander Valley vineyard, which was the vineyard from which the family produced their Sausal Winery bottlings for many years. Sadly, in 2012 Silver Oak purchased this vineyard and replanted most of it to cabernet sauvignon, wiping out one of the finest pinot noir vineyards in all of Sonoma County. Dave Demostene was the first grower that the Leightons purchased grapes from to make their debut wines in 1975- a pinot noir and a zinfandel bottling- and happily, the relationship continued throughout the Demostene era for this vineyard and clearly this was a great, great *terroir* for this grape variety. As readers may recall from the first historical feature on Kalin Cellars, Having first purchased the property in 1956, the Demostene family had planted the pinot noir in their vineyard originally with cuttings taken from Louis Martini’s historic Monte Rosso Vineyard; the Monte Rosso vines had originated from cuttings brought from Burgundy in the late nineteenth century. It was an excellent strain of pinot noir, known in Burgundy as *Pinot Fin* for its small berries and excellent skin to juice ratio. No doubt the superb structural integrity of the Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” finds part of its origins in this lovely old strain of pinot noir. Like all of the Kalin red wines, the Cuvée DD is fermented in redwood vats, and is bottled without fining or filtration. Most vintages of DD would spend approximately eighteen months in cask prior to bottling, with fifty percent of the barrels new in most vintages. Having had the very good fortune to be pointed in the direction of a small cellar sale of older bottles of this bottling back in the spring of 2015, I was able to put together a nice vertical tasting of this wine in time for the preparation of my second report on Kalin Cellars, with the wines showing beautifully across the board! The still quite young, 1999 reported on below is the current release of Cuvée DD from the Leightons, so happily there are still several more vintages presumably waiting in the wings for release. As the notes below will attest, this is one of California’s greatest bottlings of pinot noir!

### **1996 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)**

Interestingly, the 1996 vintage of Cuvée DD is fairly high in acidity and would not be out of place at all in a tasting of this red Burgundy vintage. The wine is still in climbing mode and on the youthful side for primetime drinking, but it is showing excellent potential on both the nose and palate and will be a superb wine in the fullness of time. The nascently complex bouquet



offers up scents of black cherries, dried eucalyptus, dark soil tones, a touch of road tar, grilled meats, woodsmoke and a gentle base of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tangy, with a fine core of fruit, fine focus and grip, suave tannins and lovely balance on the very long finish. There is just a touch of volatile acidity here when first opened, so decanting is recommended- as is the case with every bottle of Kalin I have had the pleasure to drink over the years! This is going to be a very long-lived vintage of DD. 2021-2060+. **94+**.



### **1994 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)**

The 1994 Cuvée DD is a deeper and more broad-shouldered vintage than the 1996 that I paired up with it at our February tasting, but the quality of the two vintages is quite comparable, despite their different stylistic profiles. The '94 wafts from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, smoked duck, dried eucalyptus, a touch of cinnamon, a complex base of dark soil tones, hints of autumn leaves and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a generous attack, rock solid core, modest tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long, poised and tangy finish. In initially, the group at our vertical tasting had a pretty clear preference for the 1994 over the 1996, but the latter vintage kept blossoming with further air and in the end, it was really a toss-up in terms sheer quality, and was more a matter of preference of style which vintage was favored. This is a really lovely bottle of pinot noir that is just reaching its plateau of peak maturity and will continue to drink beautifully for decades to come. 2017-2060. **94+**

### **1988 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)**

1988 was a challenging vintage in northern California and the Cuvée DD shows this in some respects, though this is still a complex and well-balanced wine. The bouquet is cool and quite black fruity for this bottling, offering up scents of dark berries, a touch of road tar, charred wood, espresso and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and complex, with a perfectly respectable core of fruit, still a touch of backend tannin and good length and grip on the tangy finish. This is a touch less completely ripe in profile than any other vintage of DD I have tried, but it is still a very tasty bottle for current drinking. 2017-2035. **89.**

### **1987 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)**

The 1987 Cuvée DD is an absolutely stunning wine and one of the most beautiful examples of pinot noir I have ever tasted from California. The bouquet is deep, pure and absolutely *à point* at the present time, soaring from the glass in a gorgeous mix of red and black cherries, dried red berries, a superb base of *sous bois* soil tones, dried eucalyptus, cedar and a nice touch of cinnamon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and tangy, with stunning complexity, lovely depth in the mid-palate, tangy acids and great grip and complexity on the very, very long and meltingly tannic finish. A stunning wine in full bloom! 2017-2050. **97.**

### **1986 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)**

The 1986 vintage of Kalin Cellars Cuvée DD Pinot Noir is at its absolute apogee and is drinking with great style and grace at age thirty-one. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a blaze of strawberries, pomegranate, dried eucalyptus, lovely spice tones, a touch of smoked meats, forest floor and a touch of iron-like soil tones as well. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with still a bit of residual structure to resolve over the coming years. The core is lovely, the tannins are modest and nicely integrated and this is going to be a svelte, vibrant example of DD at its apogee, which is still a few years in the future. 2020-2045. **93+.**

### **1985 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)**

The 1985 vintage of Cuvée DD pinot noir from Frances and Terry Leighton is a beautiful wine that has just entered into its peak period of drinkability and offers up exceptional complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine, mature blend of red and black cherries, venison, dark soil tones (remember the soils here are similar to Gevrey-Chambertin), bonfire, cigar ash and a topnote of fresh bay leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, great soil signature, bright acids and fine length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. There is still a touch of backend tannin here that will continue to carry the wine for decades to come, but this lovely and vibrant pinot has now entered its plateau. 2016-2045. **94+.**

### **1984 Kalin Cellars “Potter Valley” Pinot Noir**

As I wrote back in January of 2013, I was only aware of a small handful of different cuvées of pinot noir produced by the Leightons, but suspected that there may well have been a few additions to the roster that I had not yet tasted. On my September trip out to Livermore, Terry and Frances produced this 1984 Potter Valley bottling of pinot noir that I never knew had been produced. The wine is deep, smoky and quite black fruity in personality, offering up scents of dark berries, damp earth, woodsmoke, a bit of game and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with fine soil signature, melting tannins and fine focus on the long and well-balanced finish. This is not as elegant a rendition of pinot noir as the Sonoma bottlings from Kalin, but it has depth and substance. 2016-2035. **90.**

### **1982 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)**

This particular bottle of 1982 Cuvée DD pinot from Kalin was initially a bit musty and we feared it was mildly corked, so it was set aside for the duration of the tasting. Circling back to it at the end of the night, I was very happy to see that whatever was ailing the wine had blown off and it was showing quite well. The bouquet offers up classic DD aromatic notes of dried berries, black cherries, singed soil tones, heather, smoke and that telltale topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more rustic in structure than the 1981 or 1980 iterations, with a good core, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the still moderately tannic finish. This wine still has plenty of life ahead of it and may well become more elegant in profile as it continues to evolve in the bottle. 2017-2040. **91.**

### **1981 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)**

The 1981 vintage of Kalin Cuvée DD is now fully mature and drinking with grace and style. The complex nose wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of desiccated red berries, woodsmoke, gamebird, dried eucalyptus and a marvelous base of gently autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and balance and a very long, vibrant and perfectly resolved finish. This does not have quite the same inherent elegance of more recent vintages of DD, as the Leightons were just still getting to know the grapes from this fine *terroir* in these early days, but the quality of the wine is still excellent and the potential for even greater things in the future was very much in evidence with this lovely 1981. 2017-2035. **93.**

### **1980 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)**

The 1980 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir is another lovely and absolutely *à point* bottle, offering up a pure and classy bouquet of dried cherries and red berries, forest floor, a touch of heather, delicate notes of gamebird, a dollop of clove-like spices and the signature topnote of Demostene Ranch pinot noir, dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely tertiary flavors, bright acids, excellent soil signature and impressive length and grip on the perfectly resolved finish. Lovely juice. 2017-2035. **92.**

### **1978 Kalin Cellars “Sonoma” Pinot Noir**

The Sonoma bottling of Pinot Noir back in these early days of Kalin Cellars came from Dave Demostene’s ranch in Alexander Valley, which Terry and Frances Leighton first began working with in their inaugural vintage of 1975. In these first few vintages, this was the only pinot noir produced by the Leightons, so there was no need for a Cuvée designation and hence, the wine was simply labeled as Sonoma pinot. The wine continues to drink beautifully as it closes in on its fortieth birthday, offering up a deep and vibrant bouquet of desiccated black cherries, dark berries, charred gamebird, dark soil tones, bonfire, a touch of cola and a beautifully complex upper register of herb and spice tones (curry, turmeric and dried eucalyptus amongst others). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly tangy, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and grip, lovely complexity and a very long, still modestly tannic finish. As is also the case with the 1980 through 1982 version, the ‘78 does not have quite the inherent elegance that later vintages of Cuvée DD Pinot Noir showed, once the Leightons became more familiar with the fruit from this vineyard, but it remains a very tasty bottle that continues to drink with complexity and style at nearly forty years of age- without showing any signs of slowing down anytime soon! 2016-2035. **92.**



### ***Zinfandel***

While Zinfandel, along with Pinot Noir, was one of the first two varietal wines produced by Frances and Terry Leighton at Kalin Cellars in the inaugural vintage of 1975, the couple did not produce Zinfandel for a great many vintages and 1982 was the last year for this varietal at Kalin Cellars. In their day, there were both a Livermore Valley and a Sonoma County bottling of Zinfandel over the seven vintages that this varietal was produced at Kalin Cellars, with the Sonoma bottling hailing from Dave Demostene's Dry Creek Valley vineyard, and the Livermore Valley bottling coming from a parcel of old vines on the Ruby Hill Ranch prior to its destruction by Computerland in 1982 to make their executive retreat. The Kalin Cellars Zinfandels were handled like all of the estate's other red wines, with fermentation in the old redwood tanks, followed by a gentle pressing, full malo and aging for about fifteen months in barrel prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The one primary difference for the Zinfandels was that their *elevage* was done in American oak, rather than French oak, of which forty percent was new wood in each vintage.

### **1981 Kalin Cellar "Livermore Valley" Zinfandel**

I reported on this wine back in my first feature on Kalin Cellars, but Terry Leighton thought my note on the wine might not be entirely accurate and it surfaced again for our second cellar archaeological dig from the Kalin library. Clearly, once I put my nose in the glass of this most recent bottle, it was clear that I was already half asleep when I tried this wine three years

ago! This is a stunning zinfandel, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a beautifully complex nose of desiccated black fruit, hot stones, roasted game, cigar ash, dried peppers and a complex base of dark soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a very soil-driven personality, melted tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This was the very last vintage produced from old zinfandel vines at Ruby Hill Vineyard, as Computerland razed these with the centenarian sémillon vines in 1982. This is brilliant wine and has decades of life still ahead of it! I am glad I had a chance to taste it again and set the record right! 2016-2035+. **95.**

### ***Merlot***

Frances and Terry Leighton only produced a single vintage of Merlot at Kalin Cellars, which was their 1981 Reserve from Santa Barbara County. This had been one of the wines that I was too fatigued to taste during my trip out to Livermore in early 2013 (jet lag be cursed!) and I was so happy to see it still waiting in the cellars for part two of our tasting. And this was before I knew anything about the wine, which turned out to be the single finest example of merlot I have ever tasted outside of the very, very finest addresses in Pomerol! When I asked Terry Leighton a bit about the history of this wine, he replied that “back in this era, we were invited to discreetly consult at a well-known estate in Pomerol for a short period” on an issue in the cellars (remember, Frances and Terry are two of the most prominent specialists on yeasts in the world of microbiology), and as he said, “though no information was offered to us about making merlot, we did pay attention to how things were done here during our stay and came back to California with a few ideas!” These were soon put into place and the 1981 Kalin Cellars Reserve Merlot was crafted, though I am not sure if it was ever really commercialized and as Terry commented, “we still have a pretty good number of bottles in the cellar” and it seems likely that this was mostly kept in house for family consumption.

### **1981 Kalin Cellars “Santa Barbara County” Merlot Reserve**

Frances and Terry Leighton only produced this one vintage of Merlot, which was made from a blend of eighty percent merlot and twenty percent cabernet sauvignon from the Tepusquet Vineyard. The wine is a cool twelve percent alcohol and is utterly magical today on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a glorious blend of red and black plums, Cuban cigar, raspberry, woodsmoke, a touch of cocoa, stunningly complex soil tones and a gentle framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with brilliant complexity, a fine core, still a touch of backend tannin and absolutely seamless balance on the long, vibrant and hauntingly beautiful finish. This is the only Californian merlot that I have ever tasted which can approach the breed and complexity of Pomerol’s greatest wines! 2016-2045+. **97.**

### ***Cabernet Sauvignon***

As I have noted in past articles on Kalin Cellars, there always seem to be more surprises in the lineup of great wines that the Leightons have produced over the years, and this past Christmas produced another new wine to me- their 1984 Potter Valley Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve. Previously, I was aware of a couple of different Sonoma County Cabernet bottlings from Kalin, produced from different vineyards in Dry Creek Valley, as well as their “Santa Barbara” cabernets produced in the early 1980s from the Tepusquet Vineyard in Santa Maria in Santa Barbara County. Add to this lineup their Potter Valley bottling that was produced in a few

vintages from the Pauli Vineyard that supplied grapes for their beautiful Sauvignon Blanc Reserve bottling for so many years.

### **1986 Kalin Cellars “Sonoma County” Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve**

I pulled this bottle by mistake for our most recent vertical tasting of Kalin’s Cuvée DD pinot noir, as I wanted to finish up the evening with a bottle of the Leightons’ cabernet sauvignon and I had not yet tried their 1986 Potter Valley cabernet bottling. Of course, I pulled the cork on this bottle before I realized my mistake! This is one of two bottles I purchased a year ago, and they were perhaps stored a bit at room temperature, as they came from a retailer in California and were just a bit more forward in their evolution than the other bottles in my cellar. That said, it was still a very tasty bottle and drinking a bit ahead of the curve, offering up a beautifully complex and more red fruity bouquet of cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, a very complex base of soil tones, dried eucalyptus, gentle tariness and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a great core of fruit, excellent soil signature, suave, retreating tannins and a very long, complex and wide open finish. This particular bottle is missing just a touch of the backend amplitude and grip of a totally pristine bottle, but it is the same wine and oh, so easy to drink! 2017-2050. **95.**

### **1984 Kalin Cellars “Potter Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve**

As I was digging around in my cellar looking for bottles of Kalin wines that I had not written up in the last feature on this iconic winery, I was delighted to find two bottles of their 1984 Potter Valley cabernet sauvignon, which I did not even have in my cellar inventory and must have picked up at auction without logging them in! The fruit for this bottling comes from the same Potter Valley source as their superb sauvignon blanc in this era, BJJ Vineyard, and it weighs in at a cool and classy twelve percent octane. This is a beautiful example of this outstanding cabernet vintage, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a touch of balsam bough, a fine base of gently tarry soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and low fat, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip, still a bit of remaining tannin perking up the long, gently weedy finish. This is an excellent wine that is still blossoming at age thirty-two and will be even better with a bit more bottle age! 2016-2050. **93+.**

### **1981 Kalin Cellars “Santa Barbara County” Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve**

The 1981 Kalin Cellars “Santa Barbara County” Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve included twenty percent merlot in its blend, from the superb vineyard source that the 1981 Merlot itself was bottled from in its one vintage. This wine is now drinking beautifully, offering up outstanding depth and purity in its aromatic constellation of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, a lovely foundation of minerality and a topnote of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, lovely complexity and still a fair bit of backend tannin on the great, long finish. I would still give this wine another eight to ten years in the cellar to allow more of the tannins to fall away on the backend. This is not quite in the same league (yet?) as the surreally beautiful 1981 Merlot Reserve, but it is a superb wine in its own right! 2023-2075. **94+.**

### ***Dessert Wines***

Prior to our most recent vertical tasting of Kalin Cellars wines, I had only tasted a single dessert wine from the Leightons, their lovely 1990 vintage of their Cuvée L d'Or, which is a blend of late harvest, botrytized sémillon and sauvignon blanc, made in the same proportions as Château d'Yquem- eighty percent sémillon and twenty percent sauvignon blanc. The grapes were sourced for this rare bottling from the same two that supplied the production for the dry wines from Kalin these two varietals, with the sémillon hailing from the very old vines owned by Wentz Brothers in Livermore Valley and the sauvignon blanc coming from the Pauli Vineyard in Mendocino's Potter Valley. I was very happy during our vertical tasting of the Cuvée DD pinot bottlings to have a chance to taste two more vintages of the Cuvée L d'Or, the 1989 and 1984.

#### **1989 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée L d'Or” (served from half bottle)**

The 1989 Cuvée L d'Or from Kalin Cellars, the blend of late-harvested, botrytized Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc produced by the Leightons in certain vintages where conditions were favorable, is truly outstanding. This wine has cut, bounce and beautiful vibrancy from its excellent girdle of acidity and is at its absolute apogee as it closes in on age thirty. The bouquet soars from the glass in gorgeous blend of apricot, white cherries, honey, new leather, orange zest, a lovely base of soil, barley sugar and a whisper of buttery oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with bright, zesty acids, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, refined and dancing finish. A beautiful wine. 2017-2035+. **94.**

#### **1984 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée L d'Or”**

The 1984 Cuvée L d'Or is also a lovely wine, but it is a bit more advanced on both the nose and palate than the 1989 version, and even out of full bottle, is probably best drunk up in the not too distant future. The bouquet remains fresh and complex, offering up slightly more tertiary scents of baked peach, apricot, tea leaves, orange peel, salty soil tones and barley sugar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fully mature, with lovely focus and grip, a fine core and impressive complexity still evident on the long, but perhaps gently fraying finish. Please keep in mind that I had never tasted the 1984 Cuvée L d'Or prior to this bottle, and the possibility certainly exists that perhaps the wine is as lively as the 1989 and our bottle was just slightly evolved. It was purchased at auction by a friend of mine, and though the provenance was reported as very good, one never knows as well as if the wine had been in one's own cellar since release. But, in any event, the 1984 out of full bottle was in a similar stage of evolution to the 1990 Cuvée L d'Or I reported on a few years ago out of half bottle. 2017-2023+? **89.**



## **CHÂTEAU MUSAR**

### **THE WORLD'S MOST HEROIC WINE**



Lebanon's Château Musar, made in the war-torn Bekaa Valley throughout all of the long Lebanese civil war, is one of the wine world's most iconic and inspiring wines. The winery and vineyards have been owned by the Hochar family for three generations, tracing back their history with wine production in this region to when Gaston Hochar returned from Bordeaux in 1930 and planted his first vines in the Bekaa Valley. The Hochar family was originally of French origin, having first arrived in the region during the first Crusades and can trace back their heritage here to the Frankish Kingdom of Jerusalem all the way back in the tenth century. Gaston Hochar was born in 1910 and was only twenty years of age when he set out to establish a world class vineyard in his homeland. At the time, Lebanon was administered by the French, under the mandate of the League of Nations that was established after the end of the First World War. A republic was created officially here under French oversight in 1926, but due to tensions amongst various groups within Lebanon, as well as agitation for independence from the French, it had a short life and the Constitution here was suspended in 1932. It had to be a very optimistic Gaston Hochar who returned from a visit to Bordeaux with the idea to establish Château Musar in the Bekaa in 1930, when tensions in the nation were starting to mount. Happily, he chose a very

good spot for his vineyards and the seeds were sown for what was to become Lebanon's greatest wine estate.

The first vintage ever produced at Château Musar was the 1933, with the first red grape vineyards planted in 1930 having their proverbial "third leaf" in the '33 vintage (which will often produce a wine of the depth and complexity of significantly older vines) and the seminal history of this great estate was up and running. The white wine at Château Musar in these very early days was produced from indigenous vineyards that had already been long established in the hills up above the Bekaa Valley, with the two white grapes used being Merwah and Obaideh (often described as very distant cousins of *Sémillon* and *Chardonnay* respectively). Marc Hochar, part of the third generation of the family to direct the estate, comments that "these indigenous varieties have existed in Lebanon for centuries" and "in the early 1900s, they were used to produce grapes for people to eat, as well as juice that would eventually be fermented before being distilled into alcohol for arak production." He recalls that "when my grandfather started the winery in 1930, he wanted to use local varieties for both white and red wine, but only those local white varieties existed" and this is the reason that he planted only red grape varieties in his new vineyards, as old vine white grapes were already available in the area, and "which he used for his white wine." From the very outset, Gaston Hochar was determined to sell his wine in bottle, rather than in cask, so that from the very first vintage, the vast, vast majority of Château Musar's wines were estate bottled and sold to clients in bottle. Keep in mind, that in the 1930s in Bordeaux and Burgundy, a large percentage of the regions' production was still sold in barrel, with estate-bottling only arriving in a widespread fashion in Bordeaux in the late 1950s and 1960s, and even later in Burgundy! In this respect, as in many others, Gaston Hochar showed himself to be a visionary and anticipated the changes in the wine world that we now take for granted.

One of the seminal moments in the early days at Château Musar occurred during the second world war, when Ronald Barton of St. Julien's Château Leoville-Barton was stationed in Lebanon during his army days and became friends with Gaston Hochar in 1941, forming a long-lasting friendship that would help to shape the future stylistic profile of the wines from this Lebanese estate. The wines here by the early 1940s were already gaining quite a reputation within the country as the best to be found in Lebanon, and no doubt Ronald Barton was delighted and surprised to find such serious wine to drink during his war-time period in Lebanon. At the outset, the Musar winery and cellars were established in 1930 in the town of Ghazir, just north of Beirut, which lies along the Mediterranean coast to the west of the Bekaa Valley. Gaston Hochar based his original winery in the five hundred year-old Mzar castle, giving the estate deep cellars for the slow aging of their wines. These facilities were sufficient for the first couple of decades of wine production at Château Musar, but as the latter half of the 1950s arrived, more space was needed and the Hochar family constructed another winery a couple of hundred meters away from the Mzar castle cuverie and cellars, with this second winery remaining the place where the wines of Musar continue to be produced to this day. However, Ghazir is about a two hour drive from the Musar vineyards in the Bekaa Valley, and this would lead to some major logistical headaches when the civil war would erupt in 1975.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Gaston's two sons, Serge and Ronald, would ultimately decide to follow in the vinous footsteps of their father at Musar, with Serge first studying civil

engineering at the university and then turning his focus to winemaking and taking a degree in Oenology from the University of Bordeaux in 1959 (amongst his professors was the famous Emile Peynaud, with whom he studied at his father's suggestion), and his younger brother Ronald studying law and taking over the financial and administrative side of the estate in 1962. Serge Hochaer's first vintage at Musar that he vinified on his own was the 1959, as he had asked his father if he could take over the winemaking duties as soon as he decided to pursue his career at Musar, and based on how brilliantly it showed at my recent vertical tasting, he most assuredly hit the ground running in 1959! Together, the two brothers would build upon their father's pioneering work and establish the reputation of Château Musar as one of the top wines in the world, though for the first fifteen years or so of their period at the head of the estate, the reputation for excellence of Musar was still pretty much a local phenomenon, with almost all of the wine consumed in Lebanon and the immediate geographic vicinity. Things would start to change in the second half of the decade of the 1970s.

In 1979, Michael Broadbent first brought the world wine market's attention to Château Musar, when he had a chance to taste the 1967 vintage at the Bristol Wine Fair and was dutifully impressed by the quality and complexity of this twelve year-old bottle. From this point forward, Château Musar was to become well known throughout the major wine export markets of the world, establishing their own import company in the United Kingdom in that same year (following up on their growing reputation brought about by Mr. Broadbent's praise of the 1967 vintage), and Musar would then start to make inroads in continental European markets as well. The timing of Musar's international success could not have come at a better time, as the home market was in the midst of disintegration, as the simmering tensions between various ethnic and religious groups in Lebanon, exacerbated by the huge influx of Palestinian refugees into the country in the wake of the 1967 war in Israel and Palestine, finally spilled over into open warfare within Lebanon in the spring of 1975. The Lebanese Civil War, which would last for fifteen bloody, horrific years, completely destabilized the country, pulverizing the once breathtakingly beautiful city of Beirut, displacing millions of people and killing more than a quarter of a million souls during its duration. It was one of the worst conflicts of the post-World War II era anywhere on the globe, and it is amazing that the Hochaer family was able to not only maintain production at Château Musar during most of this period, but actually expand their business in the international marketplace and gain a fine reputation for the quality of their wines while the war raged across their shattered homeland. The Bekaa Valley, where the vineyards of Musar are situated, lies close to the Syrian border and was home to some of the heaviest fighting of the civil war, and one can only imagine the tenacity and unwavering commitment that was necessary for the team at Musar to continue to cultivate their vineyards and make their wine during the long nightmare of the war.

The peripatetic Serge Hochaer was the driving force behind Musar's recognition in the world market, as he took to the road to show his wines beginning in 1975, realizing that the Lebanese market was on the verge of self-destruction, and he continued to spend an enormous amount of time travelling to promote Musar for the rest of his life. The civil war in Lebanon did manage to disrupt two vintages of Musar from the Hochaer family, as it was not possible to pick grapes and make wine in both 1976 (when there was simply no fuel for trucks to transport the grapes from the vineyards to the winery) and 1984, where the grapes were picked very, very late due to the intensity of the fighting in Lebanon in the autumn of that year. Amazingly and quite

heroically, Serge and Ronald Hochar managed to make every other single vintage during the fifteen and a half years of this protracted and horrific war. With the winery based in Ghazir, one of the logistical nightmares for Ronald Hochar during the civil war was how to get the winery's trucks back and forth from Ghazir to the vineyards in the Bekaa. In fact, the 1984 vintage of Musar was initially thought to be lost because it was not possible to get the late-harvested grapes back to the winery by truck, due to heavy fighting, and they eventually were brought to the sea and loaded on a ship to try and get them to the winery in Ghazir by water. Unfortunately, the detour took five days and the grapes started fermentation en route and the subsequent wine was very atypical and not deemed worthy of release in the 1990s. However, as Marc Hochar notes, the '84 proved to be very Phoenix-like and eventually would be released: "in its early years, the '84 vintage behaved like a Madeira and eventually moved on to having features of Port, which is why we never sold it," but "today, probably due to our natural wine-making methodology, this vintage has come back to behaving like a wine and is now sold and available globally- it is a very peculiar Musar, but definitely a wine of interest and pleasure for the wine geeks out there."



*Two generations of the Hochar family, left to right: Gaston, Serge, Ronald and Ralph.*

The vineyards of Château Musar lie on the eastern side of Lebanon, principally in the Bekaa Valley, which is sandwiched between two mountain ranges which cut off the region from the coastal weather of Beirut and the seaside to the west. The Lebanon Mountains border the valley on its western side and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains separate the valley from Syria to the east. The Bekaa Valley itself is still at elevation, with the Musar vineyards planted here ranging from nine hundred to a thousand meters above sea level. Vine cultivation for wine production is ancient in the Bekaa, with vines first planted here by the Phoenicians more than six thousand

years ago, with some of the very earliest wine production in the history of the world having taken place in this mountain valley. It was the Phoenicians who eventually introduced viticulture to Greece and Italy! Since its earliest days, all of the grape picking in the Musar vineyards have been handled by Bedouin tribes, with the harvest taking place between the end of August and October, depending on the style of the vintage and the respective growing season of each grape variety. Needless to say, all the picking is done still by hand, as it has been since the beginning, and all of the Musar vineyards are farmed organically.

Today, Château Musar cultivates one hundred and eighty hectares of vines, planted in and around the Bekaa Valley at altitudes varying from nine hundred to fourteen hundred meters above sea level. The climate is very warm in the Bekaa Valley during the growing season, but this is somewhat mitigated by the elevation at which the vines are planted, with the white grape varieties planted at the highest elevations of fourteen hundred meters, and the reds in the nine hundred to twelve hundred meter range. It is also customary for the vineyards to see some snow during most winters at these elevations. The soils here in the Bekaa are a mix of gravel and limestone, which no doubt gives the wines of Château Musar their fine signature of soil each and every year, with the *terroir* here still easily spotted in even the oldest wines that I have had the pleasure to taste from the estate. The primary white wine grape vineyards were already planted prior to Gaston Hochar founding his winery in 1930, with the local relations of Sémillon (called Merwah in Lebanon) and Chardonnay (known as Obaideh here) having been planted in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries and the vines ranging today from one hundred to fully one hundred and fifty years of age! As Marc Hochar observes, “in the 1930s, my grandfather just purchased the local white grapes from farmers without buying the land, which we have continued to do for many decades.” So these oldest vines are not owned by the estate, but purchased on long-term contracts. These very, very old bush vines are untrained and still on their original rootstocks; they are located up above of the Bekaa Valley proper, with the Merwah vines on the western, sea-facing side of Mount Lebanon at an elevation of fourteen hundred meters and on soils of limestone and gravel. The Obaideh old vines are up above the eastern side of the valley, in the foothills of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains on stonier soils, but still with plenty of chalk underfoot. The elevation for these vineyards are also fourteen hundred meters above sea level.

These very old white grape vines have been augmented as the years have gone by with more recent plantations of modern Chardonnay clones, Viognier and Vermentino at Musar, with these younger white grape vineyards having been planted close to the red wine vineyards in the Bekaa Valley. These modern white varieties are used for a second bottling of white wine from the estate, with the Château Musar Blanc remaining a blend of Merwah and Obaideh. Marc Hochar notes that “in the 2000s, we started planting our own Merwah and Obaideh” in addition to these other varieties, “as production on the existing vines was dropping significantly, and was not being replaced with the same varietals by those farmers” with whom we have always bought grapes. As noted above, Gaston Hochar would have been happy to produce red wine from local grape varieties as well if any had existed in 1930, but this was not the case and he had to decide which red grapes to plant in the Bekaa. He eventually planted three red grape varieties in Musar’s vineyards in the 1930s, with the grapes of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cinsault and Carignan being the varieties that he settled on for planting at the outset, and which continue to be the grapes that the red wine at Musar is made from to this day. The average age of red grape vines is



forty years of age today and yields are routinely kept in the thirty-five hectoliters per hectare range at Musar. I asked Marc Hochar how his grandfather might have arrived at these three varieties for the vineyards at Musar, with the supposition that Cabernet Sauvignon would have been a logical choice, given that Gaston had just returned from a trip to Bordeaux when he set out to found Château Musar in 1930. Marc responded:

“As you mention, Cabernet made sense because of his recent travels to Bordeaux and also because of his close friendship with Ronald Barton of Château Leoville Barton, who might have recommended Cabernet Sauvignon. The other varietals were chosen because Lebanon has a warmer climate than Southern France and he expected they would fare better than others in the warm and sunny climate of the Bekaa Valley; hence the choice for Rhône’s Cinsault and Carignan. I believe he also planted other varietals (in the beginning) and my father Serge eventually narrowed the number down to those three during the ‘60s for our Château Musar wine.”

Picking dates at Château Musar vary quite a bit depending on grape variety, with the red wine harvest typically sandwiched between two stages of white grape picking. With the more recent plantations of Viognier, Vermentino and Chardonnay planted in the Bekaa Valley near Musar’s red grape vineyards, these grapes tend to ripen the earliest of all the estate’s plantings and are typically brought in early in the month of August, with potential alcohol levels just under fourteen percent. I was curious, given the warmer Mediterranean climate of Lebanon, if picking for all of the grapes tended to be on the early side, but it turns out that this is not the case at all. Marc Hochar commented that after the newer parcels of white grapes are brought in from their vineyards in the Bekaa Valley, the attention of the picking teams turns to the red grapes, with a fairly wide window of picking for the red varieties, depending on the vintage: “we then harvest reds in late August to the end of September at fourteen percent potential alcohol.” The very old vine parcels of Obaideh and Merwah are the last to be picked each year, which is due to both their higher elevation (remember these vines are planted at fourteen hundred feet elevations up in the foothills of the mountains that flank either side of the Bekaa Valley) and their long history of adaptation to growing in the hot Lebanese summers. So, as Monsieur Hochar observes, “we only harvest Obaideh and Merwah in October, and despite (their) having spent so much more time in the sun, the alcohol level is around twelve percent.” He continues, “it is the nature of these grapes, and one of their unique features” that “they keep acidity while at the same time benefitting from a good maturation and ripeness in the sun.” So harvest is a drawn out affair at Musar every year.

Having never had the pleasure to visit Château Musar in person, I was curious if global warming had produced a similar effect in the vineyards of Lebanon as what we have witnessed in so many other wine regions around the globe since the late 1980s. Marc Hochar responses to my questions in the affirmative were not surprising, as he noted that due to climate change “we harvest roughly three weeks earlier than we used to thirty years ago.” He went on to emphasize just how profound the changes have been at Musar because of the changes in climate in the last quarter century: “global warming affects us more at Chateau Musar than war; certainly, war has been damaging but its effects are always punctual, whereas global warming is a steady change that does not seem to abate, nor revert back,” so there can be no recovery. Besides picking earlier than was customary in the heyday of his father’s generation, “in addition, we have to deal with

heat waves that hit us in the summer” and that “depending on whether the heat waves hits in the early or the end of the summer has a great impact on the vintage.” And it is not just the accelerated pace of the growing seasons in the wake of climate change with which the team at Château Musar has to contend, as the fundamental building blocks of each growing season have been altered dramatically because of the climate. He continues, all of “this is in addition to changes in rainfall, snow, cold and heat” patterns, so that for example, “2015 was a year with minus ten degrees Celsius in May which killed the early buds, and wiped out fifty percent of our crop” and it was the very “first time we ever experienced this cold weather in Lebanon” in the springtime. He concludes that “global warming has an impact in terms of heat, but also more extreme weather conditions.”



*Serge Hochar and his youngest son, Marc, in the offices at Château Musar.*

Despite the difficulties that are posed by all of the shifting and volatile factors of climate change during the growing season, once the grapes are harvested at Château Musar, the classical style of winemaking here has remained quite constant since the 1930s. As for the winemaking practices for the *vin rouge* at Château Musar, each grape variety is fermented on its own in cement tanks, with the red wines spending six months settling in tank prior to their being racked into French barrels for two years of further *elevage*. During this time, each varietal is still kept separate. After their two years in cask is completed, the team at Musar starts working on a final blend of the three varietals for the *grand vin*, with each year slightly different, depending on how the grapes excelled in any given growing season, as well as how they have evolved up to this point over their two and a half years of *elevage* in the cellars at Musar. Once the final blend's proportions are settled on for a given vintage, the blended wine is racked back into cement tanks



for a further year of aging prior to bottling, so that the three varietals can harmonize with one another. The wines are then bottled without fining and filtration, and the aging process is still not done in the cellars, as every bottle of Château Musar *rouge* will then spend another four years aging in the bottle prior to preparation for release into the market, making it more than seven and a half years from picking to release for any given vintage of the red wine here at Musar! The white here is also aged seven years prior to release, but its *elevage* is quite a bit shorter. The white wine is barrel-fermented in French casks and aged nine months in barrel- again, with the varietals kept separate up until this time, and then blended and bottled. It will then spend six years of further aging in bottle prior to release.

One of the characteristics of the red wines of Château Musar that should be discussed is the role of volatile acidity in the wines, as this is often part of the equation with the older red wines here and it can be a bit polarizing to some wine lovers. Like many other aspects of wine, people have varying tolerances to volatile acidity in wines, and one should realize that in some vintages VA is found in the red wines here (I have never found it to be particularly prevalent in the *Grand Vin Blanc* at Musar, but my experience with the fine white wines here is a bit more limited than my experience with their reds). My gut feeling had always been that volatile acidity at Musar is partly a result of the extended period of aging that the wine spends in cask and cement tanks prior to bottling, and Marc Hochar confirmed this supposition when he said that “this is correct, as longer vat aging tends to increase VA, but also increases complexity of our wines.” His father Serge was frequently cited on the record as opining (to paraphrase his point of view) that volatile acidity can often be simply part of the equation in winemaking and it is really a matter of overall balance and not having too much volatile acidity in the wine. Marc amplified his father’s position, noting that “VA is part of what you get in wines that are produced and aged like Musar,” but “we believe it adds to the complexity and ‘life’ of what happens in the glass.” He concludes, the Musar philosophy for three generations has been that “it is all a question of balance; as long as VA is well integrated, it actually brings life and aromatics out of the glass.” I should mention that my experience with the more recent vintages, from 1999 forwards to 2008, shows significantly less volatile acidity in the red wines than was the case in the years of the civil war, and perhaps part of the legacy of the instability of those fifteen turbulent years was reflected in the more volatile nature of Château Musar’s red wine in that era. Today, I would say that in most vintages, it is no longer an issue at all.

Serge Hochar, who took over from his father Gaston as winemaker at Musar all the way back in 1959 and was the estate’s international ambassador during most of his long life. He passed away in 2014, at the age of seventy-five years of age, with the wine world mourning his loss around the globe. Serge had undoubtedly been the international face of the winery during his long career, frequently travelling to introduce wine lovers to his beloved Château Musar, while brother Ronald stayed at home and tried to keep things running as smoothly as possible during the darkest days of the civil war. The groundwork for generational continuity at Musar had already been laid many years prior to Serge’s passing in 2014, as Serge’s oldest son Gaston had joined the winery back in 1994, and Ronald’s son, Ralph Hochar had joined the importing division in the United Kingdom in 2003. Finally, as their father began to slow down a bit in 2010, Serge’s younger son, Marc Hochar also arrived back at the winery to assist his brother Gaston with the day to day operations of the estate, assuring that Château Musar would be in very capable hands under its third generation of family direction. And indeed today, the wines of

Château Musar have never been more beloved by their legions of loyal fans, with the wines represented in dozens and dozens of countries around the globe and absolutely synonymous with Lebanese wines. Lebanon has several other high quality wineries today, and this no doubt can be attributed to the vision and success of the Hochar family during its three generations at Château Musar!

Given the fractured history of Lebanon during its civil war, it really cannot be overstated just how heroic Serge and Ronald Hochar's continuity at Château Musar was during the period from 1975 to 1990. This is in addition to the rather long odds their father Gaston Hochar faced when he originally founded the winery all the way back in 1930. I asked Marc Hochar about these enormous challenges, as it truly is one of the most amazing feats of survival and success to be found anywhere in the world of wine that Château Musar could realize such growth and popularity in its first decades of production and eventually overcome the human tragedy of the civil war. His comments are worth including in their entirety, as they not only discuss Musar, but they also pay homage to the many millions of people in Lebanon that were able to survive the national nightmare from 1975 to 1990, as so many others in this small country have their own stories of transcending tragedy and persevering through the darkness to come to a new era of hope:

“Determination and rising up to adversity, this is what made our land and is part of our heritage and our family's history. When my grandfather started the winery, many people were not convinced the business would survive as there was already a wine producer in Lebanon, and wine sales were small in Lebanon (at the time). He went on to become the first official provider of fine wines to the “*Messe des Officiers*” of the French army in the whole Middle East in the '40s and '50s. My father and uncle had the same determination when they continued to produce wine despite not having a market to sell to in the early days of the war. The war was a blessing in disguise for us, as it forced us to look outside and set-up our UK operation to sell our wines globally and reach our position today. (Ultimately) we only lost the '76 vintage to the war.”

*Many of the following wines were tasted at a fine vertical Musar tasting that my friend Craig Ganzer organized here in New York back in 2014. Some of the vintages, like the 1979 and 1964, I have had the good fortune to drink on several occasions, but this was the first vertical tasting from the property I had ever participated in and I was delighted with many of the older wines in particular. When I began (finally) working on this historical piece, Marc Hochar kindly offered to send a nice slice of more current releases from Musar to round out my tasting notes on the wines from this iconic estate and make this article more complete. I am grateful to Marc not only for his generosity with the newer vintages of Château Musar that he kindly sent along, but also with his generosity with his time, as he fielded a great barrage of questions from me about the history of Musar and helped make this article far more complete as a result.*

### **Château Musar Blanc**

The *Grand Vin Blanc* at Château Musar has almost always been a blend of Obaideh and Merwah, with the exceptions of a few vintages when it was produced solely from one grape or the other. I asked Marc Hochar if there were any plans in the future to incorporate the younger vine plantations of Chardonnay, Viognier and Vermentino into the Musar Blanc *grand vin*, and he responded that “the Château white is exclusively Merwah and Obaideh, and we have no plans

of incorporating non-indigenous varietals in the blend” as “it is THE signature of what Lebanon has to offer in terms of local grapes, and we feel its identity is what makes it so unique.” As I mentioned above, the Musar Blanc bottling is produced a bit differently from the Rouge, as the wine is barrel-fermented and aged for nine months in cask before it is bottled. The wine is also raised in a bit more new oak than the Musar Rouge, with the percentage of new wood for the white wine here ranging from twenty to twenty-five percent, depending on the style of the vintage. Since its very earliest days, Musar Blanc has always been raised in Bordeaux-sized cask of two hundred and twenty-five liters, sourced from oak from the Nevers Forest and the barrels are not toasted. According to the estate’s records, a few vintages in the decade of the 1960s were entirely comprised of Merwah, and the 1986 vintage was all Obaideh, but other than these anomalies, each vintage of Musar Blanc has been a blend of these two indigenous, Lebanese varietals.



### **2007 Château Musar Blanc**

The 2007 Château Musar Blanc comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up already lovely aromatic and flavor complexity, despite its relative youth for this particular wine. The bouquet is a classy blend of delicate orange tones, peach, incipient notes of beeswax, a fine base of limestone soil and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and balance and a very long, soil-driven

and refined finish. As much fun as the really old vintages of Musar Blanc are to taste, I really like this wine at the ten year mark! 2017-2035+. **90.**

#### **2003 Château Musar Blanc**

The 2003 vintage of Musar Blanc is starting to deepen nicely in color and is now a beautiful light golden hue. The nose has moved into a beautiful secondary stage of development, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of fresh apricot, candied lemon peel, salty soil tones, a bit of paraffin, dried flowers and the most delicate hints of honey in the upper register. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and shows excellent depth at the core, with excellent balance, bright acids and outstanding focus, length and grip on the vibrant and *à point* finish. This is at a beautiful moment in its evolution for drinking! 2017-2035. **92.**

#### **1995 Château Musar Blanc**

The 1995 Château Musar Blanc is still drinking very nicely at age twenty. The bouquet offers up a mature blend of peach, candied orange peel, beeswax and a nice touch of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite rock solid at the core, with solid framing acids, fine focus and grip and a long, fresh and very nicely balanced finish. The only thing here that keeps the score down a touch is the wine is not particularly complex, though it still has plenty of vigor and remains on its plateau of peak maturity. 2014-2025+. **88.**

#### **1993 Château Musar Blanc**

The 1993 white wine from Château Musar is far more tertiary and evolved than the 1995, and I would suspect that this is a vintage that wants drinking up in the next few years. The bouquet is deep-pitched, offering up scents of honey, orange peel, a touch of new leather and white soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and starting to slide gently down the far side of its plateau, with a good core, but fleeting acidity and not a lot of remaining lift on the still quite long finish. I would opt for drinking this up in the next few years. Of course, there is also a possibility that our bottle was not pristine, in which case the score is inaccurate. 2014-2018. **85.**

#### **1991 Château Musar Blanc**

The 1991 Musar Blanc is also starting to get a little long in the tooth to my taste. The bouquet is mature, tertiary, delivering a blend of baked peach, orange peel, gentle notes of new leather and a lovely glimpse of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely plump on the attack, but takes a bit of a dip in the mid-palate, with sound framing acids and good focus, but a slightly short finish. This is not a bad drink, but it is probably not a top vintage for the white wine at Château Musar and twenty-three years down the road, it is understandable if it is fading a bit. 2014-2018. **84.**

#### **1975 Château Musar Blanc**

At our vertical tasting, I was impressed by the quality of both the red and the white wines produced at Château Musar in 1975, as this was the year that the civil war erupted in the spring and one can only imagine the challenges the Hochar family had to face in this vintage! This wine has probably been fully mature for twenty years, but it continues to drink nicely and has more vigor to it than either of the bottles of 1993 or 1991 that we had in our lineup. The bouquet offers up a mature constellation of orange peel, leather, honeycomb, baked peaches, white soils and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely vibrant for its age, with a lovely core, fine focus and a long, pure finish. Again, like the 1995, this is not the world's most complex white wine, but it is aging very nicely and is extremely enjoyable to drink today. 2014-2025. **90**

### **1969 Château Musar Blanc**

The 1969 Château Musar Blanc is a good old white wine that is hanging onto life tenaciously and is still very interesting to drink. I would suspect that fifteen years ago, when it was still on its plateau, the wine must have been outstanding, but the passage of time has taken its toll a bit here. The mature bouquet delivers scents of orange peel, chalky soil, quite a bit of smokiness and worn leather. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plush on the attack and fairly low in acidity, but still nicely balanced and structurally sound. The finish is long, but it is starting to show just a touch of backend bitterness that indicates that the fruit, after all these years, is starting to fade. Drink up. 2014-2018. **86.**

### **1967 Château Musar Blanc**

The 1967 vintage of Musar Blanc is also a very nice old white wine, with a bit more vigor still to be found than in the equally mature 1969 version. The nose wafts from the glass in a blend of honey, orange, discreet leather tones, chalky soil, citrus peel and again, plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows just a bit more remaining bounce than the '69, with a good core, fine balance and a long, mature and very nicely balanced finish. This will hold on a few years longer than the '69 Blanc. 2014-2023+. **87.**



### ***Château Musar Rouge***

The *Grand Vin Rouge* at Château Musar is one of the wine world's great reds and properly long-lived, aging and evolving positively over sixty to seventy years of bottle age. In many ways, it is very much reflective of old school European wines in its method of *elevage*, as like so many of France, Italy and Spain's greatest wines of yesteryear, it spends a long time aging in the cellars in Ghazir prior to its being released into the market. And like many of these

other great wines of yesteryear, each vintage of Château Musar rouge is released only once it begins to blossom, so the Hochar family does not follow a strict chronological order of release for each vintage. For example, at the present time, the 2006 vintage remains unreleased and resting comfortably in the cellars, as it is one of the more structured recent years of the wine, while the 2007, 2008 and 2009 vintages have already entered into the market. As noted above, today every vintage of Musar Rouge spends at least seven years in the cellar prior to release and I was curious of how long this had been the practice at the estate. Marc Hochar responded to my query that “my grandfather used to release the wines slightly younger” than we do today. He continued, “my father Serge kept that philosophy” of aging the wines for several years, but not as long as is customary today, “but he also started storing around fifty percent of the “Chateau” wines for sale at a later stage, as he considered they had a great ability to age.” This would eventually lead to a bit longer bottle age provided for every vintage of the *Grand Vin Rouge* at Musar, for “the more time he spent at the winery from 1959 onwards, the more he realized that the wines benefitted from spending more time in the bottle in order to show their full potential,” and “he eventually extended the holding period in the 60’s and early 70’s until it reached seven years” of aging in cask and bottle before any vintage would be considered as ready for release. Château Musar, under its third generation of family leadership has continued this practice, so the estate will routinely make older library releases available for the market, in addition to the newest vintage, as fully half of the production is still held back for later availability to clients of the estate. In this regard, it is really only the great old Rioja houses and a few other producers like my beloved Kalin Cellars that continue to practice this very traditionalist approach to the releasing of mature wines.

### **2008 Château Musar**

The 2008 Château Musar is an outstanding young wine, that is still clearly climbing in quality and is several years away from its true apogee, but is already awfully easy to drink with pleasure! The deep, complex and vibrant bouquet delivers scents of black cherries, cassis, balsam boughs, a touch of roasted meats, excellent soil tones, incipient notes of *garrigue* and a touch of Cuban cigar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with outstanding mid-palate depth, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the tangy and nascently complex finish. This is a superb vintage of Musar in the making and it should probably peak in another eight to ten years, and then last another half a century! 2017-2065+. **93.**

### **2004 Château Musar**

The 2004 vintage of Château Musar is a touch cooler in aromatic profile than the very promising 2008, offering up a very complex constellation of cherries, black raspberries, a touch of currant, a gorgeous signature of soil, woodsmoke, beautiful spice tones, sandalwood, just a touch of pepper and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and laser-like in its focus, with a beautiful core of sweet fruit, lovely transparency and complexity, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the very promising finish. It is interesting that there are really no signs of *garrigue* on the nose of the 2004, but at the backend of the palate, it is just loaded with it! This is already into its plateau of maturity and is drinking with breed and style, but it will continue to improve for at least the next decade and really deserves a bit more bottle age to allow it to fully reach its apogee. Great juice. 2017-2065+. **93+.**

### **2001 Château Musar**

The 2001 Château Musar has long had a reputation as one of the greatest recent vintages from this property, so I was delighted when Marc Hochar included it in the more youthful examples of the wine for me to taste in preparation for this article. At age fifteen the 2001 has now reached a lovely point in its evolution for current drinking, as it delivers a fine bouquet of raspberries, cherries, spices meats, a fine base of stony soil tones, cigar wrapper, a bit of pepper, *garrigue* and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows beautiful mid-palate depth, with impeccable balance, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and outstanding complexity on the long and utterly classic finish. I drank a fair bit of Château Musar from the decade of the 1970s in my formative years in the wine trade, and this 2001 reminds me very strongly of what the beautiful 1978 and 1979 drank like back in the late '80s and early '90s. This is a classic Musar! 2017-2055. **94+**.

### **1999 Château Musar**

The 1999 Château Musar is another excellent wine that is showing more of its cabernet side of its personality on the nose as it closes in on its twentieth birthday. The bouquet is complex, pure and nicely tertiary in its blend of cassis, dark berries, Cuban cigar, lovely dried spice tones, an excellent base of soil, sandalwood and a touch of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush on the attack and rock solid at the core, with a nice touch of pepperiness on the backend, ripe tannins and lovely focus and grip on the complex, resolving and still gently chewy finish. Whereas the bouquet is rather cabernet-oriented right now, the palate is classic Musar, with the spicy, peppery and gently autumnal elements quite prevalent that one finds often in wines that include Carignan and Cinsault in the blend. A lovely and very classic Musar in the making! 2017-2050+. **93+**.

### **1994 Château Musar**

The 1994 vintage of Château Musar is one of the ripest I have ever tasted from the estate and to my palate, just a bit overripe for its own good. I did not think to look at the label at our vertical tasting to see what the octane level was on this vintage. The quite jammy bouquet offers up scents of red and black cherries, coffee, venison, a rather modest base of soil by Musar standards and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is plump, full-bodied and rather dulled, with a fat core, soft tannins and not the customary shape and focus of less ripe vintages. This is a buxom Musar, with a bit of backend heat and not the same complexity one finds routinely in the less torrid vintages. 2014-2035. **84**.

### **1991 Château Musar**

The 1991 vintage of Château Musar is a bit more volatile than many others, which may cause some tasters a bit of concern, but there is a lot of depth and complexity here underneath the veneer of volatile acidity. The bouquet is quite Châteauneuf du Pape-like at this stage of its evolution, offering up a fine blend of grilled meats, jammy raspberry fruit, pepper, *garrigue*, green olives and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely focused, with a good core, just a touch of remaining tannin and lovely length and grip on the vigorous finish. With this vintage of Musar, one's tolerance to VA is really going to decide one's impressions, as this is a very solid **92** to **93** point wine if the VA does not particularly bother you, but deduct six or seven points if volatile acidity is hard for you to tolerate. I am sure some folks would have difficulties with the volatile acidity here, but I absolutely loved it. 2015-2030. **87-93**.



### **1989 Château Musar**

The 1989 Château Musar is one of those vintages where the Châteauneuf du Pape similarities are striking, but this is also a vintage where the VA is again a bit prevalent and one's ultimate enjoyment of the wine is partially predicated on one's tolerance of volatile acidity. The bouquet is of course, nicely lifted from the VA, offering up a very expressive blend of cherries, raspberries, game, coffee, gently autumnal soil tones and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively suave on the attack, with a good core, melting tannins and very good length and grip on the complex and moderately volatile finish. Like the 1991, I have scored this in a range, with those who can tolerate a bit more VA likely to find the higher score reflective of the wine. 2014-2035. **88-92.**

### **1986 Château Musar**

The 1986 vintage of Château Musar has been fully mature for decades, but is still a pretty good drink, as it gently starts to peer over the far side of its plateau of maturity. The bouquet offers up a tertiary blend of desiccated cherries and red berries, coffee, hung game, damp soil tones and a touch of mocha in the upper register, which may well be a sign of the oxidation to come in the not too distant future. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still has good depth of gently jammy fruit at the core, with a bit of remaining tannin, good focus and balance and sound length on the fully mature finish. This still has pretty good structural chassis on the palate, but the dollop of mocha appearing in the aromatics makes me wonder if the fruit is going to fade before the tannins fully fall away. It is not a great vintage of Musar, but a good, solid one that has aged well, but may be at the crossroads. On the other hand, there may be bottles out there with more vigorous fruit components to match the structure of this bottle. 2014-2030+? **87+?**

### **1983 Château Musar**

The 1983 Château Musar has a touch of volatile acidity, which is not surprising or particularly alarming to my palate (low levels of VA generally do not bother me all that much), and this dissipates a bit with time in the decanter, allowing most of it to blow off. Once blossomed, the wine is quite pretty and fully mature, offering up scents of fruit cake, coffee, hung game, Christmas Tree spice, leafy autumnal notes, a good base of soil and a gently balsamic topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with still a bit of backend volatility in evidence, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This too seems to be inching towards the far side of its plateau of peak maturity and is probably going to slide into gentle decline in the not too distant future, so I might be inclined to drink up this vintage of Musar over the near-term. 2015-2025? **88.**

### **1979 Château Musar**

The 1979 vintage of Musar is fully mature and more tertiary in profile than the fine 1978, but this is a classic example of the wine that remains at its apogee and has plenty of life still in it. The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of raspberries, coffee, a bit of bonfire, *garrigue*, hints of fresh herbs and a bit of meatiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still has lovely depth at the core, with a fully-resolved, soft palate impression, but still fine focus and balance on the long, velvety finish. As this is further along its evolutionary arc than the 1978, there is not the same backend grip here as in the earlier vintage, but this is a lovely, complex wine that is still drinking with plenty of style and grace. 2014-2025+. **90.**

### **1978 Château Musar**

I really like the 1978 vintage of Musar, which has lovely brightness still on both the nose and palate and is drinking very well indeed. This is one of the vintages of Musar that I cut my

teeth on back in my earliest wine trade days, so I was very happy to see it still drinking beautifully all these years later. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows its southern Rhône stylistic affinity in its constellation of cherries, raspberries, a touch of orange peel, grilled game, *garrigue*, stony soil tones and almost a touch of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nicely resolved, with lovely complexity, still a good core of fruit, fine soil signature and a long, meltingly-tannic and very nicely balanced finish. Really a top notch vintage of mature Musar! 2014-2030+. **92.**

### **1975 Château Musar**

1975 is the year that the civil war started in Lebanon and the country changed profoundly (and not for the better) after fighting erupted in Beirut in the spring of this year. Given the challenges that had to be posed trying to tend the grapes and make the wine at Musar in this pivotal year, the '75 vintage has turned out pretty well. The bouquet is deep, complex and nicely tertiary, offering up scents of dried raspberries, cherries, *garrigue*, spit-roasted venison, coffee, a really lovely base of soil this year and an old Burgundy note of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, but not quite as vibrant in flavors as the nose promises. The tannins are fading, the wine is nicely balanced and there is good grip on the backend, but this is just a touch dulled in personality on the palate, but perhaps this is just reflective of this particular bottle and there are better examples out there? 2014-2035. **88+?**



### **1969 Château Musar**

The 1969 Château Musar is a touch barnyardy in profile, from a bit of brett, but there is depth, complexity and still plenty of vigor here as well. The bouquet offers up scents of raspberry, coffee, gently damp soil tones, a touch of herbs and some barnyard. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more four-square in personality than vintages of the 1970s and 1980s (Serge Hochar always liked to say that it was not until the 1977 vintage that he really settled on the classic Musar style for his red wine), with good length, modest grip and very little remaining tannin on the soft, but still lively finish. This wine is holding up quite well for its age, and it is most interesting when seen as one of the building blocks that would lead to the style of Musar we know from 1977 forwards. It is not a bad wine by any stretch of the imagination, but it does not share the same level of complexity as is found in most of the later day vintages. 2014-2025. **87.**

### **1964 Château Musar**

I have been fortunate to share bottles of the 1964 Musar on a couple of occasions in recent years and the wine has always acquitted itself very well indeed. This was one of the older vintages that was readily available when I was first starting out in the wine trade back in the early 1980s, so I have seen it on again and off again over the years and always enjoyed it. The bouquet is deep, complex and nicely tertiary in its mix of dried cherries, pepper, hung game, coffee, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety, with a suave attack, very good complexity and fine length and grip on the meltingly tannic finish. Another fine vintage from this iconic estate that just keeps cruising along! 2014-2030. **91.**

### **1961 Château Musar**

I have had a lot of excellent vintages of Château Musar over the years, but I have yet to have one that can surpass the beautiful wine produced here in 1961. Maybe some of the most recent vintages, like the 1999 and 2001 will age as gracefully? At age fifty-three, this wine continues to cruise along at the peak of its powers, soaring from the glass in a complex and utterly classic aromatic blend of raspberries, cherries, lovely spice tones, a fine base of stony soil, coffee, game and a touch of chipotle pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with fine focus and grip, a plush core, impressive soil signature and a very, very long, refined and vibrant finish. This is more precise and vibrant than the very good 1964, and just a half step more elegant than the equally impressive 1959. A great, great Musar! 2014-2030+. **95.**

### **1959 Château Musar**

The 1959 vintage was the first for Serge Hochar as winemaker at Château Musar and the wine is drinking brilliantly well still to this day and is one of my favorite vintages all-time from the estate! The bouquet is deep, complex and exceptional in its blend of desiccated raspberries and cherries, pepper, roasted game, coffee, new leather and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with plenty of mid-palate core, still a touch of old school tannin perking up the finish and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. Not a bad way to start out a career as winemaker at Musar! *Chateau Monsieur Hochar*. This is a terrific vintage of this iconic wine! 2014-2035+. **93.**

## MARCH 2017 REPORT ON THE MÂCONNAIS AND CÔTE CHALONNAISE



*Looking south into the Pouilly-Fuissé AC, with the Roche de Vergisson and the Roche de Solutr  in the background.*

I started working on this article back in the summer of 2016, but there was just so much material in each of the last several issues that this report kept getting pushed to the back burner. Finally, after returning from Burgundy at the end of November of last year, I finally had the time to tackle the pile of samples that had built up over the last few months from the M conna  and C te Chalonnaise and get this piece finished up and published. Happily, the slow pace of tackling samples allowed me to tackle a wider range of 2015s as they were released, as well as work through the sizable number of bottles from the 2014 vintage and earlier that had been piling up un-tasted in my cellar. It was really pretty good work if you can get it! The 2015 vintage is pretty strong in the M conna  and C te Chalonnaise, as with the exception of some younger vines, parcels in the southern half of region, the vineyards handled the hydric stress of the drought and midsummer heat quite well and the wines have turned out to be slightly buxom, generous in spirit and quite pure, with plenty of succulent fruit and good soil signatures. Of course, the overall quality of any domaine's 2015s in these two regions would have been predicated by when they started picking (as was also the case further north in the C te de Beaune), for those who started picking too late will have lost freshness and vibrancy in their

wines in this vintage. For example, in 2015 the Lafon family started harvesting their parcels in the Mâcon on August 28<sup>th</sup>, commencing with their parcels in Prissé and St. Véran and collected their grapes as quickly as possible from that point forward to keep as much freshness and cut in the finished wines. Similarly, Maison Joseph Drouhin started picking on September 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Mâconnais in the 2015 vintage.

As I wrote about back in the summer of 2015, the 2014 vintage is also very, very strong in both the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise, with the wines mirroring the transparent, classic style of the white Burgundies found further north in both the Côte d'Or and Chablis. The 2014s are not necessarily powerful wines and they started out life with quite tightly-knit girdles of acidity, which gave them lovely cut and grip, but which also made them a touch leaner out of the blocks than many fans of the wines from these two regions expect when they are first released. However, to my palate this is a very positive attribute for the wines and with a year's passage of time since the vintage was released, all of the 2014s that I tasted in preparation for this report have blossomed beautifully and are now drinking with lovely style and almost electric verve. Consequently, folks can now take their pick from two excellent and quite differently-styled vintages in the market at the present time, with those that like a bit more plush exuberance to the fruit components in their wines likely to be most happy with the really pretty and generous 2015s, whereas those that lean towards a touch more mineral drive and cut should focus primarily on the lovely and very classic 2014s that remain in the market. This, of course, only really refers to the wines that are hand-harvested in these sections of Burgundy, as the machine-harvested and mass-produced juice in the Mâcon is just not in the same league and is really only suitable for supermarket shelves (if you never buy wine in supermarkets). It is too bad that more producers cannot or choose not to harvest by hand, as there are some really marvelous *terroirs* to be found in these two regions, but sadly, we only generally get to see a small percentage of the region's true potential, as so much of the production in these two regions is still made in a mass market, commercial style wines crafted solely to meet lower price points. Given that most of these wines sell fairly cheaply, there is not really much hope that this will change anytime soon, but when one gets to taste hand-crafted wines from folks like Dominique Lafon, Daniel and Julien Barraud, Domaine Guerrin et Fils, the Auvigue brothers, Maison Drouhin, Domaine Ferret or the Clos de la Chapelle (to name just a few) it is quite easy to see how much potential really exists in these two regions.

Looking back a bit further, readers may recall that both the 2012 and 2013 vintages in these two regions were characterized by very, very small croploads, which have tended to create wines of unprecedented concentration (this was particularly true in the 2013 vintage, where yields were generally half of a normal crop-load), but often with very good balance and fine expressions of minerality. To my palate, 2012 was perhaps a bit more uneven than 2013 in quality, as hail also played a role in the shorted crop of the earlier year, but both vintages had their fair share of outstanding wines, and as the notes below will attest, both vintages continue to drink well at many of the most successful addresses. So both the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise have been on quite a good roll in the last several vintages and the market has never been more well-stocked with tasty and serious options from these two beautiful regions in the southern half of Burgundy. So please take your time reading through the notes below, as there are some truly exceptional wines in the roster that I have worked through in the last several months, and many of the very best wines are as satisfying as many more expensive bottles from

the Côte de Beaune or Chablis. As Dominique Lafon commented, back in my historical piece on this family's domaines, "the wines of the Mâconnais may last nicely in bottle, but most of the wines do not develop the same additional complexity with bottle age as the best wines of the Côte de Beaune." This would of course also apply to some degree to the wines of the Côte Chalonnaise. However, I would observe that until the day when the causes of premature oxidation are finally found and cured, this fundamental difference between the three regions is less meaningful, as we are so often forced to drink more white wines from the Côte de Beaune in their relative youth these days, and for this reason, the wines of the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise merit more attention by lovers of white Burgundy than might have been the case when we could all count on tucking away our premier crus for a dozen years or more and our grand crus for thirty-plus without fear of losing large numbers of bottles to premoxy. As to my palate, there is often more enjoyment to be had from drinking a great bottle today of young Pouilly-Fuissé like the 2014 les Crays from Domaine Guerrin et Fils as there is in drinking a bottle of 2014 Puligny from a top premier cru and top producer at a similarly youthful age. So even if your customary white wine is Meursault "Perrières" or Chablis "Montée de Tonnerre" or Corton-Charlemagne, take the time to try some of the very many exceptional bottlings coming out of the best addresses from the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise these days, as I guarantee you that you will be very, very pleased that you did!

*The following notes are arranged first by vintage, and then by region, with first generic bottlings that have no specific appellation listed, and then Côte Chalonnaise bottlings, followed by those from the Mâconnais. Within the groupings of Mâconnais tasting notes, I have listed the straight, blended Mâcon-Villages bottlings first, then those from specific villages in the Mâcon that are allowed their own appellations, like Chardonnay, Chaintreé or Viré-Clessé, followed by St. Véran and Pouilly-Fuissé bottlings. Within each appellation grouping, the wines are listed alphabetically by producer.*

### ***The 2015 Vintage***

#### **2015 Bourgogne Blanc "Vieilles Vignes"- Christophe Cordier**

The 2015 Bourgogne Blanc "Vieilles Vignes" from Christophe Cordier is a good, solid example of the vintage, offering up a ripely fruit nose of peach, apple, toasty soil tones and a bit of citrus blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, juicy and crisp, with a fine core, good soil signature and a long, youthful and vibrant finish. This is fourteen percent octane, which is quite reasonable for the 2015 vintage and the wine seems likely to improve with a year or two of bottle age. It is a very good example, but I often find blended examples of Bourgogne lag a bit behind the more precise minerality of specific Mâconnais sites- particularly when they are tasted in the same lineup- as they do not possess the same personality. 2017-2023. **88.**

#### **2015 Rully- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 2015 Rully from Maison Drouhin is an excellent example of the vintage, with the wine raised entirely in cask and seeing fifteen percent new wood in this vintage. The bouquet is ripe and pure, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, pineapple, lovely stony minerality, citrus peel and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a plush core, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and zesty finish. A lovely Rully. 2017-2025. **91.**



**2015 Mâcon-Villages “Vieilles Vignes”- Christophe Cordier**

Christophe Cordier, who runs his family’s thirty hectare domaine in Pouilly-Fuissé, started a small *négociant* line in 2003, working with farmers who have old vines and are willing to have their fruit picked entirely by hand. Monsieur Cordier’s 2015 Mâcon-Villages “Vieilles Vignes” is sourced from fifty year-old vines and was fermented and raised in *foudre*. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of peach, apple, Mâconnais toastiness, citrus peel and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and succulent, with a fine core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This has the generosity of the vintage, but also good structural undertow. 2017-2020. **88.**

**2015 Mâcon-Bussière “Les Clos”- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

I did not taste the Drouhin family’s lovely Mâcon-Lugny bottling in 2015, but their Bussière les Clos is very good in this vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a stylish and generous blend of peach, apple, a fine base of the Mâcon’s toasty soil elements and a potpourri of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely racy in profile, with a good core, bright, vibrant acids and fine length and grip on the wide open and classy finish. Twenty percent of the blend here had the malo blocked in 2015, to give a bit more cut to the finished cuvée. Good juice. 2017-2022. **89+.**

**2015 Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon**

The 2015 Mâcon-Bussière was picked on the first of September this year and is really a superb example of the vintage, offering up a slight sense of reserve out of the blocks that augurs very well for its evolution in bottle. The bouquet is focused and refined, offering up scents of apple, pear, fresh almond, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, succulent finish. This has a bit of youthful cut like a 2014, but with the core strength particular to the 2015 vintage. I would give it at least six months of bottle age after it is released to allow it to really blossom. Fine juice. 2017-2025+. **91.**

**2015 Mâcon-Chardonnay “Clos de la Crochette”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon**

The Lafon family’s 2015 Clos de la Crochette is excellent and already a very , very tasty bottle to drink. The wine wafts from the glass in an aromatic constellation of peach, pear, a touch of almond, good soil tones and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and succulent on the attack, with really pretty fruit tones, fairly broad shoulders and a long, vibrant and ample finish. This is more forward than the Bussière and will delight from day one. 2016-2022. **90+.**

**2015 Mâcon-Prissé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon**

The 2015 Mâcon-Prissé from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is really a very pretty and easy-drinking example of the vintage, offering up a bright and juicy nose of apple, peach, a nice base of soil, a touch of sweet almond and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and has a lovely spine of acidity, with good bounce, length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice. 2016-2021. **89+.**

**2015 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon**

The Milly-Lamartine is again a very strong bottle from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon in 2015, wafting from the glass in a summery constellation of apple, peach, hazelnuts, a good base of toasty soil tones and a touch of butter in the upper register. On the palate the wine is plush,

full-bodied and nicely balanced, with zesty acids, good focus and a long finish that closes with fine grip and backend lift. Very stylish. 2016-2021. **90.**

**2015 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon**

The Clos du Four is always the most powerful example in this fine lineup of Lafon Mâcon bottlings and the 2015 is no exception. The bouquet is deep, ripe and impressively pure, offering up scents of apple, tangerine, sweet nutty tones, a fine base of soil and a nice touch of Mâconnais toastiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and plump on the attack, with a fine core, bright acids and a long, complex and classy finish. This is very attractive this year and there is no need to defer gratification. 2016-2025. **91+.**

**2015 Mâcon- Péronne “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Tour Penet**

The Domaine de la Tour Penet is owned by the Ferret family, with Guy Ferret now having handed over the winemaking duties to his daughter, Anne Ramonet. Anne is the former wife of Jean-Claude Ramonet of Chassagne-Montrachet fame, so she knows a thing or two about chardonnay! The wines here are barrel-fermented and is produced from fifty year-old vines. The 2015 offers up a ripe and still quite primary bouquet of peach, pear, a touch of hazelnut, chalky soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plump at the core, with good framing acids, fine focus and grip and a long, youthful and soil-driven finish. This is fourteen percent octane, which is a full point higher than the 2014 version, but is still fresh as a daisy and should drink nicely for at least half a dozen years. 2017-2023. **90.**

**2015 Mâcon- La Roche-Vineuse “Vieilles Vignes”- Château de la Greffière**

As I noted last year, the Vieilles Vignes bottling from Château de la Greffière hails from vineyards older than fifty years of age and a quarter of the cuvée is barrel-fermented each year. The 2015 version is excellent, offering up a beautiful bouquet of fresh-picked orchard fruit, chalky soil tones, a touch of acacia blossom and whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fresh, full-bodied and offers up excellent mid-palate depth, with sound acids, a fine soil signature and a long, ripe and rock solid finish. This is even more powerful than the 2013 version, but at the same time impeccably balanced and zesty and will have no difficulties drinking well for the next five to seven years. Fine juice. 2017-2024. **90.**

**2015 Mâcon-Solutré- Vins Auvigue**

This is produced from purchased grapes, as the Auvigue family uses the Vins Auvigue label for their small *négociant* line of wines. Their 2015 Mâcon-Solutré is a very pretty example of this ripe vintage, offering up a bright and zesty nose of apple, a touch of tangerine, lovely, chalky soil tones and a gently musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plump in the mid-palate, with good framing acids, fine focus and good length and grip on the generous finish. This does not have the cut and grip of the 2014s and 2013s from the Auvigues, but it is tasty bottle for more near-term drinking. 2017-2020. **88+.**

**2015 Mâcon Solutré Pouilly- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine et Pascal Rollet)**

The 2015 Mâcon Solutré Pouilly from Domaine de la Chapelle's Pascal Rollet is a very pretty and quite cool example of the vintage, coming in with a quite classic alcohol level of thirteen percent (at least on the label) and plenty of brightness and bounce. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, just a whisper of sweet grapefruit, chalky soil tones and white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with a succulent core of fruit, impressive soil signature and a long, zesty and classy finish. This is one lovely bottle of Mâcon! 2017-2022. **90+.**

### 2015 Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches” bottling from the Lafon estate is not one of the favorites of the team here, as there is a lot of Chardonnay Musquée planted in the vineyard here and this gives the wine its tropical floral elements. Stéphane from Comtes Lafon noted that they have just bought another parcel of vines in this vineyard that is planted to classic chardonnay clones and they hope that the musky element in this wine will diminish down the road as a result. In any case, the 2015 is still quite musky in profile, offering up a bouquet of peach, a touch of apricot, a nice base of soil, gentle toastiness and plenty of musky, acacia-like floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and generous on the attack, with a good core, fine framing acids and impressive length and grip on the finish. A very well-made wine, but I am starting to agree with the Lafon team that less muskiness would be more interesting. 2016-2021. **89.**



### 2015 Viré-Clessé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Auvigue

The 2015 Viré-Clessé “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Auvigue is a pretty ripe example of the vintage, and though the wine has fine depth and length, it does not presently show the same focus as the other bottles that I tasted from the Auvigue brothers for this report. The ripe nose offers up scents of peach, a touch of pineapple, spring flowers, a good touch of soil and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plump in the mid-palate, with sound acids, good length on the finish, but a bit of a chunky personality from the heat of the summer of 2015. Maybe more precision will arrive with a bit of bottle age, as the

puppy fat of fruit recedes a bit, but this may always be a bit four-square in personality. Not bad. 2017-2023. **87+**.

**2015 Viré-Clessé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Pascal Bonhomme**

Pascal Bonhomme farms two and a half hectares of vines in Viré-Clessé, with his old vine bottling hailing from parcels that are sixty to sixty-five years of age. His 2015 Vieilles Vignes is a blend of eighty percent tank-fermented juice and twenty percent of the cuvée that is barrel-fermented in older casks. The wine offers up a ripe and very stylish bouquet of white peach, tangerine, chalky minerality, a touch of nuttiness and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush in the style of the vintage, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and slightly heavier-styled finish (particularly in comparison to the racy and mineral-infused 2014 version). The acidity and balance here are still quite good, this is just a riper style of wine that reflects the summer of 2015. Good juice. 2017-2023. **90.**

**2015 Viré-Clessé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon**

The Viré-Clessé bottling from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is the cream of the crop of their Mâconnais bottlings in 2015, offering up a pure and elegant nose of pear, tangerine, citrus blossoms, chalky soil tones and a nice dollop of sweet almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a good core, lovely balance, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long finish. A lovely bottle. 2016-2025+. **92+**.

**2015 Saint-Véran “les Perriers”- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine et Pascal Rollet)**

The 2015 Saint-Véran “les Perriers” from Domaine de la Chapelle is from a small parcel of forty-plus year-old vines, planted on clay topsoils over a base of limestone. The wine is a blend of thirty percent barrel-fermentation and the balance raised in stainless steel. The 2015 Perriers is ripe and very pretty, offering up a fine bouquet of pear, peach, lovely toasty soil tones, a touch of honeysuckle and a delicate framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and juicy on the attack, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, good framing acids and lovely balance on the long and classy finish. This is not quite as racy and complete as the superb 2014 version, but it is drinking with plenty of style out of the blocks and is a classic example of a very successful 2015. 2017-2022. **90..**

**2015 Saint-Véran- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

Like all of the Mâconnais wines that I tasted from Maison Drouhin in 2015, the winemaking team here decided to partially block the malo in the Saint-Véran to keep more bounce on the palate and the results are very fine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very pretty blend of apple, peach, a touch of orange zest, toasty soil tones and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and juicy, with impressive depth at the core, lovely focus and balance and a long, vibrant and wide open finish. Very tasty. 2017-2021. **89.**

**2015 Saint-Véran- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon**

The 2015 Saint-Véran is the second vintage of this appellation from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon and the wine is very pretty. The nose is pure and slightly more reserved in profile than the Viré-Clessé bottling that preceded it in the lineup, offering up scents of apple, white peach, Mâconnais toast, almonds and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a fine core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the still slightly youthful finish. Good juice. 2017-2025. **92.**

**2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Solutré”- Jean-Pierre et Michel Auvigue**

The 2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Solutré” cuvée from Jean-Pierre et Michel Auvigue is always a blend of purchased fruit and some of the domaine’s own production. The wine is fermented almost entirely in stainless steel (ten percent of the blend is barrel-fermented) and aged in older barrels. The 2015 Solutré is a very pretty example of the vintage, harnessing the ripe fruit of the vintage very nicely and burying it in a fine frame of minerality, as it offers up a nose of pear, apple, fresh almond, chalky soil tones and a bit of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, good focus and a long, zesty and nascently complex finish. This is a bigger wine, in the style of 2015, but with plenty of precision and personality at the same time. 2017-2030. **91+**.

**2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Chailloux”- Jean-Pierre et Michel Auvigue**

Les Chailloux is one of the warmer *climats* in which the Auvigue family has a parcel of vines, with the soils here yellow clay and stones. The exposition is directly south, which gives the wine its generosity. The Auvigue family barrel-ferments this wine and ages it in a combination of one to three year-old casks. The 2015 les Chailloux shows the ripeness of the vintage to fine effect, wafting from the glass in a classy constellation of apple, white peach, orange zest, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, bright acids and fine grip on the long and ripe finish. This wine handles the vintage style quite well, with only the tail end of the finish hinting at the heat of the summer. Fine juice. 2017-2030. **92**.

**2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “aux Bouthières”- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine et Pascal Rollet)**

The aux Bouthières vineyard includes some of the very oldest vines at Domaine de la Chapelle, with this bottling hailing from seventy-plus year-old vines. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised in a one-third each combination of new, one wine and two wine casks. The wine is pretty ripe in 2015, coming in at 14.5 percent octane on the label, but offers up plenty of freshness in its bouquet of white peach, pear, almond, a lovely base of limestone soil, gently musky floral tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and powerful in personality, with fine focus and grip, a bottomless core and just a bit of backend heat perking up the long and complex finish. This is really a well-made wine and I am sure that there are people who are absolutely going to love its extroverted personality, but, stylistically, it is not the first wine I would reach for in this vintage out of the fine lineup of bottlings from Domaine de la Chapelle. 2017-2022. **90** (and add at least three points for fans of very ripe styles of Pouilly-Fuissé, as the wine is extremely well-done in its style!)

**2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Grands Climats”- Domaine de la Chapelle**

The Pouilly-Fuissé “Grands Climats” from Domaine de la Chapelle is produced from thirty year-old vines and raised in fifty percent new wood, but only for three months to give the wine a delicate framing of oak. The 2015 Grands Climats is really a first class bottle, offering up a pure and complex constellation of apple, peach, a touch of tangerine, lovely soil tones, a bit of hazelnut, just a whisper of vanillin oak and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core, a good base of soil, bright acids and fine length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is already very easy to drink, but another six months of bottle age will allow some secondary layers to start to emerge. Good juice. 2017-2025. **91+**.

**2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Chapelle**

The 2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine de la Chapelle is a wide open and very classy example of the vintage, offering up lovely ripe fruit, good soil signature and a

fairly moderate octane level of fourteen percent. The first class bouquet jumps from the glass in a bright mix of white peach, pear, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and succulent on the attack, with a fine core, sound framing acids and excellent balance and grip on the long and still fairly youthful finish. This is ripe, but also harmonious and zesty. 2017-2025. **91.**

**2015 Pouilly-Vinzelles- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 2015 Pouilly-Vinzelles from Maison Joseph Drouhin is a fine, fine follow-up to their excellent 2014 version. This too had its malo partially blocked in 2015 and was thirty percent barrel-fermented in this vintage. The wine delivers a pure and vibrant nose of lemon, pear, chalky minerality, just a touch of vanillin oak and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a plush core, excellent backend mineral drive and a long, zesty and focused finish. The difference between the 2014 and 2015 versions comes down more to stylistic preferences, with the 2015 a bit more plump at the core, whereas the 2014 is more racy and minerally in profile, but both are excellent wines of impressive quality. 2017-2025+. **91.**

***The 2014 Vintage***

**2014 Bourgogne Blanc “Vieilles Vignes”- Christophe Cordier**

The 2014 Bourgogne Blanc “Vieilles Vignes” from Christophe Cordier is a very pretty example of the vintage, offering up a nice tropical fruit note in its bouquet of peach, tangerine, a touch of mango, a sound base of soil and a judicious framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is succulent and full-bodied, with a respectable core, sound acids and a quite ripe, long finish. This seems like it was picked pretty late and will be at its best in the next year or two. This has personality, but is not the most complex example out there. 2016-2018. **88.**

**2014 Rully- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

Maison Drouhin’s 2014 Rully is a beautifully pure and balanced bottle of chardonnay, with all of the elegance of this white Burgundy vintage in residence. The bouquet is vibrant and classy, offering up scents of lemon, fresh pineapple, stony minerality, a touch of citrus zest and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a really lovely core of fruit, fine structural tension and a long, focused and vibrant finish. This is not the most complex bottle of white Burgundy, but it is seamlessly balanced and energetic and delivers plenty of pleasure in its own right. 2016-2022. **90.**

**2014 Mâcon “Vieilles Vignes”- Christophe Cordier**

The 2014 Mâcon “Vieilles Vignes” from Christophe Cordier is really a lovely example of its level, with freshness on both the nose and palate and a sense of vibrancy that makes the vintage so classic. The first class bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of apple, peach, a nice touch of toastiness, spring flowers and just a hint of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and nicely delineated, with a good core, sound acids and good length and grip on the finish. This is not particularly soil specific- it is a blend after all- but it has plenty of Mâconnais charm. 2017-2020. **88.**

**2014 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine- Château des Bois**

The Château des Bois is owned by Xavier Greuzard and his wife Lucie, whose family owns the well-known Château de la Greffière. All of the Château des Bois’ vines are located in the superb village of Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine, with the vines ranging from fifteen to fifty years



of age. The 2014 Milly-Lamartine bottling is fermented and aged in stainless steel tank and offers up a fine bouquet of apple, a touch of clementine, chalky soil tones, a touch of almond and a gentle topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, lovely balance and impressive length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. This could do with a bit more bottle age to allow more complexity to emerge on the palate, but it is already quite tasty. 2017-2023. **89.**

**2014 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”- Domaine Cordier Père et Fils**

The Clos du Four vineyard is one of the warmer microclimates in Milly-Lamartine, but this dovetails very nicely with the racier style of the 2014 vintage and Monsieur Cordier has produced a lovely wine here. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of white peach, pear, lovely, chalky soil tones, orange blossoms and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature, a bright girdle of acidity and impressive length and grip on the still nicely youthful finish. This is very tasty today, but will be even better with another year in the cellar. Fine juice. 2017-2025. **91.**

**2014 Mâcon- Péronne “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Tour Penet**

Anne Ramonet’s 2014 Mâcon- Péronne “Vieilles Vignes” is a classic example of this outstanding vintage, wafting from the glass in a bright and complex blend of pear, a touch of casaba melon, gently toasty soil tones, fresh almond, spring flowers and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still nicely racy, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, still blossoming finish. This is very easy to drink already, but it has not yet started to show any secondary layers of complexity and will be even better with another year’s worth of bottle age. A lovely, svelte example. 2017-2025+. **90+.**

**2014 Viré-Clessé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Pascal Bonhomme**

Pascal Bonhomme’s 2014 Vieilles Vignes includes twenty percent of the cuvée that is barrel-fermented in older casks and the wine offers up an outstanding bouquet of pear, delicious apple, a touch of orange zest, a beautifully complex base of limestone soil, a whisper of vanilla, fresh almond and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, outstanding soil signature, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This already has outstanding mid-palate amplitude, to go along with the nicely racy structure of the 2014 vintage. Fine, fine juice! 2017-2030. **92.**

**2014 Viré-Clessé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Cordier Père et Fils**

The 2014 Viré-Clessé “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Cordier is excellent and perhaps the best example of this fine appellation I have tasted outside of the Lafon cellars. The bouquet is pure, elegant and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, delicious apple, a hint of citrus zest, chalky minerality and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with an outstanding core of fruit, fine soil inflection, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and still fairly youthful finish. This is high class Mâcon! 2017-2025+. **92.**

**2014 Saint-Véran “le Clos Vessats”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils**

The “le Clos Vessats” from Domaine Guerrin et Fils is their younger vine bottling of Saint-Véran, which they ferment and raise entirely in stainless steel. The 2014 is a lovely follow-up to the pretty 2013 I tasted in the last report, offering up a pure and very classic bouquet of

white peach, apple, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and an incipient note of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core, fine underlying minerality and very good length and grip on the vibrant and still nicely youthful finish. Good juice that will age quite gracefully. 2017-2023. **90.**

**2014 Saint-Véran “les Perriers”- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine et Pascal Rollet)**

The Saint-Véran “les Perriers” from Domaine de la Chapelle is a relatively new cuvée for the Rollet family, as it was first produced in 2012. The wine hails from vineyards that are in the forty year range, with thirty percent of the cuvée barrel-fermented and the rest raised in stainless steel, with only indigenous yeasts used for fermentation. The 2014 les Perriers is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a bright and very precise aromatic constellation of pear, blood orange, almond, chalky soil tones, gently musky floral tones and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly refined, with a rock solid core, excellent soil inflection, bright, seamless acids and outstanding length and grip on the poised and classy finish. This is dynamite Saint-Véran! 2017-2025. **92.**

**2014 Saint-Véran “la Côte-Rôtie”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils**

The 2014 Saint-Véran “la Côte-Rôtie” from Domaine Guerrin et Fils is produced from a very stony, chalky soil planted with forty-five year-old vines. However, the vineyard takes its name from its due southerly exposition, which gives fine ripeness every year. The wine is barrel-fermented solely with indigenous yeasts and raised in fifteen percent new casks. The 2014 is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a vibrant and complex blend of pear, delicious apple, chalky soil tones, a touch of gentle leesiness and a gentle base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and zesty, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, excellent balance and grip and a long, vibrant and focused finish. Just a lovely bottle! 2017-2025. **91+.**

**2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “Solutré”- Jean-Pierre et Michel Auvigue**

The Solutré bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé from Domaine Auvigue is a blend of estate fruit and purchased grapes, with thirty percent of the cuvée hailing from the family’s own vineyards. The wine is ninety percent stainless steel and ten percent barrel-fermented, with the blend then raised in a mix of one to three wine casks. This is a lovely 2014, with the tight-knit structure and transparency of the vintage very much in evidence in its youthfully complex nose of pear, lime blossoms, chalky soil tones, fresh almond and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and beautifully balanced, with a good core, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the quite minerally-infused finish. Good juice. 2015-2022. **90+.**

**2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “aux Bouthières”- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine et Pascal Rollet)**

The aux Bouthières single vineyard bottling Domaine de la Chapelle is made from seventy-year old vines and barrel-fermented. The 2014 vintage of this outstanding cuvée is everything one would expect from the synthesis of a great year and a top *terroir*, as the wine offers up precision and vibrant complexity on both the nose and palate. The nose jumps from the glass in a classic mix of golden delicious apple, pear, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, a deft framing of vanillin oak and a pungent topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely racy, with a fine core, superb transparency and cut and a very, very long, and complex finish. A beautiful wine. 2017-2030. **92+.**

**2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Cordier Père et Fils**

The 2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Cordier Père et Fils is an excellent example of the vintage, with the cut and precision of 2014 nicely augmented by ripe, generous fruit tones and a judicious touch of new oak. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a

complex blend of apple, white peach, gentle toasty soil tones, spring flowers, a touch of almond and a stylish base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, succulent and classy finish. Really a lovely bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé! 2017-2024. **91+**.



#### **2014 Pouilly-Fuissé - Domaine J. A. Ferret**

The 2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Ferret is a lovely example of this absolutely classic vintage. The wine wafts from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, pear, a touch of Mâconnais toastiness, a nice touch of soil, apple blossoms and just a whisper of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and stylish, with good depth at the core, crisp acids, reasonable complexity and fine length and grip on the wide open, but focused finish. Good juice. 2016-2020. **89**.

#### **2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “Tournant de Pouilly” Cuvée Hors Classe - Domaine J. A. Ferret**

The 2014 Tournant de Pouilly from Domaine Ferret is a really pretty wine, which shows a bit of the Jadot house style of partially blocked malolactic in its aromatic constellation of pear, orange zest, *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and nicely light on its feet, with a good signature of soil, bright acids and sneaky length and grip on the elegant finish. This is a blend of different parcels and hence does not have the *terroir* signature of some of the single vineyard bottlings, but this is good juice. 2017-2030. **91**.

#### **2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Ménétrières” Cuvée Hors Classe - Domaine J. A. Ferret**

The 2014 Domaine Ferret les Ménétrières also shows a touch of blocked malo in its aromatic package, which I do not quite understand the reasoning for in a racy vintage like 2014. But, the wine is very, very pretty as it offers up a vibrant bouquet of pear, apple, pastry cream, a bit of underlying minerality, apple blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and again, nicely light on its feet, with a good core, vibrant acids and a long, zesty finish. I like this wine a lot as well, but tasting it alongside of the Tournant de Pouilly, I am having a real hard time tasting any difference between the two! 2017-2030. **91+**.

#### **2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “le Clos” Tête de Cru - Domaine J. A. Ferret**

The 2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “le Clos” Tête de Cru from Domaine J. A. Ferret is another really bright, zesty and high class example of the vintage, but again, I am left searching for more signature of *terroir* to distinguish it more definitively from the two pretty wines above. There is more depth at the core here, more cut and grip and a touch more new oak than in the 2014 Ménétrières or Tournant, but the aromatic and flavor profiles are really pretty similar. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a superb blend of pear, apple, almond paste, a touch of orange zest, gentle soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has a fine core in the mid-palate, with bright acids, good focus and grip and a long, gently oaky finish. This could use a bit of bottle age to really start to blossom. 2019-2040. **92**.

#### **2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Perrières” Tête de Cru - Domaine J. A. Ferret**

The 2014 les Perrières from Domaine Ferret is another young and very stylishly-crafted example of the vintage, but the winemaking signature here is as strong in this wine as it is in the other three top 2014 Pouilly-Fuissé bottlings that I tasted from the domaine. The bouquet is pure, nascently complex and enticing, delivering a composition of apple, pear, a touch of fresh almond, a bit of chalky soil tones, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, lovely balance and a very long, primary and zesty finish. I really like this wine, as I do for all of the 2014s from Domaine Ferret, but they are so similar out of the blocks that I would advise against serving any of them side by side. 2020-2040. **92+**.

#### **2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “La Roche”- Domaine Eric Forest**

Eric Forest is the son of André Forest, who was the first *vigneron* I was introduced to in the Mâconnais whose wines showed just how great the finest bottlings in this region could be. A friend, Chet Kern, who once imported André Forest’s wines way back in the day, had told me about Eric’s wines, and I set about to try and get samples. I wrote to Monsieur Forest and he put me in touch with his American importers (the two I called and emailed blew me off completely), and I eventually had to prevail upon the generosity of my friend to send me a bottle of Eric Forest’s 2014 La Roche bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé for inclusion in this report. Thank you Chet! The 2014 La Roche is a superb and impressively mineral expression of Pouilly-Fuissé, wafting from the glass in a superb blend of apple, pear, complex limestone minerality, spring flowers, a touch of almond and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core, impressive backend minerality, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the still youthful finish. This is a fine example that could even use a bit more bottle age to fully blossom. 2018-2030. **92+**.

#### **2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Crays”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils**

The 2014 “les Crays” from Domaine Guerrin et Fils is absolutely refined and one of the best young examples of Pouilly-Fuissé I have tasted in quite some time! As readers may recall, the stony les Crays vineyard is situated right at the base of the Roche de Vergisson and is one of

the best vineyards in the appellation. The Guerrin family have forty-five year-old vines here, barrel ferment with indigenous yeasts and raise this bottling in twenty percent new wood. The bouquet is deep, complex and refined, offering up a superb blend of pear, apple, almond, beautiful soil tones, apple blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with excellent mid-palate depth, great soil signature, bright, seamless acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex finish. An outstanding wine that is an utterly classic expression of this great *terroir* and will age beautifully. 2017-2035. **93+**.

**2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “la Maréchaude”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils**

The la Maréchaude bottling from Domaine Guerrin hails from a sixty year-old vineyard that has more clay in the soil than les Crays, but also with plenty of limestone pebbles to add minerality. The wine is similarly barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in twenty percent new wood. The 2014 la Maréchaude is also outstanding, delivering a deep and pure bouquet of pear, apple, a touch of hazelnut, spring flowers, a fine base of soil and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with beautiful fruit, a good base of soil tones, gentle oakiness and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is a bit more fruit-driven in personality than the 2014 les Crays, but every bit as refined and complex. 2017-2030. **92**.

**2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “Sur la Roche”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils**

The 2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “Sur la Roche” from Domaine Guerrin hails from a parcel of vines right at the base of the Roche de Vergisson, but unlike the Les Crays vineyard next door (which faces due south), the Sur la Roche vineyard faces more southeasterly and is far more affected by the wind at this altitude, adding a more racy element to the wines. The thin soil is all limestone pebbles over mother rock and the Guerrins have sixty year-old vines here. The 2014 Sur la Roche is a beautiful bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé, wafting from the glass in a complex constellation of pear, apple, a hint of tangerine, complex limestone minerality, a touch of almond, white flowers and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a superb core, excellent cut and grip and impressive backend mineral drive on the long, vibrant and still youthful finish. This is superb wine in the making. 2018-2030+. **92+**.

**2014 Pouilly-Fuissé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon**

As I noted last year, the *elevage* for the domaine’s new Pouilly-Fuissé bottling is a bit longer than the rest of their range, and consequently, it is still in cask down in the Milly-Lamartine cellars when I at the domaine in Meursault in November, where the remainder of the 2015s were shown ahead of the Côte de Beaune whites. So I did not have a note on this wine last year, but was happy to see it available to taste alongside of the other 2015 Mâconnais wines this past November. The wine is a blend of four parcels right now and is raised in three to four year-old casks that were used for various Lafon Meursault bottling previously. The 2014 is excellent, offering up a refined nose of apple, pear, a touch of orange zest, chalky soil tones and a touch of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and quite racy in personality, with a fine core, lovely backend soil drive and a long, focused and still youthful finish. This is a fine, fine first vintage of Pouilly-Fuissé from Domaine Lafon. 2017-2030+. **92+**.

**2014 Pouilly-Vinzelles- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 2014 Pouilly-Vinzelles from Maison Joseph Drouhin is an outstanding example of this fine vintage, delivering a complex and vibrant bouquet of apple, tangerine, a touch of passion fruit, musky floral tones, chalky soil and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the

wine is pure, fullish and intensely flavored, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, bright acids and lovely balance on the long, zesty and complex finish. Pouilly-Vinzelles can often be a bit more mineral in personality than Pouilly-Fuissé and this seems to be the case with this excellent example from Maison Drouhin. 2017-2025. **91+**.

### ***The 2013 Vintage***

#### **2013 Saint-Véran- Vins Auvigue**

The Vins Auvigue label is used by Jean-Pierre and Michel Auvigue for the wines that they produced from purchased grapes in the area. Their Saint-Véran is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel, with the 2013 offering up a pretty bouquet of pear, a touch of pineapple, a good dollop of chalky soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core and fine length and grip on the wide open and juicy finish. Good juice. 2015-2020. **88.**

#### **2013 Saint-Véran “Terres Noirs”- Christophe Cordier**

The 2013 Saint-Véran “Terres Noirs” from Christophe Cordier is drinking very nicely at age four and is beginning to show some excellent secondary layers of complexity, while still retaining lovely acidity and backend bounce. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of peach, pineapple, musky floral tones, lovely toastiness and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and long, with lovely balance, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. A fine example of Saint-Véran. 2017-2020+. **90.**

#### **2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “Héritiers Auvigue”- Jean-Pierre et Michel Auvigue**

The Héritiers Auvigue bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé hails from a parcel of eighty year-old vines situated down below the Roche de Solutré, where there is more clay in the soils. The wine is entirely barrel-fermented and aged in older casks for eight months. The 2013 version is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pear, a touch of pineapple, beautifully complex soil tones, a gentle framing of vanillin oak and a very exotic floral topnote that is redolent of violets! On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and old vine juicy in the mid-palate, with good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, classy and complex finish. Really a lovely bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé. 2015-2022. **90+**.

#### **2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “la Frérie”- Jean-Pierre et Michel Auvigue**

The 2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “la Frérie” from Jean-Pierre and Michel Auvigue is a blend of fruit from the two villages of Solutré and Pouilly, with thirty percent of the cuvée barrel-fermented and the wine aged in one to three year-old barrels. The 2013 is very pretty, but not quite as site specific as the single vineyard bottlings below. The bouquet offers up a lovely combination of apple, pear, a touch of hazelnut, chalky soil nuances and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and quite stylish in profile, with good depth in the mid-palate, bright acids and good length and grip on the succulent finish. Another very good bottle. 2015-2020. **91.**

#### **2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Chailloux”- Jean-Pierre et Michel Auvigue**

As I noted above, the Auvigue family barrel-ferments this wine and ages it in a combination of one to three year-old casks. The 2013 les Chailloux is a lovely wine, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of apple, pear, orange blossoms, a touch of *crème patissière*, discreet soil tones and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a lovely core, impressive focus and balance and a very long, crisp and



succulent finish. This wine has marvelous complexity, but it is a bit more fruit-driven in personality than most of the other Domaine Auvigue bottlings of Pouilly-Fuissé. Lovely juice. 2015-2022. **92+**.

**2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “le Clos”- Jean-Pierre et Michel Auvigue**

The le Clos vineyard has a northerly exposure, which produces a far more mineral interpretation of Pouilly-Fuissé than the lovely les Chailloux from the Auvigue family. The domaine’s vines here are sixty years of age and the wine is barrel-fermented and aged in one wine barrels prior to bottling. This is really a beautiful bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé and I love the combination of gentle new oakiness (from the one wine casks) the fine signature of *terroir* here. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of lemon, pear, fresh almond, a superb base of chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and racy in personality, with a superb core, fine soil inflection, perfect balance and a long, crisp and focused finish. A very classy example. 2015-2025. **93**.

***The 2012 Vintage***

**2012 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes”- Jean-Pierre et Michel Auvigue**

The old vine bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé from the Auvigue family is a blend of two parcels of old vines, both located in the commune of Solutré, with a high concentration of iron oxide in the soils of the two. These are eighty year-old vines, which are entirely barrel-fermented and aged in one wine casks. The 2012 Vieilles Vignes bottling is outstanding, soaring from the glass in a complex and still quite youthful blend of lime, pear, a complex base of minerality, orange zest, fresh almond and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary in personality, with a rock solid core, excellent balance and grip, zesty acids and outstanding focus on the long and nascently complex finish. This is serious a long distance runner by the standards of Pouilly-Fuissé. 2017-2030+. **93+**.

**2012 Pouilly-Vinzelles- Maison Joseph Drouhin**

The 2012 Pouilly-Vinzelles from Maison Joseph Drouhin is now fully mature and drinking with lovely generosity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a pretty blende of apple, peach, chalky minerality and a touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with good, but not great complexity, fine acids and good length and grip on the very tasty finish. A lovely bottle for near-term drinking. 2016-2019. **90**.

***Older Vintages***

**2010 Pouilly-Fuissé “le Clos” Tête de Cru- Domaine J. A. Ferret**

The 2010 le Clos from Domaine Ferret is a lovely example of the vintage and continues to drink very nicely, due most likely to having its malolactic fermentation partially blocked. The bouquet is bright and complex, delivering a blend of apple, pear, a touch of pastry cream, chalky soil tones, apple blossoms and a deft base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely cut and grip and a bright, ripe finish. This still has plenty of life in it. 2015-2020. **92**.

**2010 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Perrières” Tête de Cru- Domaine J. A. Ferret**

The 2010 les Perrières from Domaine Ferret is a very pretty example of the vintage, which has stayed nice and fresh from its partially-blocked malo. The bouquet offers up scents of pear, apple, a touch of orange zest, *crème patissière*, vanillin oak and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely light on its feet, with zesty acids and fine length and grip. Good juice that is still drinking nicely. 2015-2020. **92**.

**2003 Pouilly-Fuissé “Tournant de Pouilly” Cuvée Hors Classé- Domaine J. A. Ferret**

I came across this note while researching my tasting books for German wines for the article that appears in a previous issue, and apparently I tasted this in Germany in the spring of 2014 (though I had forgotten having drunk it). Surprisingly, given the style of the vintage, the wine was quite good and still impressively fresh for this very hot summer and showed no signs of slowing down anytime soon, as it offers up a fully mature, but vibrant bouquet of hazelnuts, orange peel, butter, nice soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, but holding very nicely at the present time, with lovely balance and grip and a long, complex finish. Given the torrid summer of '03, this is hardly a classic example, but it is drinking nicely and showed absolutely no signs of imminent decline when I drank it back in March of 2014. 2014-2020+? **88.**

## THE MAGNIFICENT 1978 VINTAGE OF CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON



The 1978 vintage in California was one of the finest years in what may well have been the greatest decade of wine production in the history of the state. The decade of the 1970s is replete with legendary years, including 1970, 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1978, and as the years have rolled by, none of these vintages have lost any of their luster. When one considers that the drought years of 1976 and 1977 have also aged long and gracefully, it is pretty hard not to conclude that the decade of the 1970s was indeed, the finest in the history of California wine. In many ways, this decade in California wine was analogous to the decade of the 1980s in Bordeaux or the 2000s in Burgundy. It is not at all surprising that the world would first come to truly take note of the quality of California wines in the 1970s. Amongst all of these excellent 1970s' vintages, the three that have stood out most prominently in popular imagination are 1970, 1974 and 1978, and for many years, connoisseurs of California wine have debated the relative merits of each of these exceptional years and lobbied for one over the other at the top of the list of the decade's finest vintages. And of course, in this era, the grape that was king in the vineyards of northern California was certainly cabernet sauvignon, and when one speaks today of the relative merits of each of these fine vintages, it is through the prism of cabernet sauvignon that we take stock of each year's evolution and rightful spot in the hierarchy of California's

greatest years. As memory fades a bit with the passing of time, the excellence of some of these other vintages has receded a bit from the consciousness of many wine lovers, so that today, it is usually the vintages of 1974 and 1978 that are spoken of with the most reverence.

The 1978 vintage was the first return to a “normal” growing season in northern California after two years of extreme drought in both 1976 and 1977. The back to back drought years produced very low yields and the vines stored up unharnessed energy to share with the 1978 growing season, allowing for a generous crop size to be brought into the cellars at harvest time. The vintage started out slowly, with a rare wet spring, but warm and consistent growing conditions prevailed from early summer on up to right before harvest. Just prior to the start of picking, a heat spike arrived and pushed sugars up and wineries scrambled to bring in grapes as quickly as possible to avoid notes of *sur maturité* in the wines. Ripeness levels ended up generally perfect, with only a few late pickers suffering with overripe grapes, and since the very earliest days, the cabernet sauvignons from the 1978 vintage have been characterized by great purity and elegance to their fruit expressions, with plenty of depth and power, but also a velvety palate impression and suave tannins that made many of them fairly accessible after only a decade of bottle age. The 1982 newsletter from Heitz Wine Cellars, heralding the release of their 1978 cabernet bottlings, demonstrates the early appeal that this vintage had, as here discussing the '78 Martha's Vineyard, Joe Heitz wrote that “the 1978 Martha's shows itself true to variety and to the style for which Heitz wines from Martha's Vineyard are known and valued: a slightly minty bouquet, augmented by rich Cabernet Sauvignon varietal fruit and limousin oak,” with the wine “medium to full-bodied” and “still showing some signs of youth, but very drinkable and well rounded.” He concluded that “the wine has a bright future and will continue to show its elegance with further aging.” This description is equally apt for the 1978 cabernet sauvignon crop as a whole, with all of the key players from this generation turning out simply superb wines that offered some early appeal, but with the beautiful balance and depth of fruit to also stand the test of time and improve with long-term aging.

For many years I have wanted to write a feature on the 1978 California cabernet vintage, as this was the great previous vintage that was closest to my entry into the wine trade, when I began my wine journey in the early 1980s. There were still a few 1978s poking around on merchants' shelves when I was getting my feet wet in the business, so I had a chance to taste a few 1978 cabernets and zinfandels in their early days (it was a terrific vintage for zinfandel as well and some of the greatest bottles of zin I have ever tasted were from the '78 vintage), but most '78 cabernets had already disappeared into collectors' cellars by the time I was getting established in the trade. However, I had the pleasure to attend a horizontal cabernet tasting from the vintage on their tenth anniversary in 1988 and can still vividly recall just how beautiful the wines were showing at age ten! When I later bought a fair bit of California cabernet sauvignon for my own cellar from the fine string of vintages from 1984 to 1987, it was with hopes that these younger vintages would match the aging brilliance that the 1978s had achieved from the previous decade. While it is probably too early to say whether or not the best wines from that four year run in the mid-1980s will reach the same levels as the stunning 1978s, the reality is that the world of California wine was changing so dramatically by the decade of the 1980s that even if the best wines from this fine four year stretch turn out to maximize their early potential, they are still likely to be a bit stylistically different from the glorious 1978s- with the exception of the handful of producers of the mid-'80s who had established their wineries in previous decades and

had not succumbed the already mounting pressures of the 1980s to change anything stylistically. So, while I still have high expectations for many of the top cabernets from the 1984 to 1987 period (though most are still too young to have reached their true apogees), I do not hold out the same hope I had when I was buying these wines that they will one day be the second coming of the 1978s.

Consequently, over the last several years, I have been picking up 1978 cabernets whenever I spotted them at auction, with an eye towards eventually putting together this report. It has been a lot of fun locating 1978s buried in auction listings and trying to secure well-stored bottles, and my collection has grown slowly, but nicely with this great cabernet vintage over the last half dozen years. But, these wines do not appear with any great frequency (as so many collectors who own the vintage fully realize the quality of the wines and are loathe to part with them) and it has been a slow, albeit rewarding process to build up a representative cross-section of the vintage. However, as the second half of 2016 was starting to wind towards its conclusion, I was still missing from my own cellar some of the most famous bottlings from the vintage and eventually reached out to my friend Mark Golodetz (whose cellar is deeper and broader than mine) about pooling resources and organizing a 1978 cabernet tasting. At the very end of October, only a few days before I left for my three weeks in Burgundy, we set about to taste through a fine lineup of the fabled 1978 California cabernets here in New York. Sadly, Mark fell ill right before the tasting and did not get a chance to savor his share of these great wines and his presence was sadly missed on that evening, but the other nine of us who gathered around the table were treated to as fine a lineup of *à point* California cabernet sauvignon as one could ever hope to find. The results were a ringing confirmation of the exceptional quality of the 1978 vintage, with the wines nearing forty years of age and absolutely at the peak of their powers, with only one or two exceptions that seemed a bit on the downslope.

While this most recent tasting was broad and deep, it did not include all of the recent examples I have tasted of the superb 1978 vintage (as I certainly have been nipping at bottles of this vintage in my cellar over the last several years!), so I have included below my notes from a few other 1978 cabernets that have appeared in the last handful of reports on American wines, so that this article can serve as a proper reference point for subscribers interested in the state of evolution of the vintage today. As these most recent notes should make clear, the 1978 vintage for northern California cabernet sauvignon is one of the greatest in the history of the state, and rivals the very best of this golden decade of west coast wines, with the 1978s at the very same level of quality as the finest wines of the 1970 and 1974 vintages from this era, with most of the very finest 1978s still in the midst of their peak plateaus of maturity. The vast majority of top 1978s, while now at their apogees, still possess decades life ahead of them and this is a vintage that still merits considerable attention at auction. Where they ultimately stack up with the best 1970s and 1974s, not to mention the finest 1975s (which is a vintage I rank every bit as highly as these more famous three years), is right at the same lofty level and this is clearly one of the greatest vintages of cabernet sauvignon in California history. Most of the top wines still retain a bit of suave tannin on the backend and continue to climb in quality, offering up the potential for at least another quarter century of positive evolution in bottle and many may last quite a bit longer than that additional twenty-five years. But, as a group, they are drinking with grace and great style at the present time and this is a perfect moment for opening and sharing bottles.

I should take a moment to comment on one of the most endearing aspects of the 1978 vintage of cabernet sauvignon, and that is that many of the most important producers in the history of California wine were still at the top of their games in this era and producing world class and utterly classic-styled wines. Keep in mind that this was only two years after the famous “Judgement of Paris” tasting in Paris organized by Steven Spurrier that firmly cemented California’s legacy as one of the world’s greatest wine-producing regions, so these were very heady times for the pioneers of California wine. Some of the most important wineries from this era have continued on crafting classic and long-lived wines in the same vein as their 1978s, with wineries such as Heitz Wine Cellars, Mayacamas Vineyards, Mount Eden Vineyards and Ridge Vineyards continuing to produce classic wines today in the exact same mold as their lofty wines of the past. But, a great many of the era’s top cabernet producers from 1978 have succumbed to the temptation of shifting fashion and no longer produce wines today in the same style as they did back in this golden era, and drinking a lineup of gloriously classic 1978s today serves also to remind us of just what has been lost at some of these very important addresses of yesteryear. What a great wine world it would be today if wineries such as Joseph Phelps Vineyards, Robert Mondavi Winery, Caymus Vineyards, Beaulieu Vineyards and Sterling Vineyards (to name just a few) had continued on the stylistic path that they walked in 1978, rather than shifting their winemaking styles and joining the confectionary crowd of overripe, cookie-cutter modern cabernets. But, though so many of these stars of 1978 have lost their way in the years that followed, their current stylistic malaise should not detract from the truly exceptional and long-lived beauties that were crafted in their cellars in this era, and which continue to rank up at the very summit of California’s greatest vinous accomplishments. Perhaps these great 1978s will serve as the stylistic inspiration for some of these wineries to one day return to their roots and again start to make wines of truly world class quality.

The vast majority of the notes that follow hail from our October 2016 tasting organized here in New York, with the bottles coming from either my cellar or that of my friend Mark Golodetz. The bottle of 1978 Mount Eden cabernet was opened just this past January, as it was a relatively recent acquisition at auction and I did not want to open it before it had a full six months of recovery time after its shipment across the US, and hence, I did not add it into the lineup in October. Beyond these notes from October or January, I have added below my most recent tasting notes on a handful of other important 1978 cabernets that I have written about in previous articles on American wines, so that this article can serve as a proper reference piece on the beautiful 1978 vintage. There are only about a half dozen or so of these wines included, which can easily be spotted by the projected window of drinkability at the end of the note that will start with a year previous to 2016 or 2017. I hope the notes below do justice the brilliant quality of the 1978 cabernet sauvignon vintage, which really is quite analogous in northern California to the quality of the 1982 vintage in Bordeaux, the 1989 vintage in Piemonte or the 1999 vintage of red Burgundy. These are major, major wines and amongst the greatest we have yet seen from the state. Where they ultimately stack up in comparison to the other reference point vintages of California cabernet of the decade of the 1970s is really more a matter of personal taste. They are not quite as ripe and plush as the 1974 vintage, which many think of as the high water mark of this marvelous decade, but they are a bit more elegant overall and for that reason, I tend to give them a very slight nod over the exceptional 1974s. They are also more elegant than the powerful and still fairly youthful 1975s, which are every bit as superb as any other vintage in this marvelous decade (and probably the great sleeper vintage from this era, as



they do not have the same general reputation of the 1974s or 1978s) and for drinking over the next couple of decades, I would have to give the nod to the 1978s over the 1975s. After another twenty years, perhaps the 1975s will catch the '78s, but that remains to be seen. The other two very well-respected cabernet sauvignon vintages of this decade, the 1973s and the 1970s, are now further along their evolutionary arcs than are these other vintages, so it is difficult to make a comparison to the *à point* 1978 vintage. While I have had some absolutely brilliant wines from both 1970 and 1973, I would have to say that looking back to those two vintages at their absolute apogees (which for the most part are now a decade or so back in the past), the best of the 1970 vintage were every bit as magical as the best 1978s, with the finest 1973s just a half step behind these two years. But, to my palate, it is probably time to consider drinking up remaining bottles of both 1970 or 1973 over the relatively near-term, whereas the top 1978s easily have a quarter century or more of peak drinking still ahead of them. They truly are remarkable wines.



### **1978 Beaulieu Vineyards “Georges de Latour” Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon**

Of all of the great cabernet producers of this era, Beaulieu Vineyards was probably one of the few wineries that did not really capture all of the potential of the vintage. I have been drinking this 1978 since the mid-1980s and while many bottles were quite tasty back in the day, I have never hit a truly exceptional example. Back in this era, I have always found that BV was more successful in the vintages of 1970, 1971, 1973, 1975, 1976 and 1980 than they were in the more famous years of 1978 and 1974. The only caveat one needs to mention about the great

wines that Andre Tchelistcheff fashioned at BV in the decade of the 1970s is that their style has not proven to be quite as ageworthy as many of their contemporaries, and most of these beautiful wines are now in varying stages of decline. This most recent bottle of the '78 Georges de Latour was okay, but starting to get fairly oxidative and was a bit past its best, offering up scents of black cherries, plums, chocolate, a nice touch of Rutherford dust and coconutty new oak underneath the touch of cookie dough-like maderization. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a solid core and still a touch of backend tannin on the long and moderately oxidative finish. The oxidation here is not yet so bad that the wine is undrinkable, but it is ever present on both the nose and palate and detracts a tad from the enjoyment of the wine. 2016-2025. **86.**

#### **1978 Burgess Cellars “Vintage Selection” Cabernet Sauvignon (Howell Mountain)**

Tom Burgess purchased the old Howell Mountain cabernet vineyard of Lee Stewart, one of California's founding fathers, in time for the 1974 vintage, and produced really excellent wines here for many years under his own label. His 1978 Burgess cabernet sauvignon is excellent and still fairly youthful in structure, with the potential for at least another quarter century's worth of positive evolution in the bottle. The bouquet is complex and black fruity, offering up scents of cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of cigar wrapper and a topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and displays excellent mid-palate depth, with a bit of “mountain cabernet” sturdiness to its chassis of remaining tannin, as well as fine focus and grip on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. The team at Burgess Cellars never seemed to be able to quite capture the inherent elegance that Lee Stewart realized under his Souverain label from this fine vineyard source, but all of the 1970s' era cabernets from Burgess are very worthy wines. 2016-2040+. **92+.**

#### **1978 Cakebread Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon “JT L1” (Napa)**

The 1978 Cakebread “JT L1” cabernet is a superb wine, which was made from grapes purchased from the Johnson-Turnbull vineyard, the year before they began to bottle and market their own wine. This vineyard, up until the mid-1990s, was ringed by eucalyptus trees and was often dubbed the “poor man's Martha's Vineyard” for its extroverted mint and eucalyptus profile. The 1978 Cakebread version is a bit less minty than Johnson-Turnbull's own bottlings, but captures all of the lovely potential of this superbly situated Napa parcel, as it offers up a deep and complex nose of cassis, black cherries, delicate minty tones, dark chocolate, a touch of the chipotle pepper to come, tobacco and a classy base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and beautifully focused, with a rock solid core of fruit, impressive elegance, and still a bit of tannin to resolve on the long, balanced and very classy finish. This is a lovely synthesis of the powerful 1978 vintage character with the refined elegance of the Johnson-Turnbull vineyard, and is by a pretty good margin the very finest Cakebread wine that I have ever tasted. 2010-2040. **93.**

#### **1978 Caymus Vineyards “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon**

Having had some marvelous bottles of Caymus cabernet sauvignon from this era, when Randy Dunn was the winemaker here, my expectations for the 1978 Napa bottling were very high indeed. The wine was good, but not great, and perhaps this was just the bottle? I had sourced this rare bottle at auction five or six years ago, but it was only a single bottle and though its appearance was excellent, I do not know the history of its provenance. The wine remains rather stubbornly young for thirty-eight years of age, delivering a bouquet of cassis, a bit of bell pepper, cigar ash, some tariness and cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and rather four-square in personality, with plenty of depth at the core, still a bit of tannin to resolve

and a long, youthful and not particularly complex finish. This is not bad by any means, but I was expecting just a bit more, particularly for Randy's last vintage at Caymus. Again, maybe it is just this particular bottle, which was the only one I had in the cellar? In any case, the wine needs a bit more time to more fully resolve its tannins and perhaps it will be better down the road. 2021-2040+? **88+**.

#### **1978 Clos du Bois "Briarcrest" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

My early wine trade experience with the wines of Clos du Bois focused on the vintages of the early to mid-1980s, so I had no idea what to expect from their 1978 Briarcrest bottling of cabernet sauvignon. However, when a bottle was available at auction a few years ago, I saw no reason not to bid on it and add it to the potential lineup for this article. The wine turned out to be excellent and one of the great surprises of our tasting. The classy bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, offering up a mature blend of black cherries, sweet cassis, a touch of eucalyptus, cigar ash and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows of a lovely core of sweet fruit, with melting tannins, excellent focus and balance and a complex, very well-balanced finish. Fine juice at its peak, but still with plenty of life ahead of it. 2016-2030+. **92**.

#### **1978 Clos du Val Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

Though I have a quite a bit of experience with the top cabernet producers of northern California from the decade of the 1970s, one hole in my tasting roster had been the wines from Clos du Val in this era, so I was very happy to see that we had both the regular and the reserve bottlings in our 1978 lineup. The regular 1978 cabernet from Clos du Val was one of the most Bordeaux-like wines of our tasting, with both its aromatic and flavor profile very much recalling the Left Bank on the Gironde. The bouquet is a lovely blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of cedar and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classy in profile, with a fine core, just a touch of backend tannin, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long finish. This is really a delightful bottle for current drinking and has years and years of life still ahead of it. 2016-2040. **92**.

#### **1978 Clos du Val "Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

The 1978 Clos du Val "Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon is also outstanding and shows quite a bit more mid-plate sappiness than the regular version. The nose wafts from the glass in an equally elegant blend of cassis, black cherry, Cuban cigar, dark soil tones gentle scents of violet and a lovely topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined in profile, with a superb core of sappy black fruit, suave, fine-grained and melting tannins and excellent focus and grip on the complex and seamless finish. This is stellar and was one of my favorite wines from our tasting, which is pretty high praise, given that we had most of the biggest names from 1978 on the table! Great juice with decades of exemplary drinking still ahead of it. 2016-2040+. **94**.

#### **1978 Conn Creek "Lot 1" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

I last had a bottle of the Lot 1 cabernet from Conn Creek back in 2013 and the wine showed very well and quite a bit more refined than this particular bottle at our October tasting. The bouquet on this most recent example is deep and still quite vigorous, offering up scents of cassis, cigar ash, a touch of saddle leather, a fine base of soil, gentle tariness and a topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch four-square in personality, with a good core, fine balance and grip and still a bit of chewy tannin perking up the long finish. My last bottle of this was more vibrant, elegant and velvety on the palate and seemed more complex as well, so I am guessing that this particular bottle might have seen just a bit of

heat somewhere along the way. The last bottle merited 93 points, but this is not at that same level, though still quite drinkable. 2016-2035. **89.**

**1978 Diamond Creek Vineyards “Red Rock Terrace” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

1978 is a fabulous vintage for Al Brounstein’s beloved Diamond Creek Vineyards. Mr. Brounstein had only purchased the land for his vineyards on Diamond Mountain in 1967 and the first cabernet vines went into the ground here in 1968, so by 1978 they were now a decade old and starting to reach a good age. This particular bottle of the ’78 Red Rock Terrace was a touch more reticent than the also youthful bottle I drank five years ago, and it may well be that this wine is still in need of further bottle age to fully blossom. The bouquet is the most generous aspect of the wine at age thirty-eight, offering up a deep and complex blend of cassis, espresso, stony soil tones, cigar smoke, a touch of new leather and a framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very impressively soil-driven in personality, with a rock solid core, fine focus and a long, still moderately chewy finish of mountain cabernet tannin on the backend. Given that the tannins have remained virtually the same from five years ago, I start to wonder just a tad if they will always remain part of the equation. In any event, this wine still needs a bit more bottle age to fully blossom. 2020-2045+. **92+.**

**1978 Diamond Creek “Volcanic Hill” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

It had been several years since I last tasted the ’78 Diamond Creek Volcanic Hill cabernet and the wine is cruising along beautifully and almost getting ready for primetime drinking-almost! This is clearly one of the greatest wines ever produced from this estate and it is really still just a touch too young for primetime drinking, but it is getting close and will be absolutely magical once it fully blossoms. The deep, complex and truly superb nose soars from the glass in a mix of cassis, dark berries, meaty tones, cigar ash, a great base of minerality, a touch of soy and a gentle base of road tar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very, very deep at the core, with superb focus and grip, outstanding acidity and stunning length on the ripely tannic and flawlessly balanced finish. It really seems like I underrated this brilliant wine the last few times I tasted it! One of the iconic cabernets of this legendary era in California history. 2017-2050+. **97.**

**1978 Heitz Cellars “Bella Oaks Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

The 1978 Bella Oaks from Heitz is another very young and vibrant example of the vintage, and the wine really demands at least an hour of decanting time to blossom if it is to be drunk today. The wine is not overtly structured like the ’78 Burgess Vintage Select, but when first opened it shows an odd lactic or cheesy note that is not necessarily inviting. However, one hour on this characteristic is subsumed in beautiful fruit tones, and the wine begins to drink splendidly. Once blossomed, the nose is a superb blend of red cherries, orange, woodsmoke, a hint of mint, walnuts, a gentle bass note of bell pepper, chipotles, soil tones and a lovely high end of Rutherford spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very fresh, with a fine core of cherry fruit, lovely soil tones, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip. A fine bottle of ’78 that is now nearing its apogee, but which will continue to drink beautifully for a very long time. 2009-2030. **91.**

**1978 Heitz Wine Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon “Fay Vineyard” (Napa)**

I have now had the pleasure to drink the 1978 Heitz Cellars’ Fay Vineyard bottling on three occasions in the last couple of years, and it is a beautiful example of this top notch vintage. The bouquet soars from the glass in a very pure and *à point* mélange of black cherries, chipotle peppers, eucalyptus, tobacco, a nice touch of chocolate, Rutherford spice tones, woodsmoke and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very suave on the

attack, with a great core of ripe fruit, lovely soil tones, impeccable focus and balance, melting tannins and a very long, tangy and vibrant finish. Like so many of the very best examples of the 1978 cabernets, the Fay Vineyard bottling is at its apogee, but shows absolutely no signs of slowing down anytime in the next several decades. This was a very fitting close to this brief, but glorious chapter in the Heitz Cellars' single vineyard cab bottlings. 2010-2035. **94.**

**1978 Heitz Wine Cellars "Martha's Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

This most recent bottle of 1978 Heitz Martha's Vineyard was once again truly stunning, though sadly, this was my last bottle of this vintage of Martha's in my cellar. But, what a great moment in its evolution to be drinking it! The bouquet is utterly classic, soaring from the glass in a stunning blend of red and black cherries, blood orange, mint, cigar smoke, a touch of allspice, gentle chipotle notes, a beautifully complex base of soil and a deft touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and utterly suave on the attack, with stunning mid-palate depth, seamless balance, bright acids and great length and grip on the focused and refined finish. While the 1978 is now into its peak plateau, this wine has decades and decades of great drinking still ahead of it! Just a great, great wine and a perfect example why so many people think of Martha's Vineyard as one of California's First Growths. 2016-2050. **97.**



*The old stone winery of Heitz Wine Cellars.*

**1978 Jordan Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma)**

Jordan Vineyards was only started in 1976 and this 1978 cabernet sauvignon was only their third vintage at the fledgling winery. This was the sole wine based on Sonoma County fruit in our October tasting here in New York and stood out a bit from the rest of the lineup for this reason, but there is depth and complexity here that is quite impressive. The bouquet shows a



touch of the weediness of Sonoma cabernet in its constellation of black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, cigar ash, vanillin oak and the aforementioned gentle weediness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly youthful in personality, with a rock solid core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the complex finish. In our lineup of top 1978s, the Jordan did not have quite the same elegance of the very best wines of the vintage, but there are excellent raw materials here and this wine will provide plenty of enjoyment for decades to come. 2016-2040. **91+**.

**1978 Robert Keenan Cabernet Sauvignon (Spring Mountain)**

The 1978 Robert Keenan cabernet is a lovely old bottle that has begun to slowly slide down the far side of its plateau of maturity and has lost a bit of structural integrity on the palate, but still retains a lovely nose and delivers a fair bit of pleasure on the palate. The bouquet remains captivating in its blend of black cherries, chocolate, eucalyptus, a nice base of mountain soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still reasonably complex, with a velvety core of fruit, melted tannins and good length and grip on the now gently deconstructing finish. The wine is surprisingly showing just a touch of uncovered alcohol on the backend today, which I assume is a reflection of the wine starting to disintegrate a bit structurally, as I have a hard time imagining this was much over fourteen percent back in this era! It still has life in it, but it is starting to lose a bit of its attraction now. 2015-2030. **87**.

**1978 Matanzas Creek Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma County)**

The 1978 Matanzas Creek cabernet sauvignon is a stellar example of the vintage is now at its apogee of peak maturity, but has years and years of life still ahead of it. The outstanding nose jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of black cherries, plums, a hint of residual bell pepper, cigar ash, gentle notes of eucalyptus, dark soil tones and a gentle topnote of Sonoma herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a generous core, still a touch of backend tannin and excellent length and grip on the very classy finish. 1978 may still rank as the very finest year for cabernet sauvignon in the second half of the twentieth century, as these wines continue to cruise along with all the depth, grace and breed of utter classics! 2015-2035. **92**.

**1978 Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon (Mount Veeder) 375 ml.**

I managed to find a single half bottle of the great 1978 Mayacamas cabernet sauvignon, and my will power lasted almost a full year before I just had to pull the cork and see how the wine was drinking. My thinking was that out of half bottle the wine should be in its prime, whereas it is still a tad on the young side in regular-sized format, but the half was also still a bit too young for primetime drinking and I really wish I had left it in my cellar for a few more years! In any case, the wine was showing brilliantly, offering up a deep, ripe and very pure bouquet of black cherries, cigar smoke, a beautiful base of mountain soils, incipient notes of chipotles, just a whisper of petroleum jelly and a nice touch of dried eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still fairly young, with a rock solid core, great purity and focus, moderate tannins and great length and grip on the perfectly balanced and very soil-driven finish. A legend! 2012-2040+. **97**.

**1978 Château Montelena “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

The 1978 Château Montelena Estate cabernet sauvignon is a very good bottle of wine, but it is not quite up there with the top wines of this great vintage. The complex and very vibrant nose offers up scents of cassis, cigar ash, lovely soil tones, a bit of shoe polish, espresso and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very long, with a good core of fruit, a bit of firm acidity (from acidulation later in the élevage?) and a long, classy

and modestly tannic finish. This is a very good bottle of cabernet at its apogee, but I was hoping for just a bit more. 2010-2030+. **92.**

**1978 Mount Eden Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

As readers may recall from last year's article on Mount Eden Vineyards, the 1978 cabernet sauvignon was the one vintage of their older wines that I had never had good luck with, and the couple of examples of this rare wine that I had tasted in the last dozen years had all ended up being poorly-stored bottles. Such is the luck of the draw with older bottles sourced at auction, but happily, my last remaining bottle of the '78 cabernet sauvignon was pristine and I finally had a chance to drink a truly representative example of this excellent wine. This is now starting to drink very well indeed, but it is one of the long-distance runners from 1978 and there will be no need to drink the wine up in the near future! The bouquet is very black fruity, offering up a deep and complex blend of cassis, a touch of bell pepper, cigar ash, stony soil tones and a lovely topnote of fresh bay leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows lovely sweet black fruit at the core, with fine transparency and focus, just a bit of remaining backend tannin and impeccable balance and grip on the long, pure and complex finish. A beautiful wine. 2017-2045+. **93+.**

**1978 Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Insignia" (Napa)**

Drinking Joseph Phelps reds from the decade of the 1970s is one of the great treats in the world of wine. 1978 was one of the earliest iterations for this Bordeaux-inspired blend from the winery, which was composed of a blend of fifty percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty percent merlot and twenty percent cabernet franc. The wine was fully mature when I last saw a bottle in 2007, but time has not touched it and today it is every bit as vibrant and expressive. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, sweet blackberries, dark soil tones, a bit of tariness, cigar smoke, a dollop of fresh herbs and a beautiful topnote of mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a superb core, impressive focus and balance, fine-grained and now quite modest tannins, good acids and lovely balance on the long, complex and velvety finish. A beautiful wine at its apogee and one where I clearly underestimated its potential longevity the last time I had a chance to drink it. 2016-2050. **94.**

**1978 Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Eisele Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

The 1978 vintage of Eisele Vineyard cabernet sauvignon from Joseph Phelps has always been one of the most beautiful bottles from the winery that I have had the good fortune to drink and fully underscores just how great this estate was in its heyday. This most recent bottle at our October tasting was absolutely stunning, soaring from the glass in a vibrant blend of black cherries, sweet cassis, Cuban cigar smoke, dark soil tones, dried eucalyptus, a touch of cigar ash and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off marvelous mid-palate depth, with superb balance and focus, still a bit of remaining tannin and outstanding length and grip on the pure and classy finish. An iconic Napa cabernet in full bloom! 2016-2040. **96.**

**1978 Robert Mondavi Vineyards "Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

The 1978 Robert Mondavi Reserve cabernet sauvignon will always occupy a warm spot in my heart, as this was the wine I drank on my first visit to New York as an adult back in 1986. We drank it at Windows on the World at the top of the World Trade Center and it helped inspire me to move to the city a couple of years later. Beyond its sentimental value for me, the wine is really one of the best Mondavi cabernets of the decade of the 1970s and continues to drink beautifully today at age thirty-eight. The bouquet wafts from the glass in an excellent mélange of black cherries, cigar wrapper, a touch of eucalyptus, a fine base of Rutherford Bench soil tones and a deft touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and alive



with the vibrancy of peak maturity, with a good core, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the refined and very classy finish. This is at its apogee and is a superb example of the fine '78 vintage. 2016-2040. **94+**.



### **1978 Ridge Vineyards “York Creek” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

The 1978 Ridge York Creek cabernet sauvignon is a good, solid example of the vintage, with plenty of depth and stuffing, but just a touch of brett that keeps its score down a bit. The bouquet is a black fruity blend of cassis, dark berries, saddle leather, cigar ash, stony minerality and a topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now nicely resolved on the attack, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, well-balanced and gently chewy finish. There is a sturdiness to the structure of this wine that seems likely to always be part of its equation, but the wine is very nicely balanced, complex and drinks very well at the present time. This most recent bottle at our October tasting showed even better than one I had and wrote up four years ago. 2016-2035. **90**.

### **1978 Ridge Vineyards “Monte Bello” Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

It is hard to believe that more than six years had passed since I last drank a bottle of Ridge’s flagship 1978 from the Monte Bello Vineyard. The wine has not missed a beat over the ensuing years and is still climbing in quality and will be better with another five years in the

cellar, but it is blossoming beautifully and is awfully easy to drink today! The superb nose wafts from the glass in a blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, saddle leather, cigar ash, a beautifully complex base of soil, just a bit of Monte Bello's medicinal overtones (which I also often find in old La Mission Haut-Brion) and a sound base of American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with ripe, moderate tannins, fine focus and grip and a very, very long, vibrant finish. This is a great vintage of Monte Bello that is still improving and should last for many decades to come! Great juice. 2021-2075. **95+**.

**1978 Rutherford Hill Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1978 Rutherford Hill cabernet sauvignon is a very nice wine that has been fully mature for decades, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The ripe and succulent nose offers up a mix of black cherries, a touch of chocolate, cigar smoke, residual notes of bell pepper, a nice touch of soil and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with fairly gentle structure, but sneaky length and grip on the velvety finish. This is not the most profound cabernet to be found in the 1978 vintage, but it is a very well-made wine that continues to drink very well indeed. Good juice. 2010-2025. **88**.

**1978 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Cask 23" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

The 1978 "Cask 23" bottling from Stag's Leap Wine Cellars was another wine that I had enormous expectations for prior to our October tasting, but though the wine showed quite well, it was not in our top division in our lineup and was eclipsed in quality by several wines that I would not have predicted to be better than it prior to the dinner. The bouquet shows a touch of brett amongst its complex blend of black cherries, leather, cigar ash, gentle spice tones, a lovely base of soil, smoke and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with fine focus, a good core, melting tannins and a very, very long, and *à point* finish. I do not want to be too critical, as this is still a very good wine, but I was really hoping for even a bit more! 2016-2035. **92**.

**1978 Sterling Vineyards "Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)**

Ric Forman vinified the 1978 Sterling cabernets, but left the winery while their *elevage* was still in process and was not responsible for their bottling. Consequently, the finished wines were never quite up to the same level of quality as the other vintages that he crafted during his historic run at Sterling from 1969 to 1978, but this most recent bottle of the '78 Cabernet Reserve showed as well as I have ever seen it at our tasting in October. The bouquet is quite impressive, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a bit of mintiness, creosote and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with pretty good complexity, fine focus and very good length and grip on the still modestly tannic. This does not have quite the same degree of complexity as the wines Ric crafted from beginning to final bottling at Sterling, but it retains plenty of vigor and has miles to go before it sleeps. 2016-2035+. **90**.

## THE 2015 VINTAGE IN THE LOIRE VALLEY (PART TWO) AND PLENTY OF OLDER CHINON NOTES



This is part two of my report on the 2015 vintage in the Loire Valley, as I did not get around to tasting all of the current releases from a couple of my favorite importers of Loire Valley wines in time for the first part of this report, which appeared in Issue 65. As is my custom, the report also includes all of the recent notes on other vintages of Loire Valley wines that I have tasted since last October, and this includes a nice report on a superb vertical tasting of Chinon that I was invited to participate in hosted by Mannie Berk of the Rare Wine Company in January of this year. We went all the way back to Domaine Olga Raffault's library release of the 1977 Picasses (a superb wine), so it was a deep and varied tasting that nicely adds some depth to the section on Chinon, as also included are the most recent releases from 2014 from that domaine and also Domaine Bernard Baudry. I have been tasting an awful lot of truly exceptional Loire wines in the last few months, for in addition to the notes that are found in the report that follows, I have also done a couple of big vertical tastings from two of Chavignol's greatest producers, Gérard Boulay and François Cotat, but notes on those two tastings will wait for full historic features on the two estates, which will appear in an upcoming issue of View From the Cellar. In the meantime, there are notes on plenty of outstanding current releases in the pages below. I have added again the 2015 vintage introduction that I wrote in Issue 65, as I know it is often more

helpful to have the report on the growing season and vintage characteristics handy with the current round of tasting notes, rather than having to jump back to the previous article to see how 2015 or 2014 was in one particular area of the Loire. As is customary, the tastings notes below are arranged regionally from west to east, and then by vintage, and alphabetically within each vintage subset.

The 2015 vintage in the Loire Valley is a very good, sometimes outstanding, but also somewhat inconsistent year, as not every region along the meandering banks of this beautiful river fared equally well in the hot summer of 2015. The spring was early and warm, but there were some issues with flowering reducing yields right out of the blocks- particularly in Pouilly-Fumé and Sancerre. In general, the spring augured well for the year (other than the difficulties during *floraison* in isolated sectors) and set the table for what could have been a great vintage across the board. The following months of mid-summer were hot and dry, as was the case throughout France in 2015, and as the summer went along, issues of hydric stress and blocked maturation plagued certain vineyards throughout the Loire and this is where the inconsistency of the vintage can be found. Younger vines and stonier soils had the most difficult time during the drought of mid-summer, but other than these isolated pockets of blocked maturation, most regions were able to ripen up their bunches completely by the time autumn started to arrive. Harvesting began very early in the eastern end of the Loire, with the sauvignon blanc quite precocious in Sancerre and (particularly) Pouilly-Fumé, with the resulting wines generous, pure and nicely zesty, but without the cut and grip of a cooler and more drawn out growing season.

Moving westward, there was good and bad news in the Touraine, as the chenin blanc grape did very well in this year and its lovely ripeness was augmented by plenty of botrytis arriving in the *fin de saison*, making this the most heavily-glazed year here since 1997. With noble rot defining the vintage in Vouvray and Montlouis, it is not surprising that the real strength of the 2015 vintage is with the Demi-Sec wines on up to Moelleux and other dessert level bottlings in this sector, with the wines showing some stylistic similarities to the young 1990s at these early stages of evolution. Domaine Huët in particular has made some monumental bottlings at the upper levels of sweetness in 2015. There are also some very good Sec bottlings to be found in Vouvray in this vintage, but quantities will be smaller at this level, as the strength of the vintage was with the sweeter wines. I had heard reports prior to starting to taste wines from 2015 that some Vouvray Sec bottlings were going to be very high in alcohol this year, but I did not find this to be the case with the examples that I tasted. Red grapes in the Touraine did not fare quite as well as the chenin blanc in Vouvray and Montlouis, as the arrival of botrytis was not the same welcome event and the noble rot was also accompanied by less noble grey rot, with the gamay grape in particular struggling with this scourge in the lead up to picking. The examples of Touraine Sauvignon Blanc that I have tried from 2015 are nice wines, with plump and generous fruit tones, nice aromatics, but many seemed a bit soft and low in acid from the heat of the summer.

In the major red wine core regions of the central Loire, Bourgueil, Chinon and Saumur-Champigny, the cabernet franc grapes ripened beautifully, but fairly briskly in the heat of 2015, so that the wines do not have the same backend vivacity generally found in the 2014 vintage here. Consequently, the structures of these fine reds are a bit more plush in style and the wines likely to delight sooner, but perhaps not last as long in bottle as the reds from the previous and

quite strong vintage of 2014. That said, there are a lot of 2015s from this sector that are flat out delicious to drink out of the blocks, with slightly lower acidity, but plush cores, fine-grained and often pretty laid back tannins, and lovely purity and succulence. For those who prefer to age their red Loire wines over the long haul from these appellations, 2015 may not be quite as favorable as 2014, but the 2015 wines in general have balance, lovely fruit tones and plenty of personality and should still have no difficulties cruising along at least a couple of decades in bottle. Along with Vouvray's and Montlouis' sweeter bottlings, the red wines of these three great appellations are probably the strongest group of wines to be found in all of the Loire in 2015. In the Anjou, the botrytis is reported to be generous and energizing and it looks to be a classic year for the sweet bottlings from this section of the Loire, though I have not yet tasted a very wide selection from this part of the Loire and am looking forward to trying more in the months to come.

In Muscadet, 2015 is not quite as strong as in other sectors of the Loire Valley. Hopes of a great vintage in 2015 were dashed when substantial rains fell in September, forcing *vignerons*' hands and leading to wines with good purity and complexity, but without the customary backend cut and grip that would have been evident without the rains leading into harvest. However, prior to the untimely rainy weather, Muscadet was on pace for a lovely vintage, so *vignerons* had already attained pretty good ripeness prior to the clouds rolling in and the wines are still surprisingly good, given how much rain was dumped on the vineyards right before harvest. I should note that I have not yet seen some of my favorite 2015 Muscadets from estates such as Domaine de la Pépière and Domaine Luneau-Papin, and it may well be that these very talented *vignerons* have produced 2015s that are even a cut above some of the good examples I have tasted from other producers. I plan to start working on a second round of coverage on the 2015 Loire Valley wines as soon as I am back from Burgundy at the end of November, as it was simply not possible to taste through all of my favorite producers' wines from this vintage this time around prior to my departure for Beaune.

### ***Sparkling Wines***

#### **Les Maisons Bullées Rosé- Paul et Corinne Gillet (Les Maisons Brûlées) Crown Cap**

The current release of Les Maisons Bullées Rosé from Paul et Corinne Gillet is from the 2015 vintage and is composed entirely of Gamay. The wine is vibrant and nicely wild on the nose, offering up scents of *fraises du bois*, blood orange, wheat toast, a nice base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and frothy, with a good core, lovely complexity and a trace of volatility that tends to enervate the palate- at least for those of us reasonably tolerant of a bit of VA. The finish is long, the bubbles nicely done and the wine is quite complex. 2017-2025. **89.**

#### **Bocca di Rosa Rosé Pétillant NV- Julien Pineau (Crown Cap)**

The Bocca di Rosa Rosé Pétillant from Julien Pineau is composed entirely of cabernet sauvignon and hails from the 2015 vintage. The wine is nicely pale salmon in color and offers up a wild and complex nose of melon, orange peel, lovely soil tones, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core, a touch of VA, fine bubbles and impressive backend energy on the long, complex and nicely balanced finish. If a bit of volatile acidity does not deter you, this is a very elegant and complex bottle of sparkler. 2017-2025. **90.**

### **Touraine Brut Rosé Pétillant NV- Domaine François Pinon**

François Pinon's Brut Rosé non-vintage Pétillant is produced from a blend of Grolleau and Côt and made in very small quantities. The current release is really a lovely wine, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of raspberries, violets, chalky soil tones, cherry skin and a touch of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and gently vinous, with bright, zesty acids, lovely focus and grip, a fine core, frothy *mousse* and impressive backend minerality on the long and complex finish. This is lovely juice! 2017-2030. **91.**

### **Vouvray Pétillant Non-Dosé NV- Domaine François Pinon**

The Vouvray Pétillant Non-Dosé NV from Domaine François Pinon is a fine bottle, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of quince, orange peel, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a hint of the smokiness to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, mineraly and bone dry finish. This is really nicely done and clearly spent some time blossoming in the Pinon cellars prior to release. 2017-2030. **90.**

### **2014 Vouvray Pétillant Brut- Domaine François Pinon**

The 2014 Vouvray Pétillant Brut from François Pinon is a lovely young wine, but it tastes to me as if it were a bit younger than the "Non-Dosé" bottling concurrently in the market, and I might be inclined to allow this fine bottle to blossom with a bit of cellaring. The bouquet is bright and zesty, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, quince, a nice base of soil, a hint of honeycomb and a gentle topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully snappy, with a lovely core, quite discreet *dosage*, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is certainly tasty today, but just a year's worth of bottle age would really allow it to blossom nicely. 2018-2030. **90.**

### **Muscadet**

*While autumn rains robbed Muscadet producers of the possibility of a legendary vintage in 2015, the wet weather could not undo all of the glories of summer, and the best 2015s that I tasted for this report are really lovely wines- perhaps not with quite the customary cut and grip of a great classic year, but far above the quality of an "average" vintage. Most are truly delicious right out of the blocks and for the next ten years, it is going to be hard for folks to remember that 2015 was not a great year in Muscadet!*

### **2015 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine- Domaine de la Pépière**

The 2015 "regular bottling of Muscadet from Domaine de la Pépière is an excellent follow-up to the lovely 2014 version. The bouquet is nicely ripe and pretty, with a wide open personality evident in its mélange of lemon, green apple, briny oceanic tones, white flowers and a touch of straw. On the palate the wine is fullish and nicely crisp for the vintage, with a good core, fine mineral drive and lovely length and grip on the zesty finish. There is a touch of backend structural relaxation here, due to the rainy weather at harvest time, but that said, this is one of the crispest 2015 Muscadets I have tasted so far. Lovely juice. 2017-2027. **90.**

### **2015 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine "les Gras Moutons"- Domaine de la Pépière**

The 2015 les Gras Moutons" from Domaine de la Pépière is a really lovely bottle of Muscadet, showing the generous purity of perfectly ripe fruit and a very little sign of dilution on the backend from the autumn rains that turned a great vintage into a more middle level year. The bouquet is bright and complex, offering up scents of yellow fruit, wet stones, lemongrass, lovely salinity and a touch of straw in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and wide



open in personality, with a quite respectable core, fine focus and complexity and very good length and grip on the bright and easy going finish. The customary cut and grip of this bottling are not evident in this vintage, but there is depth, breed and complexity here that will satisfy enormously over the relative near-term. A fine result in a tough autumn. 2017-2025. **91.**

**2015 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Clos des Allées”- Domaine Luneau-Papin**

The 2015 Clos des Allées from Luneau-Papin is one of the finest examples of the 2015 vintage that I have tasted from Muscadet. The wine is pure, complex and flat out stunning on the nose, soaring from the glass in a blend of lemon, salty ocean breeze, stony minerality, orange peel and a touch of straw in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core, bright, zesty acidity, superb focus and grip and outstanding backend mineral drive on the long and vibrant finish. This has the cut and grip of a wine that was harvested before the rainy weather began. 2017-2035. **94+.**

**2015 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “La Grange” V.V.- Domaine Luneau-Papin**

The 2015 old vine bottling of La Grange from Pierre Luneau is an excellent bottle of Muscadet, offering up superb complexity on both the nose and palate. The classy bouquet jumps from the glass in a ripe and gently briny blend of tart pear, beautiful leesy tones, oceanside, straw and just a whisper of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with the wide open personality of the vintage, a fien core and outstanding soil signature on the long, complex and just lovely finish. I could drink this wine all night long! 2017-2030. **92.**



*A fine old lineup of high class Muscadet- the labels have changed a bit, but the terroir remains the same.*



### **2015 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “L d’Or”- Domaine Luneau-Papin**

I am not totally persuaded that the top bottlings from estates like Domaine Luneau-Papin and Domaine de la Pépière are superior to ten years ago (as the wines were excellent back then as well), but their packaging is certainly far more elegant these days. The 2015 L d’Or from Pierre Luneau is an exceptional example of the vintage, offering up a deep and complex nose of bread fruit, gorgeous leesy elements, granitic soil tones, a touch of lemon peel and ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, bright and complex, with a fine core, impressive focus and grip and a long, wide open and classy finish. The rainy harvest time shows a bit in the acids here, which are more framing acids than the customary chassis of most vintages, but my gut feeling is just that this will allow the wine to reach its apogee a bit quicker, with little diminution in quality. Fine juice. 2017-2030. **93.**

### **2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Clisson”- Domaine Luneau-Papin**

The 2014 Clisson from Domaine Luneau-Papin is a gorgeous young Muscadet, with tremendous depth and nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. The beautiful bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of bread fruit, a touch of lemon, gently nutty leesy tones, a complex base of minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and svelte, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. Fine, fine juice that is already tasty, but will cruise along in bottle for many years. 2017-2035+. **94.**

### **2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Terre de Pierre”- Domaine Luneau-Papin**

Domaine Luneau-Papin’s 2014 Terre de Pierre is outstanding. The bouquet is pure, vibrant and shows lovely oceanic influence in its constellation of tart pear, breadfruit, ocean breeze, lovely stony minerality, a gentle touch of leanness and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with impeccable balance, a lovely core, superb soil signature and a very long, complex and zesty finish. This is still fairly primary in its flavor composition and will add dimension with further bottle age, but it is so tasty in its youth, that it is going to be hard to not drink right now! 2017-2035. **93.**

### ***Muscadet Rouge***

#### **2015 Cabernet Franc- La Pépiè (Marc Ollivier)**

The 2015 La Pépiè Cabernet Franc is a low alcohol wine with loads of personality, as it is 11.7 percent octane this year, but very expressive on both the nose and palate. The first class bouquet offers up a vibrant blend of cassis, black cherries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, cigar wrapper and a touch of bitter chocolate. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and tangy, with fine intensity of flavor, tangy acids and good, solid length and grip on the complex and very slightly tannic finish. This is just a touch sinewy on the backend and not quite as full in the mid-palate as the Côt in this vintage, but it is still very tasty. 2017-2025. **88.**

#### **2015 Côt- La Pépiè (Marc Ollivier)**

The 2015 Côt from La Pépiè is even lower octane than the lovely, middleweight version fashioned here in 2014, as the wine this year is only 11.7 percent alcohol. Despite its lower octane, the bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a bright blend of dark berries, woodsmoke, peppercorn, dark soil tones and espresso. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and intensely flavored, with lovely complexity, just a touch of backend tannin and excellent focus and grip on the long finish. I would assume that Monsieur Ollivier decided to

pick the grapes here ahead of the rainy weather, which would account for the lower octane and the still excellent backend grip. This is a lovely middleweight once again! 2017-2025. **89.**

### ***Anjou Blanc***

#### **2015 Anjou Blanc- Agnès et René Mosse**

The 2015 Anjou Blanc bottling from Agnès et René Mosse is excellent, offering up impressive depth and breed on both the nose and the palate. The youthful bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of apple, quince, chalky soil tones, just a whisper of the honeycomb to come, white flowers and a gentle topnote of lanolin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core, lovely soil inflection, bright acids and a very long, youthfully complex finish. This is very easy to drink today, but I suspect it will close up for a few years somewhere down the road, before blossoming and hitting its plateau of peak maturity. Lovely dry chenin blanc. 2017-2040. **92+.**

#### **2015 Les Bonnes Blanches- Agnès et René Mosse**

The 2015 Les Bonnes Blanches from Agnès et René Mosse is a lovely bottle of chenin blanc, which is none the worse for not being submitted to *les officials* for the AOC ruling. The bouquet is deep, complex and refined, offering up scents of apple, quince, lanolin, chalky soil tones and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows a bit of its wild side, with a lovely core, bright acids, lovely transparency and fine length and grip on the very well-balanced and nascently complex finish. Fine juice. 2017-2030+. **92.**

### ***Anjou Rouge***

#### **2015 Anjou Rouge- Agnès et René Mosse**

The 2015 Anjou Rouge from Agnès et René Mosse is an outstanding wine in the making, delivering a superb bouquet of black cherries, cigar wrapper, espresso, saddle leather, a fine base of soil tones and incipient notes of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the tangy and still quite youthful finish. This is going to be a dynamite bottle with a bit of bottle age! 2022-2050. **92.**

#### **2015 Chico- Agnès et René Mosse**

The 2015 Chico bottling from Agnès et René Mosse is the first one hundred percent Côt wine that they have produced. The bouquet is deep, primary and very promising, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of tree bark, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and almost sappy at the core, with terrific soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long and nascently complex finish. This is already easy to drink, but it is still a puppy and really deserves at least three or four years in the cellar to allow the tannins to fade a bit and the secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Outstanding Côt! 2020-2045. **92.**

#### **2015 Bois Rouge- SARL 4B2F (Agnès et René Mosse)**

This cuvée is the young vine bottling of Anjou rouge from the Domaine Mosse, but it is not listed on the label anywhere as hailing from their domaine! The 2015 Bois Rouge is twelve and a half percent alcohol, is a blend of seventy-five percent cabernet franc and twenty-five percent cabernet sauvignon and offers up a complex and classic nose of cassis, dark berries, a touch of tree bark, cigar smoke and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with just a touch of backend tannin, good fruit at the core and fine

transparency on the long and tasty finish. This is eminently drinkable today, but another year or two of bottle age will allow the tannins to fully resolve and the wine will be even better. A great value. 2017-2030. **89+**.

### **2013 Anjou Rouge “Une Emotion”- Domaine du Closel**

The 2013 Une Emotion from Domaine du Closel is only twelve percent alcohol and is still a bit tightly-knit on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up scents of dark berries, cigar ash, herb tones, dark soil and just a bit of barnyard. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely soil-driven in personality, with good, but not great depth at the core, nascent complexity and a bit of chewy tannin perking up the long finish. This was not the easiest vintage in Anjou and this wine is quite successful for the year, but it is currently a bit bound up in its structural elements and does not have the customary depth of fruit to cover the bones right now, so a bit of bottle age will be mandatory. However, the balance is good and I have to imagine that this will be a fairly tasty middleweight in a few years' time. 2020-2040. **87+**.

### **2012 Le Gros- Agnès et René Mosse**

This wine does not have an “official” vintage, as no doubt the INAO took some exception with the wine, but it is from Lot “12012”, which at least gives a good idea of when it may have been harvested. I assume this was destined to be the Anjou rouge bottling from the Mosses, but at twelve percent octane, it probably ran afoul of *les officials*. The wine is a blend of cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc and offers up a nose of dark berries, tree bark, a bit of saddle leather, fresh herbs, cola and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and a touch spritzzy, with a good core and soil signature, moderate tannins and good length and grip. This wine walks on the wild side a bit, and probably did quite a bit more a couple of years ago, but there is an awful lot of good things going on in the glass as well and despite its slightly fragile structural integrity, I do like it! As is the case with so many staunchly natural wines in the Loire, this is not for everyone, but it deserves an honest hearing, as there is clearly an audience out there for this wine. 2017-2025. **88**.

## ***Savennières***

### **2015 Savennières “Clos du Papillon”- Domaine du Closel**

The 2015 Clos du Papillon from Domaine du Closel is a beautiful young bottle of Savennières, offering up a still quite primary bouquet of quince, apple, beeswax, lanolin and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with a gorgeous core of fruit, great transparency, bright acids and impeccable focus and balance on the very long, youthful and extremely promising finish. Great juice that is already very impressive to drink, despite it still being a puppy and promising another level of profundity with at least a few years of bottle age! Try to keep your hands off of it for three or four years before really starting to have at it! 2020-2050+. **94**.

### **2015 Savennières “la Jalousie”- Domaine du Closel**

Domaine du Closel's 2015 Savennières “la Jalousie” is a fine, fine example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a youthful and impressive constellation of apple, bee pollen, a touch of orange peel, incipient notes of paraffin, spring flowers and chalky soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively snappy, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright acids and fine focus and *nervosité* on the long and primary finish. This will be an outstanding bottle of Savennières in the fullness of time, but it is a bit more buttoned up

behind its girdle of acidity out of the blocks than the Clos du Papillon 2015, and will insist on some time in the cellar to start to stir. 2020-2045. **92+**.

#### **2015 Savennières “Arena”- Agnès et René Mosse**

The 2015 Arena from Domaine Mosse is a superb bottle of Savennières in the making, offering up a deep and still quite primary bouquet of quince, apple, a touch of tangerine, a touch of lanolin, chalky soil tones and a delicate topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, bright acids, fine soil signature and outstanding length and grip on the poised and very well-balanced finish. A fine, fine bottle in the making, but I would opt for tucking it away for at least a couple of years in the cellar and allow it to fully blossom. 2020-2050. **93**.

#### **2014 Savennières “la Jalousie”- Domaine du Closel**

The 2014 Savennières “la Jalousie” from Domaine du Closel is a very strong effort for this difficult vintage, as the wine offers up a complex bouquet of apple, quince, a touch of wet wool, beeswax, orange peel and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a slightly four-square personality *vis à vis* the stunning 2015 Clos du Papillon, but with fine depth, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. Given how challenging this growing season was in Savennières, this wine has turned out splendidly! 2017-2030. **91**.



### **2014 Les Vieux Clos- Nicolas Joly**

This cuvée produced by Nicolas Joly from vines he planted in the 1990s, from *selection massale* cuttings taken from the Clos de la Coulée de Serrant. The 2014 Les Vieux Clos is already a pretty golden color, but starts out very reductive when first opened and eventually offers up an evolving bouquet of fallen apples, beeswax, lanolin, chalky soil tones and incipient smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and slightly spritzy, with a deep core, bright acids and plenty of “natural wine” wildness to its flavor profile on the long and snappy finish. I like this wine better on the nose than on the palate today, but perhaps it will come around with further bottle age? Perhaps. This is a very true wine in the style that Monsieur Joly loves, but with the rain that plagued late harvesters in the western Loire in 2014, I am not sure it is my cup of tea. 2019-2035? ???

### **2014 Clos de la Coulée de Serrant- Nicolas Joly**

The 2014 Clos de la Coulée de Serrant from Nicolas Joly is a very young wine on the nose, offering up scents of tangerine, beeswax, lovely soil tones, citrus peel and a touch of fuzzy, not squeaky clean botrytis tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows good cut and structural chassis, a rock solid core and very good length and grip on the complex and slightly volatile finish. Like the 2014 Les Vieux Clos, this wine has a wildness and slightly unstable personality that I find less than reassuring for the future. I know that Monsieur Joly always argues that his wines need plenty of air and I both gave this wine a very long sojourn in decanter the first day (with frequent revisits) and played with it for a few days, but my confidence was not increased. At the end of the day, I really do not feel I have a good read on this wine by any means, but it will shock me if it somehow pulls itself together with bottle age and can match the superb 2012 vintage here. 2020-2035+? **82-89?**

### **2012 Clos de la Coulée de Serrant- Nicolas Joly**

Nicolas Joly's 2012 Clos de la Coulée de Serrant is a beautiful wine that is starting to show fine evolution on both the nose and palate and is starting to really hit its stride at age five. The bouquet offers up a bright and complex constellation of lemon, quince, candied orange peel, lanolin, chalky soil tones and incipient notes of both the beeswax and leather to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and complex, with a great core of fruit, superb soil inflection, bright acids and a very long, ripe and focused finish. Not only is this a true wine, but it is a truly superb wine, with a far cleaner and more stable palate impression than the 2014 version. It is still on the youthful side and will be even better with further bottle age, but it is already a very impressive glass for current drinking! 2017-2040+. **94.**

### ***Saumur Blanc***

#### **2015 Saumur Blanc- Domaine Filliatreau**

The 2015 Saumur Blanc from Domaine Filliatreau is a very pretty, youthful bottle of chenin blanc, with just a touch of that varietal's adolescent dustiness in evidence in the bouquet of quince, crab apple, chalky soil tones and lanolin. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite solid at the core, with fine soil signature, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the still primary finish. This is quite tasty today, albeit not overly complex, and would also age nicely, if the synthetic cork it is sealed with can stand the test of time. Good solid juice. 2017-2027? **88.**

### **2006 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Domaine Guiberteau**

This was the first wine I had tasted from Romain Guiberteau and I was dutifully impressed, but this should come as no surprise, as Romain was tutored by Dani Foucault of Clos Rougeard when he took over the first of his family’s vineyards in Saumur back in 1996. The 2006 Brézé is a stunning example of Saumur Blanc that is now at its apogee and drinking with great agility and verve. The bouquet offers up a classic blend of sweet quince, tangerine, chalky minerality, a touch of honeycomb and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with bright, zesty acids, excellent focus and balance and a very long, complex and succulent finish. Really lovely juice that may well even improve a touch with further bottle age. 2017-2035. **93+**.

### ***Saumur-Champigny***

#### **2015 Saumur-Champigny - Domaine Filliatreau**

The 2015 Saumur-Champigny from Domaine Filliatreau comes sealed with a plastic cork, which may prove too bad for the wine over the long haul (unless synthetic corks have improved their long-term capacity to protect the wine in the last few years), as the wine is really pretty and would probably age nicely for a decade or more with a natural cork. In any case, no sense worrying about the future until it gets here, and in the meantime, the wine offers up a superb bouquet of cherries, a touch of menthol, lovely soil tones, a touch of cigar wrapper and a topnote of juniper berries. On the palate the wine is medium-full, juicy and complex, with a perfectly respectable core, lovely soil signature, tangy acids, modest tannins and excellent grip on the well-balanced, albeit very slightly short finish. I would guess that this is made from some of the younger vines at the estate, but the 2015 vintage has given it plenty of depth and stuffing. 2017-2025+? **89**.

#### **2015 Saumur-Champigny “la Grande Vignolle”- Domaine Filliatreau**

The 2015 la Grande Vignolle bottling from Domaine Filliatreau is also sealed under plastic, so I wonder if it will last as long as the 2005s in my cellar (please see below). However, over the short-term there will be no issue and the wine is outstanding on both the nose and palate. The youthful bouquet jumps from the glass in a deep and classy blend of black cherries, gravelly soil tones, Cuban cigar, espresso, woodsmoke and a gentle topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite pure on the attack, with a fine core, excellent transparency, ripe, fairly firm tannins and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. This is approachable today, but it is still a puppy and I would opt for giving it at least a couple of years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to emerge, as this is going to be a very complex and very classy wine once it has really started to blossom. I wish it was under natural cork, as that would be one less thing to worry about. 2019-2040? **93**.

#### **2014 Saumur “Château Fouquet”- Domaine Filliatreau**

The bottling of Château Fouquet from Domaine Filliatreau hails from vineyards that stray just outside of the official boundary for Saumur-Champigny, and hence the designation of Saumur on the label. The 2014 is an excellent bottle of cabernet franc, wafting from the glass in a complex and classy blend of dark berries, cherries, cigar wrapper, beautiful soil tones, coffee bean and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and quite nicely accessible, with a good core, lovely focus and grip, just a bit of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. The vineyards here are in conversion to biodynamic viticulture, so why on earth is this wine still sealed with a plastic cork? 2017-2030+. **90**.

### **2013 Saumur-Champigny “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Filliatreau**

The 2013 Domaine Filliatreau Vieilles Vignes is a really strong example of the vintage. The wine offers up lovely complexity on the nose, but is still a bit closed down on the palate and a bit tannic on the backend, so I would plan to tuck this away in the cellar for a few years and let it come fully into its own. The bouquet is already superb, offering up a refined constellation of red berries, cherries, a touch of tobacco leaf, menthol, complex, *tuffeau* soil tones and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with good, solid depth at the core, fine-grained tannins, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This does not have the depth in the mid-palate that a 2015 would have, but it is a very complete wine in its typical 2013 guise and will make great drinking for a couple of decades, once it has had another year or two to really blossom. 2019-2040. **91+**.

### **2005 Saumur-Champigny “la Grande Vignolle”- Domaine Filliatreau**

The 2005 la Grande Vignolle from Domaine Filliatreau is aging well and still has plenty of stuffing, but it is currently in a bit of a closed phase and should probably be left alone for a few more years of cellaring. This was one of my last few bottles and I will not touch another until at least 2020, as the wine seems to be shuttered and need more time right now. The bouquet is deep and fairly black fruity at the present time, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, tree bark, dark soil tones and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a bit of Barolo-like tariness on the backend, moderate tannins and a long, dense and rather hunkered down finish. The sappiness that this wine had in its youth is still evident, but it is now buried in the core of the wine and this is rather grumpy at the present time. I had not opened a bottle of this in several years and was expecting it to be totally singing right now, but it is hibernating! 2019-2035+? **90+?**

### ***Bourgueil and St. Nicolas de Bourgueil***

#### **2015 Bourgueil “Merci la Vie”- Xavier Courant (Domaine de l’Oubliée)**

The 2015 Bourgueil “Merci la Vie” from Xavier Courant is an outstanding young wine, with beautiful refinement on both the nose and palate and a sophisticated structural chassis which will carry it very nicely in the cellar, without precluding early enjoyment. The lovely bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of blackberries, espresso, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, incipient notes of tree bark and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and intensely flavored, with lovely mid-palate concentration, superb transparency, moderate, well-integrated tannins and a long, bouncy finish. This is high class Bourgueil that is made to drink on the younger side, as it hails from sand and gravelly soils, but has the balance and depth to also age long and gracefully and I would be inclined to give it at least a couple of years in the cellar to develop additional complexity. High class juice. 2019-2045. **91+**.

#### **2014 Bourgueil “Alouettes”- Domaine de la Chanteleuserie**

The 2014 Bourgueil “Alouettes” from Domaine de la Chanteleuserie is a lovely example of the vintage and is starting to drink very nicely. The bouquet is pure and vibrant, offering up scents of cherries, dark soil tones, cigar ash, a nice touch of bell pepper and a delicate topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, modest tannins, good acidity and lovely balance on the long and nascently complex finish. This



is quite tasty today, but will be even better with another couple of years' worth of bottle age. 2017-2035. **90.**

**2014 Bourgueil “Notre Histoire”- Xavier Courant (Domaine de l'Oubliée)**

The 2014 Notre Histoire bottling from Xavier Courant is another superb young Bourgueil, but this wine is a bit reductive when first poured and one needs to give it a bit of aeration to allow it to blossom. The soils here are clay and limestone, which gives more structure to the young wine. With air, the wine is flat out excellent, offering up a very deep and nascently complex nose of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, cigar wrapper and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with a youthful profile, superb core of fruit, excellent nascent complexity and a long, ripely tannic and focused finish. This deserves some time in the cellar to fully blossom and will live long and prosper in bottle! 2020-2050. **93.**



***Chinon Blanc***

**2015 Chinon Blanc- Domaine Bernard Baudry**

The 2015 Chinon Blanc from Domaine Bernard Baudry is an outstanding wine, which offers the possibility of drinking early in its youth, but also has the requisite structural chassis to also age long and gracefully. The bouquet delivers a fine, complex blend of apple, a very discreet touch of lanolin, incipient notes of beeswax, chalky soil tones and hints of the honeycomb that will come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully

balanced, with good, respectable depth at the core, bright acids, excellent focus and a long, zesty and soil-driven finish. This is only 12.5 percent octane, which keeps it light on its feet and augurs extremely well for its evolution in bottle. Lovely juice. 2017-2035. **92.**

**2015 Chinon Blanc “Champ Chenin”- Domaine Olga Raffault**

The 2015 Chinon Blanc “Champ Chenin” from Domaine Olga Raffault is also nicely lower in alcohol, also coming in at 12.5 percent, and the wine shows off impressive cut and bounce on the palate as a result. The bouquet is deep and more primary than the fine Baudry example, offering up scents of quince, lime peel, gentle smokiness, a fine base of soil, incipient notes of beeswax and a discreet floral topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful in personality, with a rock solid core, lovely soil inflection, vibrant acids and excellent cut and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. This is of course approachable today, but this is still really a very young wine and deserves at least a few years in the cellar to start to blossom properly. 2019-2035+. **92.**

***Chinon***

**2014 Chinon- Domaine Bernard Baudry**

The 2014 “regular” cuvée of Chinon from Domaine Baudry is a beautiful and quite classic bottle in the making. The bouquet offers up a deep and youthful blend of cassis, tree bark, cigar ash, dark soil tones and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with an excellent core, fine soil signature and a long, wide open and gently tannic finish. While this wine is already nicely laid back structurally, the bouquet and flavors are still on the primary side and there would be no harm in giving it some bottle age to allow its secondary nuances to emerge. However, the wine is already so tasty that it is not going to be easy to keep one’s hands off of the wine in the cellar! 2017-2040. **90.**

**2014 Chinon “les Grézeaux”- Domaine Bernard Baudry**

The 2014 Chinon “les Grézeaux” from the Baudry family is excellent and utterly classic in profile and structural chassis. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a still quite primary mélange of dark berries, cigar wrapper, gravel, bitter chocolate and an incipient topnote of tree bark. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and elegant in personality, with a superb core, lovely focus and grip, ripe, suave tannins and excellent balance on the long and youthful finish. This is approachable today, but it really deserves at least three or four years of bottle age to allow the wine to blossom more properly. It should be absolutely stunning at age ten and last until it is at least thirty-five or forty years of age. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2050+. **92+.**

**2014 Chinon “Le Clos Guillot”- Domaine Bernard Baudry**

The 2014 version of Le Clos Guillot is everything one would expect from the confluence of a great wine and a top rate vintage. The wine offers up an aromatic constellation of great purity and promise, wafting from the glass in a blend of sappy black cherries and cassis, a fine base of gravel, gentle notes of tree bark, cigar smoke and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very refined in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins, impeccable balance and a very long, focused and nascently complex finish. This is more suave out of the blocks than the equally fine 2013 Le Clos Guillot, but despite its elegant personality, it too is a wine for the cellar and I would advise at least five or six years of cellaring to allow this wine to really stretch its wings. 2022-2060+. **94+.**

### **2014 Chinon “les Barnabés”- Domaine Olga Raffault**

The 2014 Chinon “les Barnabés” from Domaine Olga Raffault is a lovely wine. The bouquet is a touch reductive when first opened, but give this wine just a few minutes air and it blossoms beautifully to offer up a very pure and complex nose of sweet cassis, dark soil tones, tree bark, chicory and a nice touch of woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and nicely transparent, with a good core of fruit, fine nascent complexity, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and very nicely balanced finish. This is very tasty out of the blocks, but like all of the Raffault wines, it will repay cellaring. 2017-2035+. **90.**

### **2013 Chinon “Le Clos Guillot”- Domaine Bernard Baudry**

I had not previously tasted the 2013 vintage of Le Clos Guillot from the Baudry family and was very impressed by its potential. The already quite expressive bouquet shows beautiful purity and depth in its constellation of blackberries, road tar, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones and just a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite tightly-knit, with a rock solid core, tangy acids, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is a young wine today, but it will be outstanding with the requisite bottle age. 2021-2060. **93.**

### **2012 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault**

The 2012 vintage of Domaine Raffault’s les Picasses is a fine example and really a strong testament to the winemaking sure hand here, given the more middling nature of this difficult vintage in Chinon! The bouquet is pure and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, cigar wrapper, espresso and incipient notes of tree bark. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with very good depth at the core (particularly for the vintage), moderate tannins and a long, youthful and very promising finish. In the ultimate scheme of things, this will end up being a more middleweight vintage of les Picasses, but it is a complete wine in every facet and will be lovely once it has had a few years to blossom. 2020-2045. **92.**

### **2007 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault**

The 2007 les Picasses from Domaine Raffault has reached a fine point to start drinking at age ten, as it offers up secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate at the present time. The bouquet is a fine blend of cassis, a touch of saddle leather, tree bark, porcini, dark soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stylish, with a wide open personality, melted tannins and a long, complex and focused finish that closes with a gentle note of road tar. Fine juice that is just entering its plateau of peak maturity. 2017-2035+. **92.**

### **2005 Chinon “Cuvee des Varennes Grand Clos” Franc de Pied- Domaine Charles Joguet**

This was only the second bottle out of my case of 2005 Franc de Pied from Domaine Joguet, as I had previously opened a bottle back in the autumn of 2014 to see how it was evolving. This bottle was settling in nicely, but it is still a very young wine, and tasting it on the same evening as a bottle of 1989 Varennes Grand Clos, it was pretty easy to say that this wine deserves plenty more bottle age before broaching it in earnest! The bouquet is just starting to show a bit of development in its mélange of cassis, dark berries, tar, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones and gentle herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very

much defined by its underlying soil signature, with a tobaccoey personality at the present time, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a very long, chewy finish. There is great complexity to come here, and I am now thinking of not touching another bottle for at least seven or eight years! 2024-2075. **94+**.

#### **2005 Chinon “Pensées de Pallus”- Domaine Pallus**

The 2005 Pensées de Pallus is drinking beautifully right now, with the depth and concentration of the vintage nicely compensating for the young vines that comprise this cuvée. The bouquet is deep, pure and really sappy, offering up scents of black cherries, tobacco leaf, a touch of eucalyptus, dark soil tones and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and loaded with sappy fruit at the core, with a fine soil signature, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2017-2045. **92**.

#### **2005 Chinon- Domaine Pallus**

The *grand vin* from Domaine Pallus is also outstanding in 2005, but it is still more primary in personality than the Pensées bottling and is in need of a few more years of cellaring before it really starts to drink with generosity. The bouquet is deep, primary and sappier than the Pensées, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, a youthful touch of road tar, dark soil tones, cigar ash and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, ripe, suave tannins and excellent length and grip on the soil-driven finish. This is going to be a great bottle of Chinon, but give it at least another four or five years to blossom. 2021-2055+. **94+**.

#### **2004 Chinon “Cuvée des Varennes Grand Clos” Franc de Pied- Domaine Charles Joguet**

The 2004 Cabernet Franc de Pied bottling from Domaine Joguet is now into its plateau of peak maturity and drinking very well indeed, though it clearly has a couple of decades life still ahead of it. When I first started drinking this wine five or six years ago, I feared that it might have a fairly short plateau of peak maturity, as the fruit component was ample enough, but did not seem to show a lot of reserves. At age thirteen, this seems to have been a bit of unnecessary worrying, as the wine remains beautifully balanced and seems poised for many more years of high class drinking. The nose wafts from the glass in a cooler fruit blend of dark berries, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, tree bark, currant leaf and the first vestiges of red fruity tones starting to show with extended aeration. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with still a touch of backend tannin adding grip, fine focus and a long, classy and soil-driven finish. Just a lovely bottle. 2017-2035+. **93**.

#### **1996 Chinon “Cuvée des Varennes Grand Clos”- Domaine Charles Joguet**

Charles Joguet’s 1996 Cuvée des Varennes Grand Clos has now reached a beautiful point in its evolution and is a pretty strong testament that twenty years’ worth of bottle age is the point where these wines really start to hit full maturity. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, delivering a superb constellation of eucalyptus, dried dark berries, a touch of roasted meats, cigar smoke, chicory, a fien base of soil and a nice touch of seasoned leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with a lovely core, just a whisper of backend tannin and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Fine, fine juice that is now at its apogee. 2017-2035+. **93**.

#### **1990 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault**

It had been nearly five years since I last drank a bottle of the 1990 les Picasses from Olga Raffault and the wine continues to cruise along as time will not touch it anytime soon, and my

last prognostication of drinking it up in the next couple of decades seems to have underestimated its potential for longevity by quite a bit. The bouquet still shows just a touch of brett, giving the wine a slightly rustic veneer, but not in a particularly strident way and I quite like its aromatic blend of cassis, saddle leather, gravel, cigar ash and a bit of rustiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is resolved, full-bodied and complex, with good depth in the mid-palate and just a bit of brett poking out on the long, meltingly tannic finish. Good juice. 2017-2040. **91.**

#### **1989 Chinon “Clos de la Perrière”- Domaine Christophe Baudry**

I have never tasted the Clos de la Perrière bottling from Domaine Christophe Baudry, but the 1989 is a really lovely example of this top flight Chinon vintage. The complex bouquet offers up an excellent and quite mature mélange of cassis, cherries, salty soil tones, a touch of eucalyptus, gamebird, new leather, cigar ash and a bit of tree bark. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch bretty (which keeps its score down a bit), with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, meltingly tannic and complex finish. This is a very, very good bottle of Chinon for current consumption, but with the potential to cruise along nicely for a couple more decades. 2017-2035+. **91+.**

#### **1989 Chinon “Cuvée des Varennes Grand Clos”- Domaine Charles Joguet**

The 1989 vintage of Monsieur Joguet’s Cuvée des Varennes Grand Clos is one of the best bottles of mature Chinon that I have tasted in years! The nose is absolutely *à point* and stunning in its complexity, soaring from the glass in a blaze of dried berries, Cuban cigars, a gorgeous base of soil, dried eucalyptus, summer truffles, a touch of red curry and gentle autumnal tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very complex and utterly seamless in its balance, with a great core, outstanding soil signature and beautiful length and grip on the poised, resolved and soil-driven finish. Brilliant juice! 2017-2045+. **96+.**

#### **1989 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault**

I have always felt that the 1989 vintage for red wines in the Loire was a big step up from the 1990s, and this was confirmed once again on this evening, where we had the 1990 and 1989 les Picasses from Olga Raffault in brisk succession. The 1989 Picasses is a superb bottle of Chinon that has now entered its peak plateau, offering up a complex bouquet of black cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, gravel, tree bark, still a bit of pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and far more refined in profile than the 1990, with modest remaining tannins, excellent focus and balance and a very, very long and classy finish. Great Chinon. 2017-2045+. **94.**

#### **1989 Chinon “les Cornuelles”- Serge et Bruno Sourdais**

I remember well selling this wine back in my merchant days and always liked it, but did not manage to keep my hands off of the bottles in my personal cellar, so it is only happenstance that allows me to drink it today. Consequently, I was happy to see it in our Chinon tasting lineup at the end of January. This is a *terroir* with a lot of clay in the soil, which tends to produce slightly more rustic interpretations of Chinon, and this was apparent in our flight of 1989s, but the wine was none the worse for a bit of noble rusticity! If memory serves me correctly, the Sourdais’ parcel in les Cornuelles was planted with seventy year-old vines back in 1989, and this has given the wine plenty of depth. The bouquet is excellent, offering up a robust blend of dark berries, roasted venison, tree bark, dark soil tones, a bit of road tar and a smoky topnote redolent of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely rock solid at the core, with modest tannins, good acidity and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Fine juice in its more “masculine” style. 2017-2040+. **93.**

### **1988 Chinon “Clos des Roches”- Domaine Alain et Jérôme Lenoir**

The Clos des Roches bottling from Alain et Jérôme Lenoir was another Chinon that I was unfamiliar with prior to our tasting, but I was very impressed with the style of both the 1988 and 1986 vintages of this wine that we tasted. The 1988 is the slightly more complete wine (hailing from a bit more ripe vintage), offering up a very stylish and resolved bouquet of red berries, cherries, autumnal tones, summer truffles and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and nicely soil-driven in personality, with melted tannins, lovely complexity and very good intensity of flavor on the bouncy finish. This is fully mature and drinking very nicely indeed. 2017-2035. **90.**

### **1986 Chinon “Clos des Roches”- Domaine Alain et Jérôme Lenoir**

The 1986 vintage in Chinon was only moderately ripe and this shows just a touch in the Clos des Roches bottling from the Lenoir family, but the wine is complex, poised and a good drink, despite the less ripe style. The bouquet is complex and classy, offering up scents of cherries, red curry, forest floor, coffee and summer truffle. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and shows just a bit of remaining tannin on the backend, with moderate depth at the core, but very good length and grip on the well-balanced and complex finish. This is a slightly leaner style of Chinon, but still a very good drink. 2017-2030+. **89.**

### **1983 Chinon “Clos des Roches”- Domaine Alain et Jérôme Lenoir**

The 1983 Clos des Roches from Domaine Alain et Jérôme Lenoir is again a very good bottle of fully mature Chinon. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a red fruity mix of cherries, red berries, cigar wrapper, a touch of chipotle pepper, a fien base of soil and a topnote of celery salt. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tangy and very well-balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and very classy finish. The tannins here have fully fallen away, but the acids are good and this wine should continue to cruise along very nicely for a couple of decades. 2017-2035. **91.**

### **1982 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault**

The 1982 vintage of les Picasses from Olga Raffault is at its apogee of peak maturity and is drinking with style and grace. The nose wafts from the glass in a resolved and complex blend of cassis, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of curry, coffee and gentle autumnal tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with a good core, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. I had never had the pleasure to drink the 1982 previously and was very impressed, as this is really a lovely, lovely vintage of les Picasses. 2017-2035+. **92.**

### **1977 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault**

Similarly, this was the first time I had ever been lucky enough to try a bottle of the 1977 Raffault les Picasses, but as this was a late release from the domaine, I had expectations that the wine would transcend the rather modest reputation of the vintage. This was indeed the case and this is an outstanding bottle of Chinon at its absolute peak at age forty, offering up a deep and complex nose of cassis, dried eucalyptus, cigar ash, lavender, lovely, gravelly soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still very vibrant, with a lovely core, melted tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the classy finish. High class juice! 2017-2035+. **93.**



### ***Vouvray and Montlouis***

#### **2015 Vouvray “Silex Noir”- Domaine François Pinon**

The 2015 Silex Noir from François Pinon is a beautiful young bottle of Vouvray, offering up a beautiful synthesis of youthful exuberance and great structural integrity for the long haul. The bouquet is pure and classic, wafting from the glass in a blend of sweet quince, fresh pineapple, lanolin, hints of honeycomb, a gorgeous, chalky base of soil and citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, great soil signature, bright, perfectly-integrated acids and outstanding focus and grip on the pure, dancing and utterly classic finish. This is a demi-sec in 2015, with an utterly seamless palate impression and the potential for magical complexity down the road. Do not drink all of your bottles in their beautiful first blush of youth, as this wine will go for decades in the cellar! 2017-2050+. **94+**.

#### **2015 Vouvray “les Trois Argiles”- Domaine François Pinon**

As I mentioned last year, the Vouvray “les Trois Argiles” from the Pinon family was formerly known as “Cuvée Tradition”. The 2015 version offers up a lovely and classic nose of quince, lemon, a touch of pineapple, chalky soil tones, lanolin and orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully elegant and light on its feet, with a fine core, impressive nascent complexity and a long, pure and classy finish. This is a demi-sec this year and is gorgeous out of the blocks, but will probably close a bit a few years down the road. It will blossom again and should prove to be a particularly long-lived vintage for this cuvée. 2017-2050. **93**.



### **2010 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Sec- Domaine Huët**

It had been five years, almost to the day, since I last drank a bottle of the 2010 Clos du Bourg Sec from Domaine Huët and the wine today is wide open and drinking with great precision and vivacity. The bouquet is wide open and shows lovely detail in its complex constellation of quince, apple, lemon peel, chalky minerality and a gardenful of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows marvelous purity on the attack, with a rock solid core, bright, zesty acids and stunning length and grip on the complex and electric finish. This is still a young wine and probably has more than a half century in front of it, but it is currently in a very open phase of its evolution and is a joy to drink! 2017-2075. **96.**

### ***Touraine Blanc***

#### **2015 Melon de Bourgogne- Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme**

The 2015 Melon de Bourgogne from Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme is a very fragrant and engaging middleweight, coming in at skinny eleven percent octane and offering up a very expressive bouquet of green apple, lovely soil tones, a nice touch of leanness, lemon peel and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and just a touch volatile, with lovely intensity of flavor, sound acids and good length and grip on the complex finish. If you do not mind a little walk on the wild side, then there is a lot of pleasure to be found here. 2017-2022. **89.**

#### **2015 Touraine “la Tesnière”- Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme**

The Touraine “la Tesnière” from Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme is a blend of seventy-five percent Menu Pineau and twenty-five percent Chenin Blanc, with the wine barrel-fermented and aged twelve months in older casks prior to bottling. The 2015 iteration offers up a fine and gently oak nose of lemon, bread fruit, a discreet touch of vanillin oak, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and a touch wild with volatile acidity. The wine has fine depth at the core, good complexity and focus and a long, complex finish. I am pretty tolerant of volatile acidity and this is on the edge for me, but there is no denying that there is a lot of personality here! One’s enjoyment is probably predicated on one’s ability to embrace VA, but if it does not bother you a whole lot, there is plenty here to recommend. 2017-2023. **88.**

#### **2015 La Sauvignonne- Laurent Lebled**

The 2015 La Sauvignonne from Laurent Lebled is made by carbonic maceration, and has ended up with a far more golden color than one would expect from a 2015 sauvignon blanc as a result. On the nose the wine reminds me of some of the experimental cuvées from Oregon I reviewed six months ago, as the bouquet offers up a deep and complex (albeit idiosyncratic) blend of orange, new leather, tea leaves and damp grass. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and notably volatile, with a good core, modest complexity and solid length and grip on the rather frayed finish. I liked a lot of Monsieur Lebled’s wines that I tasted for this article, but this one is a swing and a miss in my book, as it is just too volatile for my palate. 2017-2020. **85.**

#### **2015 Bois Sans Soif- Olivier Lemasson**

The 2015 Bois Sans Soif from Olivier Lemasson is a blend of fifty percent Menu Pineau and fifty percent of either Romarantin or Chenin Blanc- the distributor’s and importer’s website were not in accord on this point (and neither one specifically mentioned the 2015 vintage, which of course could be a different blend from previous iterations). In any event, the wine is lovely, offering up a bright and complex nose of fresh lime, tart pear, chalky soil tones, a touch of grassiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full and succulent, with bright framing acids, a nice touch of residual sweetness, good depth at the core and fine

focus and grip on the long finish. For the record, I am betting on Romarantin for the other half of the blend this year, but whatever the *cépages*, the wine is really tasty in 2015! 2017-2020. **89.**

**2015 Sauvignon Blanc “Roche Blanche”- Julien Pineau**

The 2015 Sauvignon Blanc from Julien Pineau, the new proprietor of Clos Roche Blanche, is bottled without any added SO<sub>2</sub> at the *mise*. I should mention that the wine is simply labeled as Roche Blanche, but it is indeed all sauvignon blanc. The wine offers up a complex nose of gooseberry, limepeel, gentle grassiness, lovely chalky soil tones and a bit of white pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is a bit wilder in profile than the old wines of Clos Roche Blanche, but every bit as compelling in their own right. 2017-2020. **89.**

**2015 Sauvignon Blanc- Domaine de la Rochette (Famille Leclair)**

The 2015 Sauvignon Blanc from Domaine de la Rochette is a very pretty and expressive example of this varietal, offering up a bright bouquet of tangerine, green apple, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full-bodied, bright and succulent, with plenty of stuffing in the mid-palate, fine acids, and lovely focus and grip on the vibrant and well-balanced finish. This is a superb value! 2017-2020. **89.**

***Touraine Rouge- Primarily Gamay, Pinot Noir and Pinot d’Aunis***

**2015 Pineau d’Aunis “La Tesnière”- Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme**

The 2015 Pineau d’Aunis “La Tesnière” from Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme is a cool customer, coming in at twelve percent octane, but has plenty of personality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a vibrant blend of cherries, a touch of strawberry, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and soil-driven, with a very modest core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This wine is light and lean, but also intensely flavored, and it grew on me nicely over the course of a couple of glasses. This is not a wine for one looking for weight and depth on the palate, but it is quite long and complex, despite being essentially weightless on the palate. 2017-2025. **89.**

**2015 Touraine Pinot Noir- Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme**

The 2015 Pinot Noir from Monsieur Bonhomme is even a tad lower in octane than his Pineau d’Aunis, tipping the scales imperceptibly at 11.5 percent alcohol. The wine is light in color, but offers up a pretty nose of strawberries, fresh dill, lovely soil tones, a touch of orange peel and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, gently weedy and ephemeral at the core, with tangy acids, nice focus and balance and a long, complex and light on its feet finish. This is cut very much from the same cloth as the 2015 Pineau d’Aunis, and while it has plenty of intensity, there is virtually no stuffing. For those who are drawn to this style of wine, it is a lovely rendition, but it is not for everyone! 2017-2025. **88.**

**2015 Pineau d’Aunis- Le Clos de Tue-Boeuf**

The 2015 Pineau d’Aunis from Le Clos de Tue-Boeuf is a lovely middleweight in the making, wafting from the glass in a bright and red fruity nose of cherries, cranberries, incipient notes of *sous bois*, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a nice touch of tree bark. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a just a touch of volatility further elevating the flavors and aromatics, little tannin and lovely length and grip on the focused and nicely soil-driven finish. This comes in at 12.35 percent alcohol in 2015 and is really a lovely bottle that is light on its feet and long on personality. 2017-2025. **90.**

**2015 Vin Rouge (Gamay)- Le Clos de Tue-Boeuf**

The 2015 Gamay from Le Clos de Tue-Boeuf is an excellent, red fruity and vibrant middleweight. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of cranberries, raspberries, cloves, bonfire and a fine, complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, transparent and complex, with fairly low acids for this varietal, good length and focus, but rather gentle grip on the finish. I would guess this wine was the victim of a bit of rain at harvest time, but was poised to be brilliant before a less than favorable *fin de saison*, and consequently has given up a bit of backend structural mojo. Nevertheless, the aromatic and flavor complexity here is quite impressive. 2017-2022. **89.**

**2015 La Butte Touraine Rouge- Clos de Tue-Boeuf**

The 2015 La Butte bottling from Clos de Tue-Boeuf is an excellent bottle of gamay, offering up a deep, vibrant and complex nose of red and black cherries, discreet spice tones, a touch of gamebird, a beautiful base of soil, chicory and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and intensely flavored, with a good core, fine transparency, tangy acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. There is just a whisper of backend volatility here, but this is good juice. 2017-2025. **91.**

**2015 Pinoir de Soif- Olivier Lemasson**

The 2015 Pinoir de Soif from Olivier Lemasson is produced from a parcel of thirty year-old pinot noir vines planted on a base of flint and clay soils. The 2015 version comes in at a cool 11.5 percent octane and offers up a fine nose of black cherries, dark berries, cola, a lovely base of stony soil tones, chervil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and focused, with a fine core, lovely transparency, modest tannins and plenty of tangy, well-integrated acids perking up the long and complex finish. This is an outstanding middleweight, with plenty of intensity of flavor and personality! 2017-2030. **92.**

**2015 “Mon Cher” Gamay- Noëlla Morantin**

The 2015 “Mon Cher” Gamay from Noëlla Morantin is a really lovely example of the vintage, with nice ripe fruit, lovely soil signature and all of the svelte polish that its low octane brings to the dance. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a very stylish blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of pepper and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and loaded with flavor, with a good core, fine transparency, just a whisper of tannin and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This is really a beautiful bottle of low octane and soulful Gamay! 2017-2025+. **92.**

**2015 Les Sucettes à l’Aunis- Julien Pineau**

This is the first vintage for Julien Pineau from his half of the old Clos Roche Blanche vineyards, which he purchased from Catherine and Didier Barouillet, upon their retirement (though of course they both helped Julien with the harvest in 2015)! The wine is a lovely bottle of Pineau d’Aunis, offering up scents of red berries, cherries, incipient notes of fallen leaves, a hint of pepper and a superb base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and tangy, with lovely flavor intensity, fine transparency and complexity and a long, youthful and bouncy finish. This needs a bit of time in decanter to settle down after it is first opened, but is a lovely bottle when it has had a chance to stretch its legs a bit. 2017-2030. **89+.**



*Noëlla Morantin treating visitors to a tasting in her cellars.*

#### **2014 “R2L’O”- Les Maisons Brûlées (Corinne et Paul Gillet)**

As I mentioned last year, this wine finds its name the vineyard of Herdeleau in which is planted a field blend of Pineau d’Aunis, Gamay and Pinot Noir. Monsieur Gillet bottles this wine without added SO<sub>2</sub>, after twelve months *elevage* in older barrels. The 2014 version comes in at 12.5 percent octane, so it is just a touch riper than its predecessor. The wine delivers a bouquet of black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of pepper, tree bark and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and just a touch volatile, but this dissipates a bit with air. The finish is long and vibrant, with good complexity, but with no added SO<sub>2</sub> at bottling, this is not going to be a particularly long-lived wine and will need drinking up in the next year or two. It is a very pleasant middleweight, if a touch of VA does not bother you too much. 2017-2019. **88.**

#### **2014 Gama Sutra- Olivier Lemasson**

The Gama Sutra bottling from Olivier Lemasson does not print the vintage date prominently on the label (it is probably not allowed), but it can be found in a small code in the

lower right hand corner. The wine is produced entirely from eighty year-old gamay vines and the 2014 version offers up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, a touch of cranberry, woodsmoke, chicory and a superb base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, vibrant and complex, with a respectable core (this is only 11.5 percent octane after all), modest tannin and fine length and grip on the impressively intense and energetic finish. Fine juice. 2017-2025+. **91.**

***Red Wines of the Touraine- Primarily Côt and Cabernet Franc***

**2015 On Est Su l' Sable- Laurent Lebled**

The 2015 On Est Su l' Sable from Laurent Lebled is a carbonically-macerated cuvée of cabernet franc, which Monsieur Lebled allows to go a full thirty days, rather than the typical two or two and a half weeks of most wines made by this method. It is bottled without any added SO2 and the 2015 version comes in at 11.5 percent octane. The wine offers up a fine, high-toned nose of cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, a lovely base of soil and a touch of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and suave on the attack, with nice intensity of flavor, good complexity, little tannin and really good length and grip on the bouncy finish. This smells a lot like claret, but is very light on its feet, pale in color and really a unique and compelling wine. Monsieur Lebled only started his very small *négociant* business with the 2010 vintage and he has clearly mastered his craft briskly! This is a delicious middleweight! 2017-2023+. **90.**

**2015 Cheville de Fer- Olivier Lemasson**

The 2015 Cheville de Fer from Olivier Lemasson is a low octane example of Côt, coming in at 11.5 percent octane. The wine offers up lovely aromatics in its blend of dark berries, tree bark, espresso and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and a touch sinewy, with modest depth, bright acids and a touch of backend tannin on the long and lean finish. This is very well done in its style, but it is a wine for purists, as it will seem a bit malnourished to many tasters. That said, for those inclined to this style, there are some very attractive elements to this wine. 2017-2025. **88.**

**2014 La Guerrierie Touraine Rouge- Clos de Tue-Boeuf**

It has been nearly eighteen months since I last tasted the 2014 La Guerrierie from Clos de Tue-Boeuf. Readers may recall that this wine is a blend of seventy percent Côt and thirty percent Gamay, with the 2014 version tipping the scales at twelve percent alcohol. The wine was just a touch volatile when I last tasted it, but it has settled in nicely with a bit of bottle age and now offers up a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, pepper, a fine base of dark soil tones, charred wood, espresso and a gentle topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, balanced and blossoming into lovely complexity, with tangy acids, fine focus and grip and a long, gently tannic finish. This is more black fruity in personality than it was out of the blocks and is aging very nicely indeed and will clearly last longer than I thought eighteen months ago! 2017-2025+. **89.**

**2014 Érèbe- Les Maisons Brûlées (Paul et Corinne Gillet)**

This blend of Cabernet Franc and Côt from the Gillets is fairly ripe in 2014, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and nicely dark ruby in color. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of sweet dark berries, tree bark, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a touch of clove-like spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and tangy with a touch of VA, but with a nice kernel of fruit, lovely complexity and a long, modestly tannic and tangy finish.

This is made without added SO<sub>2</sub> at bottling and retains a wild child side, but it is also loaded with personality and if you are willing to overlook a slightly unstable structural chassis, there is plenty of enjoyment to be found here. 2017-2023. **89.**

**2014 Côt à Côt- Noëlla Morantin**

The 2014 Côt à Côt from Noëlla Morantin is a young and beautiful wine, with great purity and promise tied to a suave, but still serious structural undertow. The bouquet is very pure and youthful, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet cassis, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil, espresso and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and rock solid at the core, with moderate, well-integrated tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is so well-balanced that it is certainly approachable today, but this is still a very young wine and I would not hesitate to tuck it away in the cellar for a handful of years and let its tannins relax a bit more and the secondary layers of complexity to start to stir. As promising a middleweight as one could ask for! 2020-2040. **92+.**

**2014 Les Débonnaires Cabernet Franc- Luc Sebillé**

The 2014 Les Débonnaires from Luc Sebillé is a lovely, middleweight bottle of cabernet franc, from vines that lie near the Chinon region. The wine offers up a lovely nose of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil, coffee and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very nicely balanced, with a solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, just a touch of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the impressively complex finish. This is an excellent middleweight that will be even better with another year or two of bottle age. 2017-2030. **89+.**

**2013 Le Gam Cab du Bled- Laurent Lebled**

The 2013 Le Gam Cab du Bled from Laurent Lebled is a blend of cabernet franc and gamay, which again has been carbonically macerated. The wine delivers a fine bouquet of cassis, currant leaf, dark soil tones and cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, deep and intensely flavored, with lovely complexity and grip, tangy acids, a bit of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the soil-driven finish. While this may contain gamay, its personality is almost entirely derived from its cabernet franc component and really tastes remarkably like a light-bodied, but serious example of Chinon! This is only 11.5 percent octane, so it is a bit lean when first opened, but it fills out nicely with air and packs a powerful punch of flavor for its weight class! And this was only Monsieur Lebled's fourth vintage ever producing wine! Impressive. 2017-2022. **89.**

*Jasnières*

**2015 Jasnières "les Rosiers"- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)**

The 2015 les Rosiers bottling of Jasnières from Eric Nicolas is a beautiful young bottle of chenin blanc, wafting from the glass in a deep and nascently complex mix of quince, apple, a touch of lanolin, deep and gently chalky soil tones, incipient honeycomb and a discreetly musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off superb mid-palate depth, with just a touch of residual sweetness on the attack, outstanding complexity and grip and a very long, vibrant and zesty finish that promises greatness down the road. This is very easy to drink out of the blocks in its primary youthful exuberance, but it is really a wine where a bit of patience will allow far more complexity to emerge. A superb vintage of les Rosiers! 2017-2045+. **93.**

**2015 Jasnières “Prémices”- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)**

The Jasnières “Prémices ” from Domaine de Bellivière, which is crafted from vines in excess of fifty years of age, is simply superb in 2015. The bouquet is deep and more youthfully reserved out of the blocks than the fine Rosiers, offering up scents of quince, peach, a hint of pineapple, gentle notes of honeycomb, superb soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a succulent core, lovely purity and focus, bright, seamless acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and vibrant finish. A beautiful young wine where the old vines have given and extra element of finesse and elegance in this vintage. 2020-2050+. **94.**

***Côteaux du Loir*****2015 Patapon Blanc- Domaine le Briseau (Nathalie Gaubicher)**

The 2015 Patapon Blanc from Domaine le Briseau is a very pretty bottle of chenin blanc, offering up a youthfully complex nose of apple, quince, a touch of wet wool, lovely soil tones, incipient notes of honeycomb and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with an excellent core, fine soil signature, good acids and lovely length and grip on the still quite primary finish. Good juice that will be even better with a year or two in bottle. 2017-2030+. **89.**

**2015 Patapon Rouge- Domaine le Briseau (Nathalie Gaubicher)**

The 2015 vintage of Patapon Rouge from Nathalie Gaubicher is nicely ripe, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a bright and vibrant bouquet of cherries, fallen leaves, white pepper, lovely soil tones, a touch of green tea and a gentle topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with lovely intensity of flavor, just a bit of backend tannin, excellent focus and balance and a long, complex finish. This is beautifully light on its feet, while still delivering plenty of depth and personality. This is delicious already, but will also age nicely for at least the coming eight to ten years and is really a classic bottle of Pineau d’Aunis. 2017-2025+. **90.**

**2014 L’Effraie Coteaux-du-Loir- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)**

It had been eighteen months since I last opened a bottle of the 2014 L’Effraie bottling from Eric Nicolas (made primarily from his younger vines parcels in his Jasnières vineyards). There are some older vines from outside of the appellation boundaries of Jasnières, and the inclusion of some fruit from outside of Jasnières causes the cuvée to be classified as Coteaux-du-Loir. This is a ripe and pure wine, coming in at a full fourteen percent octane, but offers up lovely purity and complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet today is superb, wafting from the glass in a very precise blend of quince, green apple, chalky minerality, lanolin, citrus peel and a touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and drinking very nicely today, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, sound acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. It is starting to really drink beautifully, but the acids are not quite as prevalent as they were a year and a half ago and I might be inclined to drink the wine a bit sooner than I initially anticipated, though chenin blanc can be quite deceiving in this way. This is classy juice. 2017-2025+? **92.**

**2014 Vieilles Vignes Éparses Coteaux-du-Loir- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)**

As readers may recall, the old vine bottling of Éparses from Eric Nicolas is produced from vines that range from fifty to eighty years of age and are grown in the classic Coteaux-du-Loir soils of clay and flint over *tuffeau*. The 2014 vintage of Éparses is quite a bit deeper-pitched on the nose than the 2015s from the estate, offering up a complex bouquet of honey, apple,



pineapple, lanolin and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and youthful, with bright acids, fine focus and length, nascent complexity and a well-balanced and still quite primary finish. Given the deeper-pitched aromatics, I was expecting a wine that was more ready to drink, but this is still a puppy on the palate and will need some time in the cellar to blossom. 2020-2045. **90+**.

**2012 Les Longues Vignes- Domaine le Briseau (Nathalie Gaubicher/ Christian Chaussard)**

The 2012 Les Longues Vignes from Nathalie Gaubicher has gotten a vintage officially on the label since I last tasted it. The wine is Pineau d'Aunis grown in a vineyard in Jasnières and the wine has a Côteaux du Loir tag I assume. The bouquet remains quite black fruity, offering up scents of cassis, tree bark, pepper, chicory and a touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and complex, with tangy acids, just a touch of backend tannin and very good length and grip on the focused finish. The wine has opened up very nicely since I last tasted it in the autumn of 2014 and is now drinking with style and grace. 2017-2025. **89.**



***Cheverny and Cour-Cheverny Blanc***

*The white wines from Cheverny are a wonderful mosaic of the Loire in general, as they can include varying percentages of grapes such as chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, sauvignon gris and Romarantin. In fact, wines made solely from the local grape of Romarantin are given their*

*own appellation here: Cour-Cheverny. The vineyards are located on the outskirts of Blois, about halfway between the cities of Tours and Orléans. In my experience, most bottlings of Cheverny blanc will be generally based on sauvignon blanc, with the other varieties playing supporting roles, but there are a few bottlings that are a high percentage of Romarantin in the blend and which may well be amongst the very best whites made in the Cheverny appellation of the Loire. Cour-Cheverny is a step up from most regular Cheverny bottlings, as the Romarantin is a beautiful grape that thrives here and offers up loads of personality and always a fine window to the underlying minerality of its vineyard. Cheverny blanc and Cour-Cheverny offer impressive value, and for the intrepid, there are some amazingly fine bargains to be had here, not to mention some very serious and accomplished producers.*

**2015 Cheverny Blanc “le Petit Chambord” Vendanges à la Main- Domaine François Cazin**

François Cazin has changed the label and the name of this bottling slightly starting in 2015, but the wine remains every bit as fine as it has always been. The *cépages* of the 2015 Cheverny Blanc from François Cazin is its traditional eighty percent sauvignon blanc and twenty percent chardonnay. The wine delivers a vibrant bouquet of lime, tart orange, fresh-cut grass, lovely soil tones and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with lovely transparency, bright acids and impressive grip on the long, focused and perfectly balanced finish. This is a terrific wine that is drinking with succulence and style out of the blocks, but will be even more complex with a bit of bottle age! 2017-2030. **91+**.

**2015 Cheverny Blanc “Frileuse”- Le Clos du Tue-Boeuf**

The 2015 Cheverny Blanc “Frileuse” from Le Clos du Tue-Boeuf is a beautiful bottle of wine, offering up a bright and expressive nose of gooseberry, a touch of fresh pineapple, chalky soil tones, a hint of beeswax and a nice topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, vibrant and complex, with lovely focus and grip, excellent nascent complexity and a long, refined and zesty finish. This is drinking beautifully out of the blocks, with a touch of wildness in its personality, but has the balance very nicely over the medium-term. Fine juice. 2017-2025+. **90**.

**2014 Cheverny Blanc “le Petit Chambord” Vendanges Manuelles- Domaine François Cazin**

The 2014 Cheverny Blanc from François Cazin is continuing to drink very nicely since I last saw a bottle eighteen months ago. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of tart orange, gooseberry, gentle grassiness, spring flowers, a hint of beeswax and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with bright acids, lovely focus and grip, plenty of stuffing at the core and impressive length and grip on the very nicely balanced finish. This has blossomed beautifully since the last time I tasted it and is now entering into its plateau of maturity. 2017-2030. **90**.

**2014 Cour-Cheverny Moelleux “Cuvée Renaissance”- Domaine François Cazin**

This 2010 version of Cuvée Renaissance was the first sweet example of Cour-Cheverny that I had ever tasted from François Cazin, and the 2014 is a more than worthy successor to that excellent wine. As readers may recall from the note on the 2010 version, this is late harvest bottling is produced from the Cazins’ oldest Romarantin vines, ranging from fifty to eighty years of age. The 2014 Cuvée Renaissance is still a young wine on both the nose and palate, but its promise is manifest. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex and vibrant blend of pineapple, lime blossoms, tangerine, chalky soil tones and incipient notes of beeswax. On the

palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, nascently complex and very much defined by its underlying soil tones, with a great core, fairly modest sweetness on the backend and lovely bounce and grip on the zesty and very long finish that is the essence of potential. This is of course quite tasty already, but it is still very primary and will develop additional layers of complexity on both the nose and palate with a bit of bottle age. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2045+. **93.**

### ***Cheverny Rouge***

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

### **2015 Cheverny Rouge “la Caillère”- Le Clos du Tue Boeuf**

The Cheverny Rouge “la Caillère” from Le Clos du Tue Boeuf is produced mainly from thirty-five year-old pinot noir vines, with just a bit of gamay found in the field blend. The 2015 version is quite light in color and offers up a vibrant and gently volatile (though this dissipates markedly with some time in decanter) bouquet of cherries, strawberries, fresh thyme, cinnamon, lovely soil tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and complex, with a good core, excellent transparency and a long, slightly volatile finish. This is a little bit like the red wine of Château Musar in that one’s pleasure here is going to depend a bit on how tolerant one is of volatile acidity. I am pretty non-plussed about a bit of VA and consequently I like this wine quite well, but if volatile acidity bothers you, this wine is going to be less satisfying. 2017-2030. **89.**

### **2015 Cheverny Rouge “la Gravotte”- Le Clos du Tue Boeuf**

In contrast to the Rouillon, the la Gravotte is composed entirely of pinot noir. The 2015 version is a touch lower in octane than the Rouillon this year, coming in at an even twelve percent alcohol. The wine offers up a really refined bouquet of bitter cherry, a touch of cranberry, woodsmoke, complex soil tones, gentle notes of cola, and a topnote of sweet herbs and violets. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and again, shows beautiful intensity of flavor, with outstanding focus and grip, modest tannins, bright acids and lovely grip on the long and transparent finish. This is really fine juice. 2017-2035. **92.**

### **2015 Cheverny Rouge “Rouillon”- Le Clos du Tue-Boeuf**

The 2015 Cheverny Rouge “Rouillon” from the Puzelat brothers’ Le Clos du Tue-Boeuf is a deeper and more black fruity wine than the 2014 was out of the blocks. The *cépages* here is fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and gamay and the wine is just a touch riper than the ’14, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of tree bark, bonfire, dark soil tones and a touch of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, impressive nascent complexity and outstanding length and grip on the modestly tannic and tangy finish. This will age as much on its fine acidity as it will on its tannins and should prove to be a particularly long-lived vintage of Rouillon. 2017-2030+. **91.**

### **2014 Cheverny Rouge “Vendanges Manuelles”- François Cazin (Le Petit Chambord)**

The 2014 Cheverny “Vendanges Manuelles” from François Cazin is a touch youthfully reserved and will need some time to blossom, but also is clearly a wine of fairly moderate ripeness from the vintage. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of cassis, tree bark, coffee grounds, dark soil and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and a bit bound up in its structure today, with good, but not great depth at the core, good soil signature and a long, lean and modestly tannic finish. I am not sure at this point in time how this wine will evolve, as it could always stay a bit green and malnourished, or blossom into a stylish middleweight. But, right now, I am not clear which way it will go. ???

### ***Pouilly-Fumé***

#### **2014 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine Karine Lauverjat**

Karine Lauverjat’s 2014 Pouilly-Fumé is only moderately ripe (as is the case with so many eastern Loire wines in this vintage) and consequently is more grassy than usual, but at the same time, the wine has fine depth, cut and complexity and no shortage of personality. The grassy nose wafts from the glass in a blend of green apple, lime, plenty of grassiness, petrol and a touch of white pepper. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and rock solid at the core, with lovely snap and focus, impressive complexity and a very long, vibrant finish. I happen to have no issue with a bit of herbaceousness in my Loire sauvignon blanc, so I find this wine very attractive, but if Pouilly-Fumé that is on the more grassy side is a bit too much for you, this will not be a wine for you. For those that like grassy Pouilly-Fumé, there is plenty to like here. 2017-2025. **89.**

### ***Sancerre***

#### **2015 Sancerre “l’Authentique”- Claude et Florence Thomas-Labaille (Chavignol)**

The 2015 l’Authentique bottling of Sancerre from Domaine Thomas-Labaille is a really lovely example of this vintage, with fine purity on the nose and impressive mineral drive and excellent framing acids on the palate for this ripe growing season. The bouquet offers up a lovely complexity in its constellation of gooseberry, tangerine, lime zest, chalky minerality, gentle grassiness and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and a long, zesty and perfectly focused finish. This has plenty of cut and bounce to carry the wine beautifully for the next five to seven years, and the fine balance to perhaps last even longer in bottle. 2017-2024+. **91+.**

#### **2015 Sancerre- Domaine Karine Lauverjat**

The 2015 Sancerre from Karine Lauverjat is really a fine bottle, with an impressive sense of delicacy on both the nose and palate that is pretty rare in riper vintages like 2015. The first class bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of gooseberry, lime, chalky soil tones, gentle grassiness and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and classically balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip, bright acids and lovely complexity on the long and zesty finish. Fine juice. 2017-2022. **91+.**

#### **2015 Sancerre “Chavignol”- Domaine Yves Martin**

The 2015 Sancerre from Yves Martin is an excellent example of the vintage, offering a ripe and pure bouquet of tangerine, lime peel, complex minerality, a touch of petrol, gentle notes of fresh-mown grass and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, well-balanced and wide open, with a rock solid core, good (but not really snappy) acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, ripe and complex finish. This is a slightly softer vintage for

Domaine Martin, and consequently will not be particularly long-lived, but it has admirable depth and palate presence and will drink beautifully over the relative near-term. 2017-2020. **90.**

**2015 Sancerre “Monts Damnés” Cuvée Buster- Domaine Thomas-Labaille**

The 2015 Cuvée Buster bottling from Thomas-Labaille is ripe, pure and classy, but a bit soft on the backend, as is the nature of the vintage. The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of gooseberry, green apple, chalky minerality, damp grass, white flowers and a touch of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, slightly low acid finish. The depth and stuffing here would make this old bones in most vintages, but this is fairly low acid by the standards of the domaine and I suspect this is going to be at its best in its youth. 2017-2022+? **91.**



**2010 Sancerre “le Grand Roc”- Domaine Gérard Fiou**

The Sancerre “le Grand Roc” from Gérard Fiou hails from fruit from a parcel of sixty year-old vines planted on Silex soils (flint which is far more common in Pouilly-Fumé) and which he ferments in a combination of stainless steel, cement and new oak. The 2010 version, which is the first wine I have tasted from Monsieur Fiou, is lovely, offering up a wide open bouquet of gooseberry, a touch of orange, damp grass, flinty minerality, dried flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a lovely core, fine focus and balance and impressive length and grip on the complex and *à point* finish. The only sign of age on this wine is the deeper-pitch to the grassy tones of Sancerre, but otherwise, this wine belies its seven years of age and still has plenty of life ahead of it. Excellent juice! 2017-2025+. **92.**

### **2005 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Edmund Vatan**

Another two and a half years has passed since I last checked in on a bottle of the 2005 Vatan Sancerre, and the wine is aging beautifully and really now seems destined to be one of the great recent vintages of this wine. While I have always liked this wine, I have wondered how it would eventually handle the quite heady ripeness of the '05 vintage, as this wine is a full fourteen percent octane and at times in its early adolescence, one could sense the alcohol just behind the other elements in the wine. Happily, this most recent bottle was the “coolest” and most classic showing of the 2005 since its early release days and the wine was absolutely singing, soaring from the glass in a beautiful blend of lime, fresh mint, chalky minerality, a touch of cress, fresh almond and a still a touch of youthful white pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and classic kaleidoscopic in its expression of minerality, with laser-like, focus, a rock solid core and great length and grip on the ripe and racy finish. I would still argue that the 2005 Vatan is a few years away from really reaching its plateau of maturity and starting to drink with complete generosity, but it is getting to that point in its evolution where it is hard to not want to open the wine! It will continue to cruise along for many decades to come. 2020-2060.**95.**



## RECENTLY TASTED SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE WINES MARCH 2017



I have been getting out at least one in-depth Spanish wine feature each year for the last several years, but have not been getting my considerable notes on Portuguese wines into the newsletter with the same consistency, so it made sense this winter to group the two countries together for this article. What really spurred me onto to include wines from Portugal in this report was a beautiful tasting of the wines of the old school producer of Caves São João that I had the pleasure to attend in mid-December of last year. Caves São João is a négociant that I was familiar with from my very earliest days in the wine trade, as I was drinking their wines all the way back when I was at the university. Caves São João is a very old-fashioned estate in that it likes to keep its wines in the cellars in Portugal until they are ready to drink, so the youngest example I tasted from any of their handful of different labels was a pair of wines from the 1995 vintage! They produce wines from two of Portugal's oldest and finest regions, Dão and Bairrada, and I used to drink them quite often in my formative wine days, as they were by far the best values to be found for mature wines for a student wine lover on a short budget. However, as the years had gone by, I had not tasted any wines from Caves São João in decades and was very curious to see what the quality was like today and what my impressions of the wines would be with a bit more experience under my belt. Happily, I found the wines every bit as superb as they



were all those years ago- old-fashioned stylistically to be sure, but full of complexity and merit- and my enthusiasm for what we sampled at our tasting in December inspired their New York importer to send me along several further vintages to try that had not been in our lineup. Having tasted a fine range of wines from Caves São João, I dug out notes and bottles from my cellar from a few other estates to further flesh out the section on Portuguese wines, which I have grouped together at the end of this article.

A new Spanish addition to coverage in VFTC found in this report are the wines of the small Bodegas los Astrales in Ribera del Duero, which I had never had the pleasure to taste previously and which absolutely floored me with their exceptional elegance and extremely high quality. The estate is located in the northeastern corner of the DO in the village of Anguix, which is the coolest section of this warm region and only a couple of villages over from where Goyo García (the Henri Jayer of Ribera del Duero) is based in the small town of Gumiel del Mercado. The estate was only founded in 2000 by the Romera de la Cruz family, who have been grape farmers in the region for three generations, but previously sold off their production to other wineries in the DO. I was so impressed with the quality of their 2013 and 2014 bottlings that I shared my enthusiasm with their American importer, who very generously sent me several other recent vintages of their wines so that I could see how they evolve with a bit of bottle age. There is a small feature on this very exciting and old school producer (twenty percent new oak and low octane for their regular bottling!) included in the Ribera del Duero section, as Bodegas los Astrales is clearly the most exciting new winery (to me) that I have tasted since the first bottle of Goyo García's wine was served to me several years ago! I cannot recommend their wines highly enough.

There are several other new Spanish producers featured in the pages that follow, as the number of more classically-inclined producers in the country seems to be happily on the rise each year and more samples are finding their way to me. While I still have the impression that the more modern, overtly new oaky and higher octane reds remain the preferred option of most wine lovers within the country of Spain itself (where the vast majority of the country's wine production is sold), I do get the sense that the tide is at least turning in the export markets and lower octane, more soil-driven wines are making significant inroads outside of the Iberian peninsula. I hope this trend continues to accelerate, as I tasted some truly remarkable, old school wines from a wide variety of Spanish regions in preparation of this report, with many of the wines also remarkably well-priced and looking like absolute steals in the over-heated wine market of today. So please take your time cull through the tasting notes that follow, as there are some real gems to be found below, made from a wide array of different grape varieties and from a plethora of different regions. Another new producer to me that merits mentioning right at the outset is the superb Rioja estate of Bodegas Alvia, who kindly reached out to me last autumn and sent along samples of their recent releases. They then waited very patiently until I started tasting through their wines in January and February in preparing this piece. Their wines are not as "classical" in style as many of my favorite producers in Rioja, but they strike me as a beautiful synthesis of the best of both the modern and old school camps in Rioja and the wines have managed, at least to my palate, to retain the traditional sense of velvety elegance that defined Rioja in my mind, while still incorporating a few modern twists that no doubt make their wines more popular in their home market. They are really terrific wines and come highly recommended!

*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 Catalunya on the northeastern sector of the country. Recent notes on Portuguese wines are listed after the Spanish wines, rather than maintaining a geographical organization across country borders. 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. **I should note that there will be a part two to this article in the next issue, as I received more samples over the last few weeks than I could taste through in time for this issue. Rather than keep delaying the release of Issue 67, it just made sense to do a follow-up feature in the next newsletter.***

### **Cava**

*I did not write to importers for samples of Cava for this article, as I hope to be able to devote an entire feature to the beautiful sparkling wines of the Six Percent Club over the summer, but as a few bottles showed up nonetheless, I was more than happy to taste them! I also came across bottles tasted in the last several months of older disgorgements of a couple of these (as I have a fair number of bottles of top Cava in my cellar, to see how they evolve with bottle age), which were going to be written up in the next feature on Champagne and Sparkling Wines, but which I include here as well.*

### **Maria Casanovas “Glaç” Brut Nature NV (Cataluña) Disgorged October 2011**

The Maria Casanovas Glaç Brut Nature is made from a blend of forty percent pinot noir and sixty percent of the “Big Three” grapes of Cava: Parellada, Macabeo and Xarel-lo. The winery is based in the heart and soul of Cava country in the town of Sant Sadurní d’Anoia, with their Glaç bottling spending eighteen months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The winery does not own its own vineyards, but sources from the same nine hectares of vines owned by a small handful of growers who they have worked with since opening their doors in 1984. The current release is very strong, offering up a pure and vibrant nose of lemon, salty soil tones, tart orange, a dollop of smokiness and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully snappy, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. As Maria Casanovas does not own their own vineyards, they are not officially part of the “Six Percent Club”, but given the high quality here, they deserve honorary membership in that august grouping of Cava producers. Though, this was disgorged back in October of 2011, it is still a puppy and will be even better with further bottle age. Good juice. 2015-2025. **91+**.

### **Cava Cygnus “1+1=3” Cava Brut NV (Disgorged October 2016)**

The new release of Cygnus “1+1=3” Cava non-vintage Brut is composed of a blend of forty-five percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent Parellada and twenty-five percent Macabeo (the big three of indigenous grapes used in Catalunya for Cava since time immemorial), with the wine aged for twenty-one months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. Like all of the top producers in the “Six Percent Club”, it is produced entirely from estate-grown fruit. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of lemon, green apple, sea salts, stony minerality and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a good core,

elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the zesty finish. For an entry level bottling, this is really good. 2017-2025. **91.**

**Cava 1 + 1 = 3 Brut NV (Cataluña) Disgorged December 2014**

I wrote very favorably about several of the organic-farmed bottlings from Cava 1+1=3 back in the article on the “Six Percent Club”, as this is one of the top producers in Cataluña for high quality Cava. This was my first chance to try their straight non-vintage Brut bottling (from two different disgorgement dates), as I had tasted three of their Brut Nature cuvées previously. Their Brut bottling is finished with a *dosage* of 7.5 grams per liter. The release disgorged in December of 2014 is bright and very pretty on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of pear, salty soil tones, lime peel, gentle smokiness and a delicate topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and brisk, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced young finish. This is a terrific bottle of Cava, but after tasting the wine disgorged fifteen months earlier, I would now be inclined to let this release age a year or two in the cellar and really start to blossom. Cava 1 + 1 = 3 is one of the very finest producers of sparkling wine in Cataluña, and both these releases are excellent. 2016-2025+. **91+.**

**Cava 1 + 1 = 3 Brut NV (Cataluña) Disgorged October 2013**

The non-vintage Brut bottling of Cava 1+1=3 that was disgorged back in October of 2013 shows how well this estate’s wines evolve with bottle age. As is the case with the above wine, the *cépage* is a blend of forty-five percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent Parellada and twenty-five percent each of Macabeo and the wine spends a minimum of eighteen months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. This classic Brut Cava now offers up a complex and blossoming nose of green apple, tart orange, a touch of menthol, beautiful soil tones, dried flowers, a touch of Catalan *garrigue* and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and really well-balanced, with a lovely core, impressive complexity, crisp acids, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. This is aging beautifully and is a stunning value! 2015-2025. **92.**

**Cava Cygnus Brut Nature “Reserva” NV (Disgorged May 2016)**

The *cépages* of the Cygnus Brut Nature “Reserva” is slightly different than the “1+1=3” bottling, as it is a mix of forty percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent each of Parellada and Macabeo, with the wine spending fully two years aging on its fine lees. The bouquet is deep and a touch more precise than very good “1+1=3”, offering up scents of lime, tart orange, beautiful, salty minerality, a touch of ocean breeze and wild fennel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with bright, well-integrated acids, lovely focus and grip, refined, pinpoint bubbles and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. A lovely example. 2017-2027. **92.**

**Cava Cygnus Brut “Reserva” NV (Disgorged July 2016)**

The new release of Cava Cygnus Brut “Reserva” is again a slight variation of *cépages* from the other two new bottlings in the market, as this cuvée is comprised of thirty-five percent each of Parellada and Xarel-lo and thirty percent Macabeo, with some of the estate’s oldest vines used for this bottling. It is aged a shorter time on the lees- fifteen months in this case- and finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The nose wafts from the glass in a vibrant mix of lime, tart orange, salty minerality, wild fennel, gentle smokiness and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a nice touch of *dosage*, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This is really the perfect

balance for most casual Cava drinkers, but will seem a tad sweet to those that are more inclined towards low *dosage* bubbly. Fine juice. 2017-2027. **91+**.



### **2013 AT Roca Brut Reserva Clàssic Penedès Sparkling Wine**

As I noted last year, 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, makers of one of Spain's greatest sparklers, which they call Kripta. A family split has led to this new winery. It had been a year since I last tasted the 2013 Brut Reserva and the wine is starting to really blossom nicely, offering up a complex nose of lemon, green apple, salty minerality, dried flowers, wild fennel and a saline topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very elegant in profile, with pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. Fine juice. 2017-2030. **92.**

### **2013 AT Roca Brut Rosat Reserva Clàssic Penedès Sparkling Wine**

It had been a year also since I last tasted the 2013 AT Roca Brut Rosat Reserva, which is composed of a rather surprising blend of sixty percent Macabeu and forty percent Monastrell. The wine spends fifteen months aging on its fine lees and is a lovely, pale salmon color. The bouquet hops from the glass in a mix of white cherries, blood orange, dried flowers, gentle smokiness and a lovely base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, poised and zesty

finish. This seemed just a touch more complex last year than it does today, but it is still a very classy bottle of Cava Rosat. 2017-2025. **91+**.

### **2012 Castell de Grabuac “El Bosc” Brut Nature Reserva- Família Suriol**

The 2012 Castell de Grabuac “El Bosc” Brut Nature Reserva was disgorged in December of 2015. Like all of the Suriol family wine, this is made very naturally, from their own organically-grown grapes, fermented with indigenous yeasts, with no enzymes, little SO<sub>2</sub> additions and no *dosage*. The El Bosc bottling is one hundred percent Xarel-lo and offers up a superb and complex bouquet of white peach, orange peel, salty minerality, plenty of smokiness and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with outstanding mid-palate depth, fine *mousse*, impressive complexity and a very long, bright and zesty finish. Despite being a non-*dosé* wine, the acids here are beautifully integrated and the wine has a very sophisticated palate impression. Very high class Cava! 2017-2027. **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.*

### **2015 Lagrima de Luna Rosado- Bodegas Aliaga (Navarra)**

The Lagrima de Luna bottling only has a very short period of skin contact- three hours- to give the wine its pale salmon color and more delicate style. The bouquet of the 2015 is very pretty, wafting from the glass in a blend of strawberries, kiwi, salty soil tones and a touch of coriander seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and vibrant, with good solid depth at the core and fine length and grip on the juicy finish. This is not as complex as the regular bottle of Rosado from Aliaga, but it has plenty of personality. 2017-2019. **88**.

### **2014 Aliaga Rosado- Bodegas Aliaga (Navarra)**

The regular bottling of Rosado from Bodegas Aliaga is quite a bit darker in color than the Lagrima de Luna, with the 2014 delivering a bouquet of blood orange, cherries, lovely spice tones, sandy soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, with bright acids, fine focus and a long, zesty and well-balanced finish. 2017-2020. **90**.

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

The Catajarros Rosado bottling always seems to gain with bottle age, and this wine has opened up nicely since I tasted it a year ago. The bouquet offers up a still vibrant blend of blood orange, watermelon, salty minerality and a nice topnote of gentle spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a long, crisp and classy finish. This is really good Rosado! 2017-2025. **92**.

### **2013 Rosat d’en Blanch “Vinyes Velles”- Oriol Artigas (Alella)**

The 2013 Rosat d’en Blanch “Vinyes Velles” from Oriol Artigas is a tiny production wine (only six hundred and thirty bottles were produced), which is somehow fitting, as the DO of Alella is the tiniest in the region of Catalunya. The wine is a very, very pale orange and offers up a vibrant and classy nose of baked apples, salty soil tones, delicate notes of raw honey, a hint of wild fennel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless in its balance, with sound acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, dancing finish. This is not the most complex Rosato I have ever tasted, but it is one of the most supremely elegant! I

could not find any background information on this wine, but I suspect it is done in amphora, based on the color and textural style. 2017-2020. **92.**

### ***Albariño- Rías Baixas***

#### **2015 Albariño “Nessa”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)**

The 2015 Albariño “Nessa” from Adegas Gran Vinum is their entry level bottling, which is made from a combination of estate and purchased fruit, but with everything hand-harvested. The 2015 went through partial malolactic fermentation, but the bottling is sealed with a screwcap. The bouquet is bright and lively, offering up scents of lemon, briny maritime tones, lovely minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and complex, with bright acids, good focus and grip and just a touch of early “prickliness” on the slightly clipped backend from its closure of choice. This deserves an agglomerated cork, as there are excellent raw materials here, but the closure is already starting to compromise the wine. Teach your children, don’t just let them ask for screwcaps! 2017-2018. **86.**

#### **2015 Albariño “Marde Viñas”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)**

The “Marde Viñas” bottling from Adegas Gran Vinum is similarly priced to the Nessa bottling, but it is sealed with a natural cork and was showing better at the time of my tasting. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of lime, menthol, a touch of leesy tones, a fine base of minerality and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long finish. I would not be surprised to find that this is essentially the same cuvée as the Nessa bottling, but finished with natural cork, as it is rounder in the core and far longer on the finish. For the price, this is very good juice. 2017-2022. **88.**

#### **2015 Albariño “Essencia Diviña”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)**

As I mentioned last year, the “Essencia Diviña” bottling of Albariño from Adegas Gran Vinum spends three months aging on its fine lees in tank, which gives it a bit more mid-palate depth than many Albariños in its price range. The 2014 version was still pretty high-toned in profile, but the 2015 has more mid-palate depth to it. The bouquet is quite good, offering up scents of lemon, green apple, briny maritime notes, dried flowers and a good base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a lovely core. The youthful finish is vibrant and mineral, with lovely length and grip. This is good juice and a step up from the 2014. 2017-2023. **89.**

#### **2015 Albariño “Selección Especial”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)**

The 2015 Albariño “Selección Especial” from Adegas Gran Vinum is their flagship bottling, with the wine spending five months aging on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2015 version is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of lime, green apple, lovely saline minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and classy, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip, bright acids and lovely balance on the long and complex finish. This is really good Albariño! 2017-2025+. **92.**

#### **2015 Albariño- Avó Roxo (Rías Baixas)**

The 2015 Albariño from Avó Roxo is an excellent wine in the making, offering up impressive complexity on both the nose and palate and a nice structural chassis on which to age. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of tart orange, a touch of grapefruit, gentle leesy tones, citrus peel, ocean breeze and a discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, excellent focus and a long, snappy finish that closes with impressive complexity and grip. High class Albariño! 2017-2027. **91+.**

### **2015 Albariño- Cabaleiro do Val (Meaño- Rías Baixas)**

Paco Dovalo is the godfather of the Asociación de Bodegas Artesanas, and his leading role in the association always seems to be tied to some of the very best Albariño produced in all of Galicia! His 2015 is a stunning young wine in the making, offering up a pure, complex and vibrant bouquet of lemon, sweet grapefruit, gently nutty tones from its extended aging on its fine lees, orange peel, complex minerality and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a great core of ripe fruit, bright, seamless acids and a very, very long, zesty and wide open finish. Great Albariño! 2017-2035. **94.**

### **2015 Albariño- Lagar de Broullón (Meaño- Rías Baixas)**

The 2015 Albariño from José Pintos' Lagar de Broullón is a fine example of the vintage, and this is one of the most youthful and reserved of this fine lineup of Albariño bottlings that I tasted from members of the Asociación de Bodegas Artesanas for this article. The youthful bouquet offers up scents of grapefruit, lemon, stony minerality, a touch of wild fennel and rosemary and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely buttoned up behind its girdle of acidity, with a fine core, lovely nascent complexity and a long, zesty and mineral finish. This will be even better to drink next year, once it has uncoiled a bit more! 2018-2028. **92+.**

### **2015 Albariño- Lagar de Candes (Meaño- Rías Baixas)**

The 2015 Albariño from Lagar de Candes is a lovely wine, offering up a bright and zesty nose of tart orange, lime blossoms, salty ocean air, dried flowers and wet stone minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with lovely focus and grip, bright acids and a long, zesty finish. The 2015 does not have quite the same mid-palate depth of the last couple of vintages of this wine, but it is pure and classy. 2017-2023. **89.**

### **2015 Albariño "O'Forrollo"- Bodegas Meis Otero (Val de Salnés- Rías Baixas)**

The 2015 Albariño "O'Forrollo" from Bodegas Meis Otero is outstanding, soaring from the glass in a complex aromatic constellation of green apple, lime, ocean breeze, discreet leanness, dried flowers and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very complex, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, excellent mineral drive and a very long, snappy and elegant finish. This is very, very high class Albariño! 2017-2035. **93.**

### **2015 Albariño- Adegas Rozas (Meaño- Rías Baixas)**

The 2015 from Manolo Dovalo's Adegas Rozas is flat out stunning and has to be one of the best examples of Albariño produced in this vintage! The bouquet soars from the glass in a complex blend of lime, tart orange, salty minerality, lime blossoms and ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a rock solid core, great focus and grip and a very long, precise and racy finish. A great bottle of young Albariño! 2017-2030+. **94.**

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

The 2013 vintage of Cabaleiro do Val is even better than it was a year ago, when I last had a bottle. The bouquet is deep, complex and absolutely *à point* today, soaring from the glass in a fine blend of lemon, orange zest, a touch of beeswax, great minerality, gentle leesy tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very complex, with a fine core of fruit, great mineral signature, bright acids and outstanding cut and grip on the very long and vibrant finish. Great juice, and keep in mind, 2013 is not a particularly strong year for Albariño! 2017-2035. **94+.**



### **2013 Albariño- Adega Rozas (Meaño- Rías Biaxas)**

The 2013 Albariño from Adega Rozas is cruising along nicely and has not changed perceptibly since I last tasted it, a bit more than a year ago. The wine offers up a bright and zesty bouquet of lime, pink grapefruit, ocean breeze, kaleidoscopic minerality, gentle leesy tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant and minerally finish. Fine juice. 2017-2027. **92.**

### ***Rías Biaxas Tinto***

#### **2013 Tinto do Umia- Pedralonga (Francisco and Miguel Alfonso)**

Tinto do Umia from Pedralonga is a blend of seventy percent Mencía, twenty percent Caiño and ten percent Espadeiro, with the wine fermented and aged entirely in stainless steel prior to its bottling, twelve months out from the vintage. The 2013 is a cool twelve percent octane and a touch reductive when first opened, but with some aeration, offers up a youthful, black fruity bouquet of dark berries, saddle leather, woodsmoke, graphite and cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and nicely balanced, with moderate depth at the core, fairly low acids, but nice bounce on the long and intensely flavored finish. This was a tough vintage and the wine probably does not have quite the depth and grip it would in most years, but it is very nicely balanced and offers up more than its fair share of pleasure in the glass! 2017-2025. **88.**

### ***Ribeiro Blanco***

#### **2015 Finca Teira Blanco- Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)**

The 2015 Finca Teira from Manuel Formigo is a fine wine in the making, wafting from the glass in a nascently complex constellation of lemon, bread fruit, stony soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a long, still quite youthful finish. This will blossom nicely with a bit of time in bottle, but it is pretty easy to drink right out of the blocks. 2017-2025. **89+.**

#### **2015 Teira X Blanco- Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)**

The 2015 Teira X from Manuel Formigo is outstanding and really shows stunning potential. As readers may recall, when I visited the bodegas here a couple of years ago, Señor Formigo opened nearly a dozen vintages of Teira X to show how the wine evolved with bottle age, and this has to be one of the longest-lived white wines of Spain. The 2015 is superb already, but will be even better with further bottle age, as it offers up a youthful bouquet of tart pear, lime, shiso, stony minerality, fresh almond and a touch of briny ocean breeze in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very promising, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced, zesty finish. Fine juice. 2017-2035+. **93+.**

#### **2012 Issué Blanco- Bernardo Estévez (Ribeiro)**

The 2012 Issué Blanco from Bernardo Estévez is a blend of several white wine grapes, including Treixadura, Loureira and Verdello, which is raised in French casks for nine months prior to bottling. The 2012 Issué is deep and complex, offering up a fine and gently oaky nose of tart pear, lime peel, beautifully complex soil tones, wild fennel, dried flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and a bit more marked by its well-integrated

new oak than the nose suggests, with crisp acids, lovely focus and grip and a very, very long, vibrant finish. This is really superb juice, and I am not usually one to embrace wines with a new oak in Ribeiro! 2017-2025+. **93.**



*Great old vines amongst the steep, stony slate vineyards of Ribeira Sacra.*

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

#### **2015 Adrás Godello- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2015 Adrás Godello from Isaac Fernandez is very floral and pretty this year, offering up a vibrant nose of honeysuckle, acacia blossoms, nectarine, a touch of lime zest and a lovely touch of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and succulent, with a good core and a long, primary and bouncy finish. The 2014 version of this had its malolactic fermentation blocked, but I do not know if this was the case with the 2015 (but I suspect it may well have been made similarly). This has a bit more mid-palate stuffing than last year's example and is a tasty wine, but still seems to not quite hit the same level as the excellent Adrás bottling of Mencía from Señor Fernandez. 2017-2022. **88.**

#### **2014 Godello- Cividade (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

As I mentioned last year, Cividade is one of those tiny, old vine parcels along the Sil River that are completely inaccessible except by boat, which is how the vineyard work is done during the summer and how the grapes are brought in at harvest time. The 2014 Godello is every bit as fine with a year's worth of bottle age as it was last year, offering up a pure and gorgeous nose of tart melon, white peach, slate minerality, raw almond and a topnote spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and blossoming with complexity, with a lovely core, a

very transparent personality and excellent cut and grip on the long and minerally finish. A beautiful bottle of Godello! 2017-2030. **93+**.

**2013 Pita Cega Blanco- Lagar de Sabariz (Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2013 Pita Cega Blanco from Lagar de Sabariz is a complete mystery wine to me, as the only thing I could find out about it from the wine's labeling is that the vineyards overlook the beautiful Miño River in Ribeira Sacra and "837 grapes which left their skin to give life to this bottle"- which grape variety these might have been is not mentioned! In any event, the wine is a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up a vibrant nose of lime, fresh apricot, salty minerality and a lovely topnote of delicate floral tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and nicely mineral in personality, with a good core, fine cut and grip and very nice balance on the long and still quite youthful finish. A very pretty wine. 2017-2025. **89**.

***Ribeira Sacra Tinto***

*While several different grape varieties play a role in the lovely red wines of Ribeira Sacra, to my palate the most exciting remains the wines produced from the marvelous Mencía grape, which finds its highest expression in these steep-pitched, terraced vineyards of Ribeira Sacra. The slate soils found in most of the top vineyards here really allow the Mencía to thrive, and this is home to Spain's most terroir-defined red wines. My enthusiasm for the beautiful wines produced from Mencía here in the canyon hillsides that tower over the Sil and Miño Rivers in Ribeira Sacra had not ebbed one bit since my return from the region eighteen months ago, and I still strongly believe that this is one of the most exciting up and coming wine-producing regions in the entire world. Though grape growing here dates back to Roman times, the region in its modern guise (and I use this term loosely, as this indeed still very much and old school viticultural outpost) is still in its infancy and we are only looking at the very start of the great things that are coming in this remote corner of Galicia. I do honestly believe that a quarter of a century down the road, Ribeira Sacra will take its place alongside Rioja as Spain's finest viticultural region, and the opportunity exists now to buy and cellar these wines at prices that will seem like absolute bargains at some point in the future. Keep in mind that fifty years ago, Côte-Rôtie was considered a local table wine most appropriately poured out by the picket in local cafés in Ampuis and great producers like Marius Gentaz, Albert Dervieux and Pierre Barge absolutely struggled to find clients in their early days and their wines could be bought for a song. A similar situation exists today in Ribeira Sacra and lovers of terroir-driven and ageworthy wines would do well to take note of this sooner, rather than later, and put a few cases away before the wine world more widely discovers just how brilliant and ageworthy these wines truly are today!*

**2015 Adrás Mencía- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2015 Adrás Mencía from Isaac Fernandez is a fine youthful bottle in the making. As I mentioned last year, this bottling is produced from fifty year-old, terraced vineyards overlooking the Miño River and is aged five months in a mixture of new and old casks prior to bottling. The bouquet is bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, espresso, graphite, pomegranate, lovely nutty tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and decidedly sappy at the core, with excellent transparency, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it is still a young wine and really will be singing with five or six years of bottle age! An excellent example, yet again. 2017-2040+. **92**.

**2015 Mencía- Adega Guímaro (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2015 Mencía from Adega Guímaro is an excellent wine, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of pomegranate, chicory, graphite, complex slate soil tones, a touch of blood orange and tree bark. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and transparent, with lovely focus and grip, good mid-palate depth and impressive intensity of flavor on the long, complex, tangy and modestly tannic finish. This is a fine, classic and light on its feet example of Amandi Mencía in the making and this is very, very impressive for an entry level bottling from Señor Rodríguez! 2017-2045. **92.**

**2014 Mencía- Décima (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2014 Mencía from José Manuel Rodríguez's Décima has blossomed beautifully with the year's bottle age it has had since I last tasted the wine. The bouquet is utterly classic Amandi (doing great justice to these old vines and steep, terraced vineyards towering above the Sil River) Mencía, wafting from the glass in a beautiful blend of cassis, pomegranate, tree bark, cigar ash, a fine base of slate minerality, a nice touch of meatiness and a gentle topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and suavely elegant on the attack, with a lovely core, superb complexity, melting tannins and a long, tangy and intensely flavored finish. Very classy juice. 2017-2045. **94.**

**2014 Mencía "Finca Meixemán"- Adega Guímaro (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

The Finca Meixemán bottling from Pedro Rodríguez is produced from seventy-five year-old Mencía vines, with the fruit foot-trodden and raised in old oak barrels. The 2014 vintage of this fine single vineyard wine is stunning, with great nascent complexity already in evidence on both the nose and palate. The beautiful bouquet offers up a wild and classy blend of mulberry, pomegranate, graphite, a bit of bonfire, a beautifully complex base of slate minerality, balsam bough and chicory. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a sappy core, great soil signature, suave tannins and outstanding focus and grip and beautiful balance on the very long and nascently complex finish. This is a beautiful example of Ribeira Sacra- deep, complex and still light on its feet, with simply gorgeous complexity. It is very easy to drink already, but it is still a puppy and will be far better five to ten years down the road, as the wine has enormous potential! 2017-2050+. **94+.**

**2014 Ora et Labora Mencía (Chantada- Ribeira Sacra)**

Readers may remember from last year's note on the 2013 that this is made from a tiny parcel of old vines owned by Father Mario Vázquez, with the vines now farmed by the young winemaker, Roberto Regal. The steep slate slope that houses this vineyard overlooks the small village of Belesar on the Miño River. The 2014 is a touch more structured out of the blocks than the 2013, offering up a very promising and refined nose of cassis, tree bark, graphite, a fine base of slate minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in personality, with a fien core, lovely focus and grip and a very long, elegant and moderately chewy finish. This excellent wine is still a puppy and will need a few years in the cellar to blossom and drink with the same generosity that the 2013 version demonstrated right out of the blocks. 2020-2040+. **93.**

**2014 Mencía- Val de Lenda (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

This small estate is owned by Víctor Rodríguez, who farms some choice parcels on the steepest slate slopes of the prime Amandi region, with the vineyards just over fifty years of age. As I mentioned in the note on the 2013, Señor Rodríguez ferments and raises his Mencía entirely in stainless steel and uses only indigenous yeasts. The estate's 2014 Mencía is an excellent

follow-up to the fine 2013, wafting from the glass in a complex aromatic blend of cassis, pomegranate, a fine base of slate, graphite, woodsmoke and a touch of young Hermitage-like medicinal tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a fine core, soft tannins and a very long, refined and complex finish. This will age beautifully, but it is awfully easy to drink right out of the blocks! 2017-2035+. **93.**

**2014 Mencía- Viña Cazoga (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2014 Mencía from Jorge Carnero has barely budged structurally in the year since I last tasted the wine. The bouquet remains outstanding and quite youthful in profile, delivering scents of dark berries, pomegranate, a touch of new leather, complex slate minerality, gentle peppery notes and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, displays lovely depth in the mid-palate, with a complex signature of soil, fine focus and a long, moderately tannic and vibrant finish. The tannins here are really quite seamless today, making the wine quite approachable, but it is still a puppy and I would give it at least a couple more years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge before having at it in earnest! 2019-2045. **94.**

**2014 Mencía- Viña Peón (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

Viña Peón is another new Ribeira Sacra property in the fine portfolio of Gerry Dawes Selections. This estate is right in the heart of the Amandi sector on the Sil River, with the vines ranging from forty to sixty years of age. This particular parcel is right down by the river, so it benefits from reflected light during the course of the growing season and is a bit riper than it would be if it was way up at the top of the slope. The 2014 comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up an outstanding bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, graphite, a gorgeously complex base of slate soil tones, a touch of chicory and the requisite topnote of graphite. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and already very complex, with a lovely core, a wide open personality right out of the blocks. The finish is very long, suavely tannic and tangy, with impeccable balance and lovely grip and focus. Fine juice. 2017-2040. **92+.**

**2013 Mencía – Cividade (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

Gerry Dawes forgot to pull a bottle of the 2014 Cividade Mencía for our tasting, and the restaurant where we met only had the lovely 2013 on their wine list, so I was happy to revisit this superb bottling with another year's worth of bottle age! The wine is really stunning, with its low octane 12.5 percent belying the depth and intensity of flavor this wine so exuberantly shares! The bouquet is just gorgeous today, soaring from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, espresso, charred wood, a fine base of slate, graphite and a discreet topnote of tree bark. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and has blossomed beautifully, with a fine core, impeccable balance and a very long, vibrant and gently tannic finish. While the 2013 Mencía from Cividade is now drinking beautifully, this will be a long-lived wine and there is absolutely no rush to start opening bottles! 2017-2040+. **94.**

**2013 Mencía- Divina Clementia (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2013 Mencía from Divina Clementia is only the second wine produced from this new, boutique estate in Ribeira Sacra. The vines for this bottling hail from two small plots of vines, ranging from sixty to eighty years of age. As 2012 was the very first vintage produced here, the wine was a bit marked by its new wood (as one needs to buy casks to make wine!), but this is emphatically not the case with the 2013, which is superb and utterly classical in style. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, offering up scents of dark berries, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, slate, graphite, woodsmoke and a touch of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep,

full-bodied, pure and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core, great soil signature, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, suavely-tannic and vibrant finish. This is already drinking with great style and breed, but will continue to improve for several decades. Congratulations to Raul Perez and his team for turning out a stunning bottle of Mencía in only the second vintage here! 2017-2045+. **93+**.

**2011 Mencía “Don Diego”- Viña Cazoga (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2011 Don Diego from Viña Cazoga since my visit to Ribeira Sacra back in the fall of 2014, so I was delighted to have another look at the wine more than two years down the road. This is a beautiful bottle of Mencía in the making, but it has closed down a bit since I last tasted the wine and today, the oak here stands out a bit more than it did in the blush of youth, so I would be inclined to give it several more years to drop back down into a more supporting role in the wine’s personality. That said, all of the depth and inherent complexity that was evident out of the blocks has not gone anywhere, as the wine offers up a beautiful bouquet of cassis, dark berries, a touch of bonfire, roasted game, bitter chocolate, gentle botanicals and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a great core in reserve, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a very long, focused and nascently complex finish. Ironically, this was raised in ten year-old, five hundred liter barrels, and yet it is showing a bit oaky in this phase of its evolution! Give it time, as it will be stunning when it is ready! 2022-2060. **95**.

***Valdeorras***

**2015 Godello- Adegas D. Berna (Valdeorras)**

The 2015 Godello from Adegas D. Berna is a very pretty wine, offering up a bright and still youthful nose of apple, gentle botanicals (pea shoots?), salty minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and juicy at the core, with good focus and grip, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is quite tasty today, but more complexity may emerge with a bit of bottle age. 2017-2025. **89+**.

**2015 Godello- Hacienda Ucediños (Valdeorras)**

The 2015 Godello from Hacienda Ucediños is an excellent and very elegant young wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of tart pear, wild fennel, salty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and shows fine depth at the core, with bright acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. Godello ages long and gracefully and this fine bottle is just starting its journey in bottle and will be more complex with further bottle age. 2017-2030+. **90+**.

**2014 Mencía- Adegas D. Berna (Valdeorras)**

Another year of bottle age has really allowed the 2014 Mencía from D. Berna to open up nicely, with the wine now delivering a fine bouquet of pomegranate, black cherries, dark soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a topnote of graphite. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and juicy on the attack, with a lovely core, fine length and grip and a touch of backend tannin perking up the long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This starts out as fairly fruit-driven in personality for Mencía, but more transparency arrives with a bit of air. Fine juice and an impressive value. 2017-2030. **90+**.

**2014 Mencía- Hacienda Ucediños (Valdeorras)**

The 2014 Mencía from Hacienda Ucediños has also blossomed very nicely in the year since I last saw a bottle, with the wine now offering up a beautifully wide open bouquet of



blackberries, pomegranate, espresso, dark soil tones, graphite and a topnote of distant bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really nicely soil-driven, with a fine core, bright acids and a very long, beautifully focused and balanced finish. There is just a touch of backend tannin remaining, but this wine is going to age primarily on its excellent acidity over the coming years. I definitely underrated this last year! Fine, fine juice. 2017-2035. **92+**.

### **2011 Godello- Bodegas Astrales (Valdeorras)**

The 2011 Godello from Bodegas Astrales is the current release of this wine from this fine estate, as the team ages this wine for more than four years after bottling prior to release. It is produced from vines planted in 1985 on slate soils. The wine offers up a beautifully complex bouquet of musk melon, pear, fresh lime, spring flowers, just a touch of candied lemon peel, a complex base of minerality and a delicate topnote of paraffin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent acids, impeccable balance and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is a beautiful example of just how well Godello can age! 2017-2025+. **93**.



*The sun going down over the vineyards in Bierzo- time to fire up the grill and break out the tapas.*

### ***Bierzo Blanco***

#### **2015 Godello- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)**

As readers may recall from my note on the 2014 last year, Bodegas Luna Beberide uses sixty year-old Godello vines for this wine, which is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The 2015 is a fine follow-up to last year's lovely wine, offering up a nose of melon, pear, acacia-like floral tones, a lovely base of soil and a blossoming topnote of beeswax. On the palate



the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and succulent, with a fine core, nascent complexity and lovely length and grip on the finish. This is a touch riper than the 2014, but every bit as fine. 2017-2023. **90.**

**2014 Mengoba “Godello Sobre Lías”- Grégory Pérez (Bierzo)**

The 2014 Mengoba “Godello Sobre Lías” from Grégory Pérez is a beautiful wine in the making, offering up both superb aromatic and flavor complexity. The bouquet is still quite youthful, offering up scents of pink grapefruit, lemon, beeswax, salty soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely snappy, with a rock solid core, impeccable focus and grip, excellent grip and a very, very long, perfectly balanced and soil-driven finish. This is certainly drinkable today with great pleasure, but one is only seeing the tip of the iceberg right now and a bit more patience will be handsomely rewarded! 2020-2040. **93.**

***Bierzo Tinto***

**2015 Mencía- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)**

The 2015 Mencía from Bodegas Luna Beberide is their entry level bottling and fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel prior to bottling. The bouquet of the new vintage is still a touch youthfully reductive and needs a touch of air to blossom, after which it offers up a fine constellation of dark berries, grilled meats, espresso, slate, graphite and a topnote of beautiful spice tones and lavender. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and balance, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Bierzo Mencía, with the clay and limestone soils here giving the wine fine mid-palate amplitude and fine soil signature. This is a great value, as it is seventeen dollars a bottle here in the US! 2017-2035. **91.**

**2014 Finca la Cuesta (Mencía)- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)**

The 2014 Finca la Cuesta from Luna Beberide is a full point lower in octane than the 2012 version, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. As readers may recall, this is produced from sixty-plus year-old Mencía vines and raised in a combination of new and one year-old French casks. The bouquet of the 2014 is excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, graphite, woodsmoke, chicory, a beautiful base of soil tones and a deft touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and nicely light on its feet, with excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and vibrant finish. This needs a bit more bottle age to more fully integrate its new wood, as there are still some wood tannins on the backend, but it is already tasty and will only get better with a bit of cellaring. Fine, fine juice! 2020-2045. **92.**

**2013 Mencía “Art”- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)**

The Art bottling of Mencía from Luna Beberide is all comprised of fruit from seventy to eighty year-old vines, planted on slate soil and cropped at very low yields. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged entirely in new French oak for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2013 version has gorgeous depth of fruit and excellent soil signature, but it is still young and a bit dominated by its spicy new oak component, though the balance here seems promising and I would imagine it will eventually absorb the new wood and blossom nicely. Today, the fairly new oaky nose offers up scents of dark berries, pomegranate, lead pencil, slate and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows marvelous mid-palate depth, with the inherent elegance of Mencía still very much in evidence. The finish is long, moderately tannic and

focused, with a bit of oak still sticking out on the backend, but the pieces in place to eventually settle in and offer up some very good drinking. If the wine eventually seamlessly absorbs the new wood, my score will seem conservative, as there are superb raw materials under the new casks! 2020-2045. **90-92+**.

### **2013 Paixar Mencía- Bodegas Paixar**

The Paixar bottling from the bodegas of the same name is entirely comprised of old vine Mencía, from eighty year-old bush vines growing at upper elevations in Bierzo. The wine is raised in French oak barrels for twenty-two months prior to bottling. The 2013 Paixar offers up a simply beautiful bouquet of cassis, pomegranate, graphite, woodsmoke, chicory, hints of grilled meats, a fine base of soil and a fairly judicious framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids and fine length and grip on the modestly tannic and very well-balanced finish. This could use a few more years of bottle age to fully blossom, but it is already a delicious glass of wine and is not easy to resist right now! 2020-2045+. **93.**

### **2012 Mencía “Art”- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)**

The 2012 vintage of Art from Luna Beberide is developing very nicely at age five, but still in the midst of fully absorbing its new wood and could use with a bit more bottle age to fully integrate its oak tannins on the backend. The bouquet is showing nice signs of secondary complexity in its blend of sweet cassis, pomegranate, graphite, incipient notes of tree bark, slate soil tones, a touch of chicory and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and starting to show a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with fine focus and grip and a long, moderately tannic finish. This is making good progress on managing its new oak and should be excellent. 2019-2040+. **92.**

## ***Monterrei***

### **2015 Godello “Finca as Cobatos” Cepas Viejas- Adega Pazo das Tapias (Monterrei)**

The 2015 single vineyard “Finca as Cobatos” Godello from Adega Pazo das Tapias is a very pretty and floral wine, offering up a bright bouquet of melon, pear (with a touch of candied element to the fruit tones), spring flowers and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine cut and grip, nascent complexity and lovely length and focus on the well-balanced finish. Given the youthful aromatics, I was not expecting fireworks on the palate, but this wine is flat out superb in the mouth! If the bouquet can fully catch up with the palate with a bit of bottle age, my score will seem conservative. 2017-2025+. **89+.**

### **2015 Godello- Bodegas Triay (Monterrei)**

The Triay family make really lovely wines at their small domaine in Monterrei, and their 2015 Godello is once again excellent! The bouquet is still youthful, but shows fine promise in its combination of pear, lime, a touch of green olive, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil inflection, impressive focus and grip and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is already a fine drink and will improve with a bit of bottle age. 2017-2030. **91+.**

### **2015 Mencía- Bodegas Vía Arxénteia (Monterrei)**

The 2015 Mencía from Bodegas Vía Arxénteia is produced from fairly young vines, as the red grape vineyards went into the ground fairly recently to augment this small estate’s primary production of Treixadura and Godello. The 2015 was raised in twenty-five percent new French

barrels and offers up a deep and nascently complex nose of pomegranate, black cherries, coffee grounds, a touch of graphite and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and fruit-driven, with moderate depth at the core, nice focus and balance and sound length and grip on the finish. This does not have the core or soil signature of older vines, but those elements will arrive in the fullness of time and the winemaking here is clearly quite good. 2017-2025. **88.**

### ***Tierra de León***

#### **2010 Pricum “Preito Picudo”- Bodegas Margón**

Raul Pérez is the winemaker at Pricum, and his 2010 old vine Preito Picudo (an indigenous grape to the region with which I am not overly familiar), made from sixty to one hundred year-old vines and fermented and aged in *foudre* is a fine and quite refined bottle. The octane here is 13.5 percent, and the low yields of these old vines (ten hectoliters per hectare!) gives the wine lovely intensity of flavor on the palate, as well as a refined and impressively complex nose of cassis, a dollop of roasted game, espresso, chicory, a touch of currant leaf, dark soil tones, a discreet framing of cedar and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very transparent, with fine focus and grip, a good core and excellent length and grip on the still youthful, moderately chewy finish. This is terrific wine, which is certainly approachable today, but would be even better once it has had a few years in the cellar to shed a bit of its tannin. 2020-2045+. **93.**

### ***Terra Alta***

#### **2015 Las Colinas del Ebro Garnaxta Blanca- Bodegas Abanico (screwcap)**

The Las Colinas del Ebro Garnaxta Blanca from Bodegas Abanico is named in memory of all the souls that lost their lives in the battle of the Ebro River, which was the longest and bloodiest conflict of the Spanish Civil War. The 2015 is very pretty, but unfortunately, sealed by screwcap and already a touch compromised by its closure already. The bouquet offers up a slightly reductive bouquet of pear, asparagus, white flowers and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and crisp, but starting to pick up a touch of metallic elements from its early reduction and short, clipped and very slightly vegetal on the finish. There is clearly a superb wine here, but it is being eaten by its closure. I would love to see this under natural cork next year, out of respect to all those who lost their lives on the Ebro back in 1938. 2017-2017. **84.**

### ***Toro***

#### **2014 Toro- Bodegas Elias Mora (Toro)**

The regular bottling of Toro from Bodegas Elias Mora is composed entirely of tempranillo, or Tinto de Toro as it is known in the region, produced from vines that are thirty-plus years of age. As I noted last year, this wine is fermented in stainless steel and ages for six months in American oak, with all the casks new this year. like the 2013, the 2014 is a ripe 14.5 percent octane and offers up a bright, red fruity mix of cherries, raspberries, a bit of *garrigue*, wild fennel and spicy American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, ripe, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the slightly warm and jammy finish. This is more red fruity than the 2013 version and is a good example of Toro, without going over the top stylistically. I would love to see it just a half point lower in octane, as

I imagine the precision and detail on the palate would jump up with just a touch less ripeness. Good juice. 2017-2030. **88.**

**2014 Prima Tinto- Bodegas Maurodos (Toro)**

The 2014 vintage of Prima Tinto from Bodegas Maurodos has a touch more Garnacha in the blend this year than was the case in 2013, with the *cépages* in 2014 fifteen percent Garnacha and eighty-five percent Tempranillo. The wine is more black fruity in personality than the Elias Mora Toro, despite including Garnacha, as it wafts from the glass in a ripe blend of black cherries, gentle balsamic tones, a nice base of soil tones, hung game, lovely spice tones and a touch of dried eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with moderate tannins, good focus and balance and a long, gently heady finish. This is 14.5 percent alcohol, but handles its octane very nicely and seems more refined on the palate than the 2013 version did a year ago. This is a very good bottle of Toro and a fine value. 2017-2030+. **89.**

**2014 Descarte- Bodegas Elias Mora (Toro)**

The Descarte bottling from Bodegas Elias Mora hails from a single vineyard that has a northern exposition and consequently retains better acidity in the warm Toro growing seasons. The vines here are forty years of age and the vineyard is planted entirely to Tempranillo. The wine spends twelve months aging in French casks and the 2014 comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, ripe and vibrant, offering up scents of black cherries, a touch of boysenberry, coffee grounds, gentle balsamic tones, cedar and a spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, plush and full-bodied, with its octane pretty well-managed. There is excellent depth in the mid-palate, ripe, fairly well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the slightly warm finish. The wood tannins become a touch more prominent as this wine opens up with air, but today, I like the balance on the 2014 version better than the 2013. 2017-2035. **90.**

**2013 Descarte- Bodegas Elias Mora (Toro)**

The 2013 Descarte bottling from Bodegas Elias Mora also comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, ripe and nascently complex, offering up scents of black raspberries, black cherries, a touch of coffee grounds, *garrigue* and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and has fine depth at the core, with good focus and grip, some oak tannins still in need of integration into the body of the wine and good length on the chewy, tannic finish. I fully understand that the market expects a higher level bottling from Toro to be aged in significant percentage of new wood, but in all honesty, the regular bottling from the bodegas is more interesting to my palate, as the balance is better and the wine already drinks with style. The 2013 Descarte may well have sufficient stuffing to eventually absorb all of its new wood, but with such fine raw materials underneath the oak, why not just age it in one or two wine casks and not have to deal with the wood tannins at all? At this point in the wine's evolution, I do not really have a strong sense if it will eventually be able to carry its new wood seamlessly and have scored it within a range for this reason. If it eventually eats up all the oak tannins, then it will merit a score at the upper level of the range, as there are some good things going on in the glass, but I do not love the oak treatment at this point in time. 2021-2040+? **85-90?**

**2013 Crianza- Bodegas Elias Mora (Toro)**

The 2013 Crianza from Bodegas Elias Mora is similarly-styled to the 2012 version I reported on a year ago, with the wine hailing from fifty year-old vines and tipping the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol. It is raised in a fifty-fifty blend of French casks and American barrels. However, this year all of the casks were previously used for one wine, whereas for the

2012 Crianza, the French wood was new for this bottling, so there is no new oak in the 2013. The bouquet is deep and ripe, offering up scents of black cherries, black plums, cocoa, gentle balsamic tones and discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe, with a plump core, moderate, fairly well-integrated tannins and good length and grip on the chunky and slightly heady finish. By using older casks for the French wood here, the tannins are far better integrated than was the case with the 2012 version, but I still do not really understand why this has to be fifteen percent octane, as it would gain immeasurably in precision and complexity at a lower octane. This is very well done in its style, but it is a big and ripe wine. 2017-2030. **88.**

### **2013 Gran Elias- Bodegas Elias Mora (Toro)**

The Gran Elias cuvée from Bodegas Elias Mora is a single vineyard bottling from the stony Senda de Lobo vineyard, which is planted with vines all in excess of seventy years. The wine is cropped at a miniscule fifteen hectoliters per hectare and raised in one hundred percent new French casks for seventeen months. The 2013 Gran Elias is a big, ripe wine, reaching a full fifteen percent octane, but offers up surprising precision in its bouquet of black plums, black cherries, dark chocolate, sweet balsamic tones, a touch of violet and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is big, full-bodied and jammy, with fine mid-palate depth, moderate, chewy tannins and good length and grip on the fairly four-square, youthful finish. One can sense that there is very good potential in the old vines in this vineyard, but at fifteen percent, there is not really much room for nuance or complexity. This is okay in its idiom, but why not pick it earlier and really see what the vineyard's potential might be? 2020-2040. **88+?**

### **2013 San Román- Bodegas Maurodos (Toro)**

The 2013 old vine bottling (sixty to ninety year-old vines) of San Román from Bodegas Maurodos was raised in fifty percent new oak, in a combination of American and French casks. This is entirely tempranillo, with the 2013 vintage coming in at the same 14.5 percent octane as last year's fine example. As I mentioned in my note on the 2012 a year ago, this is a modern-styled wine that is done impeccably well, with a sense of aromatic precision that is pretty rare in wines at this level of ripeness. The bouquet offers up a nascently complex blend of black cherries, cassis, a touch of cigar smoke, balsamic tones, a good base of soil, gentle notes of *garrigue* and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and well-balanced, with a rock solid core, fine focus, firm, chewy tannins and very good length and grip on the slightly warm finish. As I mentioned in my note on the 2012 San Román, this is really a beautifully made wine that could clearly be even better to my palate if harvested just a touch less ripe. Why not trade just a touch more youthful structure for a wine of even greater complexity and breed? That said, the 2013 San Román from Bodegas Maurodos is really a fine example of the more modern style in Toro. 2021-2045+. **92.**

### **2010 Reserva- Bodegas Elias Mora (Toro)**

The 2010 Reserva from Bodegas Elias Mora is a barrel selection of the most concentrated casks from the Gran Elias bottling, produced from seventy year-old vines planted in a very stony vineyard and the wine is aged for two years entirely in new French barrels. The wine reports fully fifteen percent alcohol on the label, but it manages this level of ripeness very well indeed and I get no sense of heat or *sur maturité* on the palate. This is a deep, powerful wine that is still very much in its adolescence, offering up a primary bouquet of black cherries, chocolate, gentle balsamic tones, a good dollop of soil, a bit of spit-roasted game, wild fennel and well done new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and potentially plush at the core, with firm,

chewy tannins, fine focus and grip and a very long, youthful and promising finish. There is great depth of fruit here to carry its new wood, but the oak tannins are still not quite fully integrated and the wine is in need of further bottle age to completely harmonize. I imagine that the wood tannins will eventually integrate completely, but this is another wine that would be even better with less new wood (how about one-third new casks and one-third each of one and two wine barrels?), as I cannot really see the point of continuing to have to wait for the wine to absorb its wood tannins. But, this has impressive potential and I imagine in another five years, it will really be drinking well. 2022-2050. **90+**.

### ***Rueda***

#### **2015 Verdejo- Bodegas José Pariente (Rueda)**

I did not have a chance to taste the fine sauvignon blanc this year from Bodegas José Pariente, but their 2015 Verdejo is excellent. The bouquet offers up a minerally-infused blend of lime, green apple, salty minerality, citrus peel and hints of the smokiness to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. The Pariente family makes one of the classiest examples of Verdejo I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2017-2023.

**92.**



### ***Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)***

Bodegas los Astrales is located in the village of Anguix, just a few kilometers to the west of Gumiel de Mercado, in the cooler, higher elevation section of Ribera del Duero. As I mentioned above, the estate was founded in 2000 by the Romera de la Cruz family, who sought to begin to produce their own wines, after having previously sold off all of their production to other wineries in the DO of Ribera del Duero for three generations. The family owned fifteen hectares of vineyards when they decided to set out on their own, and subsequently also planted an additional fourteen hectares of tempranillo in 2003 and 2004 to augment their future grape production. Of the original fifteen hectares of vineyards, the estate is very fortunate to have plenty of old vines, with the plantations ranging from twenty years of age to fully ninety years old. Many of the vines from forty years of age up to ninety are old, bush-trained plants that limit yields and produce extraordinarily high quality fruit. All of the vineyards here are now farmed organically. These days, Bodegas los Astrales still sells a significant percentage of their production off to other top producers in Ribera del Duero, but the old vines are now reserved for their own bottlings. The regular bottling is raised in only twenty percent new oak each year, which is quite low by contemporary Ribera del Duero standards, and shows a lovely soil signature across the several vintages that I tasted of the cuvée. The barrel regimen is a combination of seventy percent French and thirty percent American oak for the regular bottling of Astrales, which gives the wine a nicely old school personality that recall Ribera del Duero's classical heyday in the early 1980s. In addition to their regular bottling of Astrales, the winery also produces an old vine bottling, which they call Cuvée Christina, which is crafted entirely from ninety year-old bush vines and raised in one hundred percent new French casks for eighteen months prior to bottling. The Romera de la Cruz family has been making their old vine bottling since the 2005 vintage. As this is still Ribera del Duero, so that even at altitude, this is a hot growing region, the wines here tend to all be in the 14.5 percent octane range on the label, though to my palate, this seemed to vary a bit from vintage to vintage, with hotter or drier years seeming to be a bit higher in alcohol than this, and cooler years perhaps a touch lower. The bodegas' importer, Grapes of Spain, very kindly sent me a vertical of recent vintages of both bottlings, after I had written to them and told them how much I had enjoyed the beautiful 2014 Astrales that was included in my range of new releases from the estates that they represent. Working my way back through several vintages was very, very pleasant tasting and really showed how consistently excellent this estate is from year to year, and demonstrated that they are clearly one of the true superstars in Ribera del Duero. I find the wines far more convincing than many of the more famous estates in the region these days! I should mention that the winery also makes a fine, fine Godello from fruit grown in Bierzo, which is listed above in the section on that region.

### **2014 Astrales Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2014 Astrales Tinto from Bodegas Astrales is produced from forty year-old bush vines of tempranillo and raised in a combination of seventy percent French casks and thirty percent American barrels, with twenty percent of the oak new. The 2014 is 14.5 percent octane and offers up a really superb bouquet of cassis, black plums, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil, a touch of balsam bough, woodsmoke and a very stylish and discreet framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with excellent nascent complexity, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and very fine length on the well-balanced finish. This carries its 14.5 percent very well indeed and shows no signs of heat, but will need a



few years in the cellar to let the tannins soften up a bit and the secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. It is one of the most sophisticated bottles of Ribera del Duero I have tasted in a long time outside of the purview of Goyo Garcia! 2021-2050+. **93+**.

**2014 Astrales “Christina” Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The cuvée Christina from Bodegas los Astrales hails from a ninety year-old vineyard and is raised entirely in new French wood for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2014 version is excellent, offering up a deep and classy nose of black plums, black cherries, a lovely touch of soil, dark chocolate and a very well-done base of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a fine core, lovely focus and nascent complexity and a very long, ripely tannic and well-balanced finish. This carries its one hundred percent new wood very nicely, though the purist in me thinks that ninety year-old vines deserve less new wood, rather than more, so that more of the *terroir* here can shine through in the wine. But, this is a beautifully made and very promising bottle in the making. 2024-2060. **93**.

**2013 Astrales Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

Bodegas los Astrales clearly has some of the top vineyards in the region, as their 2013 is nearly as refined as their 2014 version, which is one of the most elegant examples of Ribera del Duero I have tasted not made by Goyo Garcia! The 2013 Astrales is beautifully perfumed on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of plums, black raspberries, cigar wrapper, a hint of balsamic tones, a good base of soil, lead pencil and a bit of oak spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely suave on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long and slightly chewy backend, with a touch of the oak tannins perking up the finish. This is not quite as elegant as the beautiful 2014 version, as the wood is not as seamlessly integrated, but this is still good juice in the making. 2020-2045+. **91**.

**2013 Astrales “Christina” Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2013 Christina from Bodegas los Astrales is more refined than the regular bottling in this vintage, with the higher percentage of new wood and the older vines perhaps giving it a leg up in this vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and very classy, offering up scents of red and black cherries, spicy soil tones, Cuban cigar, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a very suave base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and far more red fruity in personality than the regular 2013, with a good core, lovely soil signature, fine focus and grip and a very long, elegant and moderately tannic finish. I love the less extracted, really refined style of this wine, but the wood tannins on the backend show a bit more as a result of the more elegant style. Do not change the style, which is superb, but in vintages like 2013, perhaps a percentage of one wine barrels would add even more complexity and breed to the wine? This is still very, very good wine, but to my palate, less new wood would make it even better! 2020-2045. **91+**.

**2012 Astrales Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2012 Astrales regular bottling is its customary 14.5 percent octane on the label and is absolutely beautiful on the nose, which wafts from the glass in a classy constellation of black cherries, sweet cassis, pomegranate, a touch of lead pencil, cigar ash, a nice touch of soil and a very discreet framing of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine black fruity core, excellent soil signature, blossoming complexity and a long, focused and moderately tannic finish. I do not know if this wine had a touch more new wood to it than the 2014 (which is the only one I had a technical sheet for), but I would guess that this was a touch higher than twenty percent new oak (this was a very short crop), as there is just a touch of backend wood tannin firming up the finish. This is a superb wine in the

making, but it needs a few more years in the cellar to allow the tannins to more fully resolve. 2019-2045. **91.**

**2012 Astrales “Christina” Tinto- Bodegas Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2012 Astrales “Christina” bottling is a ripe and very, very classy bottle of wine in the making. This too is listed at 14.5 percent octane, but the old vine depth of fruit here carries its new wood very nicely indeed and there is a ton of promise here on both the nose and palate! The bouquet offers up an adolescently complex and very pure blend of black cherries, plums, chocolate, lead pencil, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and cedary, smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a sappy core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and lovely length and nascent complexity on the finish. A touch of the backend tannins here are also derived from the barrels, but there is more than ample depth of fruit to absorb them with a bit more bottle age and this will be a lovely bottle in the fullness of time. 2022-2050. **92+.**

**2011 Astrales Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2011 Astrales is a ripe vintage for this wine, with the octane listed at 14.5 percent on the label and perhaps just a touch higher than this in the glass? Of course, this was a drought year in Ribera del Duero that produced very concentrated berries, so this is just the reflection of the growing season. The bouquet is still nicely pure and focused, offering up a fine expression of black raspberry, black cherries, Cuban tobacco, lovely soil tones, just a hint of coffee bean and a gentle topnote of violet. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and beautifully suave on the attack, with a fine core, impeccable focus and just a touch of backend heat poking out on the long, moderately tannic finish. The polish of the wine does not quite carry through to the backend, probably due to the ripeness of the year, but this is still a complex and very classy bottle of (slightly heady) Ribera del Duero. If you do not mind a bit of backend heat, add three points to me score, as the constituent components here have aged very well indeed. 2017-2035. **89.**

**2011 Astrales “Christina” Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2011 Astrales “Christina” is also 14.5 percent octane, so the one hundred percent new oak that this cuvée is raised in shows a bit more with the higher alcohol. The bouquet is new oaky, but not badly done in this style, offering up scents of plums, black cherries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a nice touch of tempranillo spices and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully detailed, with again, just a bit of backend heat showing on the long, moderately tannic finish. Interestingly, though the perception of new oak is slightly more obvious on the nose, the wood is beautifully integrated on the palate and is really quite seamless today. I would have loved to have seen it a touch lower in octane, but this is the vintage, and the wine is very, very well done in this slightly riper style. 2017-2035+. **91.**

**2010 Astrales Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2010 vintage of Astrales is really lovely and arriving at a very nice point in its evolution for current drinking. This too is pretty ripe, but at the same time, pure and complex, offering up a fine bouquet of black cherries, plums, a touch of roasted meat, lovely soil tones, a bit of clove-like spices and a discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still fairly tannic, with lovely resolution and complexity on the attack, a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and a long, gently chewy and very nicely balanced finish. This seems a bit cooler on the backend to my palate, despite it being listed as the same octane as the 2011. Lovely juice that is just starting to drink nicely, but will continue to improve with further bottle age. 2017-2045+. **93.**

### **2010 Astrales “Christina” Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2010 Astrales “Christina” from Bodegas los Astrales has absorbed its new wood component beautifully on the nose and now offers up a really lovely bouquet of black plums, cassis, Cuban cigar, dark soil tones, a touch of wood ash, raw cocoa, gentle spice tones and a lovely topnote of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is complex, pure on the attack and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a very long, moderately tannic finish. This is a touch more tannic than the regular 2010 bottling right now, as the higher percentage of new wood has supplied a bit of tannin in addition to the skin tannins, but it is still nicely balanced and there should be no issue with seamless resolution in the fullness of time. But, today, it is not drinking with quite the same structural generosity today. Give this a few more years to more fully resolve its backend tannins, as it will be outstanding when it reaches its plateau. 2020-2045+. **93.**

### **2009 Astrales Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2009 vintage was very hot in Ribera del Duero, surpassing the previous record temperatures set in 2003, and this shows in the '09 Astrales, which seems decidedly riper than the 2010 version. There are some gentle notes of *sur maturité* interwoven in the aromatic blend of baked black cherries, a touch of apricot, chocolate, modest soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and wide open, with fairly low acids for this bottling, a good core, still a touch of backend tannin and a long, fairly complex and slightly warm finish. This is a solid effort from a vintage that I would be willing to bet did not produce a whole lot of wines in this region that would align nicely with my palate, but this is also the least interesting vintage of Astrales that I tasted for this report. 2017-2027+? **87.**

### **2005 Astrales “Christina” Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2005 vintage was the very first that Bodegas los Astrales produced their cuvée Christina, and at age twelve, the wine is now drinking very nicely indeed. This is a ripe wine that has aged quite nicely and is now offering up lovely aromatic complexity in its nose of plums, cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, bitter chocolate, a touch of wild fennel and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, a bit of backend warmth and a long, still modestly tannic and complex finish. This is a touch riper and a touch oakier than my ideal Ribera del Duero, but it has aged quite gracefully and augurs very well for the even more refined recent vintages of Christina! 2017-2035. **90.**

### ***Ribera del Duero***

### **2015 Aptus Tinto- Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz (Ribera del Duero)**

The Aptus Tinto from Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz was a new wine to me this year, with their 2015 coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol and having spent six months of its *elevage* in oak casks. The wine is a blend of ninety-five percent Tempranillo and the other five percent a mix of Garnacha and Monastrell, with the vineyards farmed organically and in conversion to biodynamics. Indigenous yeasts are used for fermentation and no enzymes are utilized in the cellars. The 2015 Aptus has a ripe, but pure nose of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, clove-like spice tones, a bit of lead pencil and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the very slightly hot finish. There are a lot of good things going on here, but the 14.5 percent octane gets just a bit distracting on the backend and keeps the score down a tad. If the bodegas could get this into the fourteen percent range, it would be stunning, rather than just pretty good! I should

mention that this is also very reasonably priced for Ribera del Duero, retailing here in the US at seventeen dollars a bottle. 2017-2035. **89.**

**2015 Bodegas Arrocal Tinto (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2015 Bodegas Arrocal Tinto is produced from twenty-five year-old tempranillo vineyards. The wine is aged for six months in cask (eighty percent French and twenty percent American), with twenty percent of the casks renewed each year. The wine comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a fine, youthful bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of cigar smoke, a fine base of soil and a discreet touch of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still tightly-knit, with promising elegance out of the blocks, a good core, moderate tannins and a long, primary and well-balanced finish. This deserves a couple of years in the cellar at the least, but it is going to be really an excellent wine for its price point (south of twenty dollars here in the states) and should age very nicely indeed. 2019-2045. **90.**

**2015 Milú- Quinta Milú (Germán Blanco)**

The 2015 Milú bottling from Germán Blanco is his entry level wine, made from tempranillo vines that are nearly fifty years of age and raised in older oak casks. The 2015 version is ripe and pure on the nose, delivering scents of cherries, pomegranate, lovely spice tones, a good base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and modestly tannic, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, still quite primary finish. This is quite approachable and tasty out of the blocks, but much more complexity will emerge with some time in the cellar. 2017-2035. **89.**

**2015 La Cometa- Quinta Milú (Germán Blanco)**

The La Cometa bottling from Señor Blanco hails from his oldest vines, which are seventy years of age, with the wine being raised in a combination of French and American oak barrels and *demi-muids* prior to bottling. These old vines are planted at a thousand meters, making this a cooler vineyard and this is reflected in an octane level of 13.5 percent in this fine 2015, which offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a bit of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very young, with a fine core of fruit, very good focus and grip, a fair bit of chewy tannin and excellent length on the finish. This is a true *vin de garde* and it is still very early days, but I would love to see these old vines raised in a bit less new wood (the exact percentage was not furnished to me), as there is just a bit of uncovered oak tannin still waiting for integration on the backend. There is plenty of stuffing to eventually do so, but why make these old vines work so hard? 2023-2045+. **90+.**

**2015 Rios de Tinta- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2015 Rios de Tinta from Isaac Fernandez is produced from relatively young Tempranillo vines, ranging from fifteen to twenty years of age and raised entirely in stainless steel, seeing no oak whatsoever prior to bottling. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and the 2015 comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful mix of black cherries, a touch of sweet cranberry, lovely spice tones, a bit of pepper and a very good base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and delicious, with lovely sappiness at the core, modest tannins, bright acids and quite impressive length and grip on the backend. This is already tasty, but I would love to have a dozen bottles in the cellar to start drinking in a year or two, as once the tannins more fully fade away, this is going to be gorgeous. By the way, this is a great bargain, as it is fourteen dollars a bottle here in the US market! 2017-2030+. **90.**

### **2014 Passión Arrocal Tinto- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2014 Passión Arrocal sees no new wood, with its *elevage* done in a fifty-fifty mix of two and three year-old French casks- my kind of wine! This is one hundred percent tempranillo and offers up a fine bouquet of plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, a really striking soil signature, a touch of cigar wrapper and a gently spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is pure and full-bodied, with beautiful balance and nascent complexity, fine mid-palate depth, ripe, moderate tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long, bright and youthful finish. This harkens back stylistically to the wines I fell in love with from Ribera del Duero in the vintages of the early 1980s and is a superb value. While the wine is quite tasty in its youth, I would let this evolve with at least a couple of years in the cellar, as there are more layers of complexity to unfold! Great juice. 2020-2050. **92.**



### **2014 Arrocal Selección- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)**

Bodegas Arrocal is located in the village of Gumiel del Mercado in the eastern end of the plateau of Castilla y León, which is decidedly cooler than the western end of Ribera del Duero. Their most famous neighbor is of course Goyo García. The fruit for their Arrocal Selección bottling comes from a fine old vineyard. and, as I reported last year is raised in a fifty-fifty blend of new and one wine French oak casks. The 2014 is an even fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a youthfully complex bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil tones, graphite and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and well-stocked

at the core, with fine soil signature, impressive focus and blossoming complexity and very good length and grip on the inherently elegant, moderately chewy finish. As I mentioned in my note on the 2011 Arrocal Selección last year, the new oak impression here is a bit strident in the young wine and detracts a bit from what is really a stunning wine underneath the wood treatment. There is a lot of oak spice on the nose and a bit of presently uncovered wood tannins on the finish. I would bet there is enough depth of fruit to eventually carry the oak tannins more seamlessly, but utterly brilliant raw materials are being hampered by the new wood here. Raise this wine in one and two wine casks and it would be one of the best wines in Spain, but the good 2014 is not quite there. I know that new oak is an important selling point in the Spanish domestic market, but just lie to your local clients and use older casks and no one is going to complain, as the wine is going to be dramatically better. There is such indisputable greatness lying under the wood veneer here that it would be worth a bit of prevarication, and one can always go to confession more often! 2022-2050+. **88-90+** (depending on how well the wine eventually absorbs the oak here).

#### **2014 Carravid Tinto- Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz (Ribera del Duero)**

The Carravid bottling from Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz sees a bit more oak than the Aptus cuvée, with fifty percent of the casks French and the rest a split of American and Hungarian wood (unfortunately my tech sheet does not say how much of this wood is new). The vineyards for this bottling are in Castrillo de la Vega (just west of Aranda del Duero) and farmed organically; the 2014 is listed at 14.5 percent octane (but seems just a touch riper than that to my palate). The bouquet shows a touch of *sur maturité* in its mix of baked plums and black cherries, chocolate, gentle balsamic tones, cigar wrapper and a very well done base of new oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and nicely velvety on the attack, with a good core, fine length and grip, moderate tannins and just a bit of backend heat. There is a bit of uncovered oak tannin here as well, but the wine has good stuffing and probably will absorb these with a bit more bottle age. This is a really well-made wine in its style and not over the top at all, but it is a bit riper than I would like to see, with the higher alcohol leeching tannins out of the barrels a bit more aggressively and causing a bit of disequilibrium on the finish. There is considerable promise here- maybe the 2015 will be a bit lower in octane? 2020-2035+? **87**.

#### **2012 Milénico Crianza- Bodega Milénico (Manuel Martinez)**

The Martinez family have been farmers in Ribera del Duero for several generations, but Manuel Martinez was the first to pursue viticulture on a more full-time basis, as he expanded the family's vineyard plantations to fourteen hectares in 1990. Today, the winery is run by his son, Manuel Martinez Jr. and their Milénico Crianza bottling is a blend of fifty year-old vines from the old days and some of the newer plantations that went in the ground in 1990. The wine is raised in mix of eighty-five percent French oak and fifteen percent American wood, with the 2012 vintage coming in at 14.5 percent octane. The bouquet is ripe and classy, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet cassis, cigar wrapper, balsamic tones and a fairly discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave on the attack and really quite elegant in profile for its ripeness level, with a fine core, good soil signature, moderate tannins and impressive length and grip on the very gently warm finish. This wine strives for elegance and does a nice job of delivering it at its octane level! 2017-2030+. **88+**.

### **2011 Arrocal “Máximo”- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)**

The Máximo bottling from Bodegas Arrocal is produced entirely from tempranillo sourced from seventy year-old vines in the organically-farmed vineyard of El Portillo. Clearly these are very special grapes of enormous potential, but the wine is raised in the Dominique Laurent style of two hundred percent new oak, as the cuvée spends twelve months in new French barrels and then is racked into another round of completely new casks for another fourteen months of aging. Given the gorgeous depth of old vine fruit here, the wine can almost stand up to this crazy oak treatment! The bouquet is deep, refined and of course, new oaky, as it offers up scents of black cherries, gentle balsamic tones, cigar smoke, a nice dollop of soil and a smorgasbord of spicy and nutty new wood tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully suave on the attack, with a very good core, fine focus and grip and some astringent, new oak tannins sticking out uncovered on the very long and potentially classy finish. The old vine fruit here is so, so good that it might have stood up to one hundred percent new oak, but two hundred percent is just over the top and has wasted much of the enormous potential of the wine. I should mention that the new wood here is very obviously of high quality, but the backend wood tannins are sufficiently independent of the wine on the backend that I am not sure if they will ever be fully integrated, and consequently, my proposed window of drinkability is rather speculative. There is a legendary wine waiting to be found here, but first the new oak has to be reined in dramatically! 2023-2045? **87-91?**

### **2011 Viña Pedrosa Crianza- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2011 Viña Pedrosa Crianza is a lovely wine that is really starting to reach its plateau of maturity at age six, as it offers up lovely secondary layers of complexity in its aromatic constellation of plums, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a bit of bonfire and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully plush on the attack, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex, slightly warm finish. This sample came directly from Spain and does not have an alcohol level on the label, but I would guess that this is closer to 14.5 than fourteen percent. Nevertheless, it is aging very well and is really a lovely drink now, if one is not daunted by a touch of backend heat. 2017-2035. **91.**

### ***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 Evolet- Aurelio Cabestrero**

The 2012 Evolet selected by Aurelio Cabestrero is composed entirely of tempranillo, which are planted in a very chalky vineyard situated at nine hundred meters above sea level. The wine is raised for six months in used casks, in a combination of seventy percent French oak and thirty percent American oak. The 2012 comes in at an even fourteen percent octane and offers up a fine nose of black cherries, plums, espresso, a bit of cigar wrapper and a fairly generous serving of oak spice. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a



good core, fine-grained tannins and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is eminently approachable today, but has the structure to also repay cellaring and will probably be even better with a bit more bottle age. It is an excellent value, retailing here in the US for twenty-one dollars a bottle! I should note that this wine really blossoms nicely with a bit of aeration and is best decanted for fifteen or twenty minutes before serving, just to allow its secondary layers of complexity to settle in. 2017-2035. **90.**

## **Navarra**

### **2012 Dignus- Bodegas Magaña**

The Dignus bottling from Bodegas Magaña is composed of a blend of fifty percent tempranillo and twenty-five percent each of cabernet sauvignon and merlot. The wine is fermented with fifteen percent whole clusters and raised for twelve months in three year-old French barrels, prior to bottling. The 2012 Dignus comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a fairly ripe bouquet of cherries, a touch of raspberry, *garrigue*, woodsmoke, wild fennel and a good base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and nicely balanced, with a good core, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This wine has good depth and stuffing and is a good value. It is quite approachable today, but my gut feeling is that secondary layers of complexity will emerge with just a couple of years in the cellar and I would suggest it will be even more interesting around 2020 or so. Good juice. 2017-2030. **88.**

### **2010 Barón de Magaña- Bodegas Magaña**

The Barón de Magaña cuvée has a different *cépages* from the Dignus bottling, as the wine is made up of a blend of thirty-five percent each of merlot and cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent tempranillo and ten percent syrah. Like all of the estate wines, it is planted in a vineyard at four hundred meters elevation which is rich in limestone. The wine includes fifteen percent whole clusters and is raised for fourteen months in two year-old, used Burgundy casks. The 2010 Barón de Magaña is more black fruity in profile than the Dignus, as well as more refined on both the nose and palate. The focused and complex bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with a fine core of fruit, lovely balance and a long, youthful and promising finish. This needs a bit of time in the cellar to really come into its own, but it will be a lovely bottle once it blossoms. 2020-2040. **89+.**

### **2001 Merlot- Bodegas Magaña**

The merlot planted at Bodegas Magaña is their pride and joy, as it came from the same nursery in Bordeaux that supplied Château Pétrus back in the mid-1970s when it was sourced and put in the ground here in Navarra. It is only produced on its own in outstanding vintages, so since its inaugural vintage of 1980, there have only been nine releases prior to this 2001. It is raised entirely in two year old casks and the 2001 comes in at an even fourteen percent octane. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of bitter chocolate, lovely soil tones and cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is a lovely bottle in the making, that is eminently drinkable today (due to its impeccable balance), but is really still a puppy and will be even better with some extended bottle age! Fine juice. 2017-2035+. **92.**

### **1997 Magaña “Reserva”- Bodegas Magaña**

The 1997 Magaña “Reserva” is comprised of a blend of fifty percent merlot, thirty percent cabernet sauvignon, fifteen percent tempranillo and five percent syrah, spends two years in older French casks prior to bottling and is held in the cellars of the bodegas for fourteen years prior to its release, so that the wine is already fully mature when it is first released into the market. The 1997 Reserva is very good, offering up a fine, mature nose of desiccated black cherries, dark berries, bonfire, a touch of chipotle pepper, cigar ash and a strong signature of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite vibrant, with a good core, melting tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This is fully mature, but has plenty of life still ahead of it as well. Good juice. 2017-2030+. **90+**.

### **1989 Viña Magaña “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Magaña**

The 1989 Viña Magaña “Gran Reserva” is a deep and black fruity wine that is now fully mature, but remains vibrant and drinking well. This is not as polished in profile as the wines that the bodegas is producing today, but there is still plenty to like here in the tertiary bouquet of baked black fruit, wood ash, *garrigue*, roasted meats, a touch of wild fennel and autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly resolved, with a good core, still a touch of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the sturdy finish. This is a touch rustic stylistically, but has the benefit of nearly thirty years of bottle age and has developed well as the years have gone by. Good, old-fashioned country wine. 2016-2030. **88**.

### **1985 Viña Magaña “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Magaña**

The 1985 Viña Magaña “Gran Reserva” is a tad more refined than the 1989 version and is really a very good bottle of mature wine from Navarra. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mature blend of desiccated black cherries, charred wood, autumnal soil tones, gentle notes of *garrigue*, coffee grounds, gamebird and a touch of dried eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature, tertiary complexity and a long, bright and fully resolved finish. This is really quite good and has plenty of life still ahead of it! 2017-2035. **89**.

### **1982 Viña Magaña “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Magaña**

The 1982 Viña Magaña “Gran Reserva” needs a bit of air to blossom, but blossom it most surely does and the wine is really quite lovely once it has had a chance to open up. The bouquet is deep and complex, wafting gently from the glass in a mature blend of baked raspberries and cherries, gentle spice tones, underbrush, nutskin, a touch of clove and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and velvety, with no remaining tannins, still fine balance and a long, complex and suave finish. This has been fully mature for decades, but it continues to cruise along nicely and shows no signs of decline anytime soon. It is not a great wine, but a very good wine that has the benefit of thirty-five years of bottle age to add gravitas and dimension. 2017-2030. **89**.

## ***La Mancha***

### **2015 Fatum Tinto (Tempranillo-Bobal) – Manuel Manzaneque Suárez**

The 2015 bottling of Fatum from Manuel Manzaneque Suárez has a slightly different *cépages* this year from the 2014, as this year the blend is eighty percent Tempranillo and only twenty percent Bobal (last year was a fifty-fifty blend). This is a wine that is fermented with indigenous yeasts and is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling, with this vintage coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. The 2015 Fatum offers up a lovely and quite complex bouquet of black cherries, a touch of chicory, roasted game, lovely, sandy soil tones, smoky overtones

and just a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely plump at the core, with modest tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Bobal often finishes with just a touch of backend bitterness that recalls top-end Montepulciano, and there is just a whisper of this on the finish here. This is another absolutely stellar value! 2017-2027. **89+**.

**2014 EA! – Manuel Manzanque Suárez**

The 2014 EA! from Manuel Manzanque Suárez is a fine follow-up to the excellent 2013 bottling. As readers may recall, this is composed entirely of tempranillo, from old vines ranging up to seventy years of age, that Señor Suárez purchases to produce this cuvée. The wine is made from very low-yielding bush vines (fifteen hectoliters per hectare), fermented with indigenous yeasts, and this year, was raised entirely in French barrels, with twenty-five percent of the oak new. The bouquet is deep and nascently complex, offering up a fine constellation of black cherries, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, wild fennel, a touch of cola and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and youthfully complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very promising finish. This is very approachable today, but it is still a puppy and will be even better with three or four years' worth of bottle age. Fine, fine juice and a terrific bargain! 2017-2040. **92.**

***Campo de Borja***

**2015 Garnacha Blanca- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)**

The 2015 Garnacha Blanca from Legado del Moncayo is really a stylish example of this grape, with lovely depth and bounce, and at its bargain price here in the states of fourteen dollars a bottle, is a great value. The bouquet offers up a ripe, but vibrant blend of melon, pear, wild fennel, acacia blossoms and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and long, with the broad shoulders of Garnacha Blanca, good acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is really a lot of wine for the price! 2017-2020+. **88.**

**2015 Garnacha- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)**

The 2015 regular bottling of Legado del Moncayo Garnacha is an excellent wine, coming in at an even fourteen percent octane and offering up lovely complexity on both the nose and palate. This cuvée is made from twenty-five year-old vines and fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The bouquet is a classic expression of this grape, offering up scents of raspberries, weedy *garrigue*, roasted game, peppercorns and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a good core of fruit and blossoming complexity on the long, ripely tannic and youthful finish. This is a touch more tightly-knit out of the blocks than the 2014 was at a similar stage, so it could use a couple of years in the cellar to allow the tannins to soften up a bit more. It should age very nicely and is really insanely good wine for its ten dollar price tag here in the US! 2019-2030. **89.**

**2015 Garnacha “Montaña” Old Vines- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)**

As I mentioned last year, the old vine bottling of Montaña from Legado del Moncayo is made from forty year-old bush vines and aged in used French barrels for seven months prior to bottling. The 2015 version is excellent, offering up a deep and more black fruity bouquet of black cherries, raspberries, grilled meats, a touch of coffee bean, *garrigue*, stony soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and shows off even better mid-palate depth from the older vines. The wine is nicely balanced, ripely tannic and focused, with good backend soil signature and a nascently complex finish. The extra element of fruit from the

old vines covers the tannins a bit better out of the blocks than in the regular bottling, and consequently, this is a bit more approachable out of the blocks (though still really built for a bit of cellaring). Fine juice and another stellar value, as this cuvée is all of fourteen dollars here in America! 2017-2035. **91+**.

### ***Calatayud***

#### **2015 Garnacha “Acentor”- Isaac Fernandez Selección**

The Acentor bottling from Isaac Fernandez is produced from vines that are more than fifty years of age, which are planted at relatively high altitudes of seven hundred and fifty to nine hundred meters above sea level, with the soils being iron-rich clay. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement tanks and aged in a combination of French and American casks. The wine offers up a deep, ripe and nicely complex nose of black cherries, grilled venison, coffee grounds, scorched earth and a touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with nice, plush black fruit on the attack, a good signature of soil, fine depth at the core and lovely length and grip on the ripely tannic and peppery finish. This is 14.5 percent octane, but very nicely balanced. A great, great value at fourteen dollars a bottle here in New York! 2017-2035. **91+**.

#### **2013 Roque Colás**

The *cépages* this year of the Roque Colás is slightly different from last year, as the five percent of merlot in the cuvée has been eliminated and the 2013 version is comprised of a blend of thirty-four percent garnacha, thirty-three percent tempranillo and thirty-three percent cabernet sauvignon. The organically-farmed vineyards for this wine range from seventeen up to eighty-five years of age. The 2013 version is a touch less ripe than the buxom 2012 version, coming in at 14.5 percent, as this was a cooler and rainier summer in the region and the harvest was quite late. The wine offers up a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, balsam boughs, dark chocolate, a beautiful swirl of *garrigue*, wild fennel and a dollop of spicy oak (though only ten percent of the casks are new for this bottling). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a plush core, fine-grained, moderate tannins and great length and grip on the very suave, complex and classy finish. As I mentioned last year, this wine is amazingly well-balanced for its octane level (which is a half point lower in 2013), with virtually no signs of heat or *sur maturité* on the long finish. I would love to see this a touch lower in alcohol, but this is Calatayud after all, which is plenty hot, and perhaps we should just think of 14.5 percent alcohol here as we would 12.5 percent alcohol in Burgundy! In any case, this is a beautifully made wine. 2017-2035+. **91+** (and again, as was the case last year, if you are more tolerant of higher octane wines, add three points, as this is beautifully-crafted wine).

### ***Blancos Cataluña***

#### **2015 Genium Ximenis Blanco (Priorat)**

The 2015 Genium Ximenis Blanco is a blend of ninety percent Pedro Ximénez and ten percent Garnacha Blanca, with the vines averaging forty to forty-five years of age. The wine is raised in new French barrels for three months prior to bottling. The 2015 Ximenis offers up a deep and vibrant nose of melon, peach, gentle notes of honeycomb, musky floral tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and shows off plenty of mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, good complexity and just a bit of backend heat on the long and vibrant finish. This is listed at fourteen percent octane on the label, but shows just a touch warm on the finish. Otherwise, this is really a lovely and quite exotic wine. 2017-2020. **88**.



*The rugged vineyard landscape of Priorat.*

### ***Cataluña Tinto***

#### **2013 Genium “Excel.lent” Tinto (Priorat)**

The Genium “Excel.lent” bottling hails from a fifty-fifty blend of Garnacha and Cariñena, with the vines from both varieties more than one hundred years of age! The 2013 Excellent is a bit less ripe than the 2011s I tasted from the bodegas, coming in at an alcohol level of 14.5 percent and offering up a ripe and complex bouquet of baked black cherries, coffee grounds, chicory, chocolate, bonfire, a good base of soil, discreetly nutty new oak and a very delicate topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with impressive soil signature, fine focus and grip, moderately chewy, but well-integrated tannins and lovely length on the complex finish. This is very, very nicely balanced for Priorat, with little signs of backend heat and impressive complexity. One of the best wines I have ever tasted from this beautifully picturesque corner of Cataluña. 2017-2040. **93.**

#### **2011 Genium Tinto (Priorat)**

The 2011 Genium Tinto is composed of a blend of fifty percent Garnacha, twenty percent Cariñena, fifteen percent Cabernet Sauvignon, ten percent Syrah and five percent Merlot. The wine this year is a hefty 15.5 percent octane and was raised in twenty percent new French wood. The bouquet is deep and ripe, but not over the top, as it offers up scents of baked raspberries, apricot, bonfire, hung game, lovely stony soil tones and a bit of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really very well-balanced for its alcohol level, with a plush core, good

soil tones and a bit of heat and chewy tannin defining the long and complex finish. There is the requisite bit of coarseness on the backend that one so often finds with high octane wines, but given its ripeness level, this is really pretty admirably restrained. I never really have a good sense of how long wines with this much alcohol will last in bottle, so the projected window of drinkability is a rather rough guess. 2017-2025+? **87.**

**2011 Genium “Poboleda Vi de la Vila” (Priorat)**

The 2011 Genium “Poboleda Vi de la Vila” is also 15.5 percent octane this year, which is not particularly shy. The wine is a bit different blend than the 2010 version, as last year’s Merlot has been abandoned and the *cépages* of the 2011 is seventy percent Garnacha and thirty percent Cariñena. The nose is brighter than in the regular bottling of Genium, offering up a mix of black raspberries, black cherries, cloves, woodsmoke, a touch of eucalyptus, soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core, lovely focus and complexity and some coarse, chewy tannins perking up the slightly hot, but long and minerally finish. Again, this is really well-balanced for its alcohol level, but the wine would be so much more sophisticated on the palate at a lower octane! 2017-2025+? **87.**

**2011 Genium “Ecològic” (Priorat)**

The 2011 Genium “Ecològic” is a tad lower in alcohol, coming in at an even fifteen percent and is a different blend as well from the preceding two wines. The *cépages* this year is fifty percent Garnacha, forty percent Merlot and ten percent Cariñena, with the wine aging for ten months in French barrels prior to racking and preparation for bottling. I really like the interplay of Garnacha and ripe Merlot on the nose here, as the bouquet delivers a blend of black raspberries, cassis, cigar ash, a dollop of fresh herb tones, a fine base of soil, *garrigue* and a nice touch of roasted venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, classy on the attack, with an excellent core, fine focus, ripe, chewy tannins and excellent length and grip on the slightly hot finish. I wish they could produce this wine at fourteen percent, because it would be brilliant, but that said, this is extremely well-balanced and almost refined for fifteen percent octane! 2017-2025+? **88.**

**2011 Genium “Costers vi de Guarda” (Priorat)**

The 2011 Genium “Costers vi de Guarda” is again a hefty 15.5 percent alcohol and is made up of an old vine blend of sixty percent Garnacha and forty percent Cariñena, from vineyards that are more than ninety years of age. The wine is raised in *Allier* oak for fourteen months prior to bottling. The bouquet of the 2011 is beautifully aromatic, offering up scents of black raspberry, dried eucalyptus, *garrigue*, gorgeous stony soil tones, bonfire and roasted meats. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and impressively well-balanced for its octane, with a fine core, ripe, quite well-integrated, albeit slightly coarse tannins, good acids and fine length and grip on the warm finish. If I was ever going to drink a wine that was 15.5 percent alcohol, this would be the one, as the aromatics are truly superb and the heat is manageable. But, I get heart palpitations thinking just how truly brilliant this wine could be at fourteen percent alcohol! It has a 95 point nose and an 85 point palate. 2017-2030+. **89.**

***Jumilla***

*For the second straight year I was absolutely floored by the quality of the Porta Regia bottlings from Bodegas Sierra Norte, which are made entirely from the lovely grape of Monastrell. These wines are beautifully balanced, complex and soil-driven wines of impeccable balance, and they are amazingly inexpensive in price as well, with none of the three bottlings I tasted from them over twenty dollars per bottle here in the US market! They have to be numbered*

*amongst the very finest red wine values to be found anywhere in the world and I cannot recommend their new releases highly enough!*

**2015 Monastrell “Old Vines”- Porta Regia (Bodegas Sierra Norte)**

The 2015 Monastrell “Old Vines” from Porta Regia follows in the path of the 2014 version, tipping the scales at a very civilized fourteen percent alcohol, though the 2015 version is more red fruity in personality. The wine this year is again sealed up under a plastic cork, which may suggest earlier drinking will be prudent. The classy bouquet of the 2015 is excellent, offering up a complex and meaty mélange of raspberries, cherries, wild fennel, spiced meats and a touch of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, modest tannins and impressive bounce on the long and softly tannic finish. This is a terrific wine for its thirteen dollar price tag here in the US and has to be one of the best values in the realm of Spanish wines! I really wish this had been bottled under an agglomerated natural cork (which is priced around the same as synthetics), as the balance here is impeccable and I have the sense that it would age quite nicely, but I have not always had good results aging wines under plastic corks. Good juice. 2017-2020+? **89.**

**2015 Monastrell “Barrica 5 Meses”- Porta Regia (Bodegas Sierra Norte)**

The 2015 Monastrell “Barrica 5 Meses” from Porta Regia is essentially the same wine as the above, except that it is aged for five months in older casks, whereas the Old Vines bottling spends its entire *eleveage* in stainless steel tanks. As was the case with the 2014 version, these were one wine barrels, rather than new oak. The bouquet is a bit deeper and just a touch more black fruity in personality than the 2015 Old Vines cuvée, but equally poised and complex, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, black raspberries, lovely spice tones, wild fennel, a nice touch of meatiness, a fine base of soil and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced and vibrant finish. Again, this is simply a terrific value! 2017-2025+. **90+.**

**2014 Monastrell “Barrica 12 Meses”- Porta Regia (Bodegas Sierra Norte)**

The 2014 vintage of “Barrica 12 Meses” from Porta Regia was raised (as the name implies) for one year in one wine barrels, sixty percent of which are French in origin and forty percent of which are American oak. These are older vines than either of the above wines, with the vineyards all at least fifty years of age. The wine is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a black fruity constellation of black cherries, *garrigue*, a touch of cigar smoke, lovely soil tones, wild fennel, a bit of lamb (cooked on vine cuttings in the Spanish tradition) and a discreet framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and still fairly youthful finish. This is eminently drinkable today, but it is still a puppy and will be even better with a few more years of bottle age. Like all of the wines from Porta Regia, this is an absolute steal! Very impressive juice. 2019-2040+. **92.**





### ***Utiel-Requana and Manchuela***

#### **2015 Bovale- Isaac Hernandez Selección**

As readers may recall, this wine is composed entirely of Bobal, produced from vines in excess of fifty years of age and grown at nine hundred meters above sea level on limestone and clay soils. The wine is fermented with native yeasts and raised in a combination of French and American casks. The 2015 Bovale comes in at an even fourteen percent octane and offers up an outstanding bouquet of sappy black cherries, pomegranate, bitter chocolate, chalky soil tones, wild fennel and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with lovely focus and balance, a fine core, very good soil signature and a very long, moderately tannic and classy finish. The 2015 is more precise and complex than the good 2014 version is a notable step up in quality. This is really a terrific bottle of wine and at fifteen dollars a bottle, it has to be one of the best red wine values to be found anywhere in the US! Great juice! 2017-2035. **91.**

### ***Rioja Blanco***

#### **2015 Viura Rioja Blanco- Mileto (Bodegas Alvia)**

The 2015 Viura Rioja Blanco bottled under the Mileto label by Bodegas Alvia is a very pretty young wine, showing a bit of new oak on its nose of apple, white cherry, salty soil tones, vanillin oak and a whisper of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and still youthfully oaky, as it has not yet fully integrated its new wood. But, there is lovely depth at the

core and all this wine needs is a bit of time to absorb its oak, and with its fine balance and bright acids, it will be very tasty once it has blossomed a bit. 2018-2030. **88+**.

**2015 Viña Otano “Viura” Rioja Blanco- Union de Viticultores Riojanos (Rioja Alta)**

The 2015 Viña Otano “Viura” Rioja Blanco is produced from thirty year-old vines and is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very floral blend of white peach, honeysuckle and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with good acids, moderate core and good length on the not particularly complex finish. I get the impression that this is machine-harvested juice fermented with cultured yeasts, and while it is perfectly serviceable, it is not a patch on the red wines produced here. 2017-2025. **84.**

**2015 Viña Otano Rioja Blanco “Fermentado en Barrica”- Union de Viticultores Riojanos**

The barrel-fermented version of 2015 Viña Otano Rioja Blanco is a blend of seventy-five percent Viura and twenty-five percent Tempranillo Blanco, with the wine aged for four months in the barrels in which it is fermented. The nose shows a nice touch of vanillin oak, but the wine also seems to be the product of machine harvesting and commercial yeasts, and consequently, there is not the same personality here as in this producer’s fine red wines. The nose is a blend of vanillin oak, apple, white soils and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and gently new oaky, with good core, bright acids and modest complexity on the good, long finish. This is okay, but could be far better with a few changes in technique. 2017-2025. **87.**

**2014 Rioja Monopole “Classico” Blanco- Cuné**

As readers may recall from the feature on Cuné back in the fall of 2014, the very last vintage of Monopole produced here that included a bit of Manzanilla Sherry in the blend was the 1979, which I had the good fortune to taste during my visit to the estate. For decades, this bottling was produced with fifteen percent Manzanilla added into the blend just after the completion of fermentation, with the remainder of the cuvée made up entirely of Viura. It was extremely popular in its day in Spain, but as fashion changed in the 1980s, the bodegas discontinued the practice of making this wine with the addition of Manzanilla. In 2014, they have happily decided to produce a very limited quantity of the old style Monopole, which they have dubbed “Classico” to denote the addition once again of Manzanilla in the blend. This is a terrific wine that is still very youthful and will age with great style. The nascently complex bouquet offers up a fine blend of lemon, white peach, salty soil tones, Manzanilla nuttiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core, lovely emerging complexity, a fine base of soil and a very long, zesty and still quite primary finish. This superb wine will probably last forty years or more and I would be inclined to give it five years in the cellar to really let it blossom and start to show its secondary layers of complexity. It is one of the most unique and compelling white wines I have tasted from the Rioja region and congratulations to the team at Cuné for once again starting to produce their Classico interpretation of Monopole. 2022-2060+. **93+.**

**2008 Rioja Blanco- Livius (Bodegas Alvia)**

Livius is the top of the line label from Bodegas Alvia, with the white wine version having been barrel-fermented. The 2008 Livius Blanco is nicely new oaky in personality and now also showing plenty of secondary layers of complexity in its fine bouquet of peach, hazelnut, salty soil tones, a touch of marzipan and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave on the attack and absolutely beautifully balanced, with a superb core, bright acids and outstanding

length and grip on the complex and very elegant finish. This is first class Rioja Blanco and has decades of life still ahead of it! 2017-2035+. **93.**

### ***Rioja Tinto***

#### **2015 “Bozeto de Exopto” Rioja- Bodegas Exopto (Rioja Alavesa)**

The 2015 Bozeto de Exopto from Bodegas Exopto is comprised of a blend of fifty percent Garnacha, forty percent Tempranillo and ten percent Graciano, with the wine raised in French casks of varying age. This is a relatively new project, only started in 2003 by *Bordelais* winemaker Thomas Puyaubert, with the goal to find higher elevation parcels of old bush vines. The 2015 is a young and promising bottle of Rioja, offering up a bouquet of raspberries, grilled meats, *garrigue*, a good base of soil tones, coffee and just a touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a very good core, promising soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still youthfully chewy finish. In personality this reminds me quite a bit of a young Muga Prado Enea. This is good juice and a fine value, but it deserves some bottle age. 2020-2045. **91+**.

#### **2015 Campellares Rioja- Bodegas San Pedro Apostol (Rioja Alta)**

The Campellares bottling of Rioja from Bodegas San Pedro Apostol is their entry level wine, which is fermented and aged entirely in stainless steel tanks. The wine is produced entirely from Rioja Alta fruit and the vines average fifty years of age. The nose on the 2015 Campellares is young and pretty, offering up scents of black cherries, a touch of pepper, a nice dollop of soil and plenty of Rioja spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and somewhat Beaujolais-like in personality, with plenty of fruit in the mid-palate, a bit of backend tannin and good length and grip on the vibrant finish. This has depth and quality raw materials and is really quite a good example of a Joven bottling and will be even better with a bit of cellaring. 2017-2030. **88+**.

#### **2014 Rioja “Viñas de Laguardia”- Bodegas Artadi (Rioja Alavesa)**

The 2014 Rioja “Viñas de Laguardia” from Artadi is a very well-made, modern styled Rioja, with plenty of extraction and new French oak, but also the balance to age very nicely with sufficient time in the cellar. The bouquet is deep, pure and very youthful, offering up scents of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, a touch of Rioja spice tones and a smorgasbord of luxuriant new oak, with smoky and nutty overtones predominant. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary, with a good core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. The octane on the back label here is 14.5 percent, but the wine is beautifully balanced, handling both its alcohol and its new oak with aplomb. This wine needs time, but should be very good when fully mature. 2025-2055. **90.**

#### **2014 Rioja Crianza- Cuné (Rioja Alta)**

The 2014 Crianza from Cuné is an excellent young bottle of Rioja, with the generosity to drink well in its youth, but also the depth and balance to age quite gracefully. The bright and classic bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, raspberries, Rioja spice tones, a fine base of soil, a hint of celery seed and a deft framing of spicy American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and nicely transparent, with a good core, moderate tannins, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long finish. This is really good already, but will be better when it has a bit more bottle age. It is a lovely value! 2017-2040. **89+**.

#### **2014 Rioja Joven- Mileto (Bodegas Alvia)**

The wines from the Mileto label of Bodegas Alvia in Rioja are packaged quite modernly, with the labels emphasizing Tempranillo and downplaying Rioja, but the winemaking seems quite traditional to my palate. Their 2014 Joven is a very pretty wine, offering up a bright bouquet of cherries, blackberries, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil and a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and succulent at the core, with bright acids, lovely focus and grip, modest tannins and really impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This wine has a depth and dimension that is pretty seldom found in entry level bottlings of Rioja! Fine juice. **89.**

#### **2014 Viña Otano Rioja “Crianza”- Union de Viticultores Riojanos**

The 2014 Viña Otano Rioja “Crianza” is a blend of ninety percent Tempranillo and ten percent Mazuelo and was aged for twelve months in cask. The wine offers up a lovely, classic bouquet of cherries, red plums, a touch of nutmeg, a fine base of soil, Rioja spice tones and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a touch youthfully tannic, with a plush core, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is still a young bottle of Rioja and is a bit chewy right now- it could use a couple of years in the cellar to allow its tannins to soften a bit, but it will be quite good once it is ready to drink. 2020-2040. **87+.**

#### **2013 Rioja “La Poza de Ballesteros”- Bodegas Artadi (Rioja Alavesa)**

The single vineyard bottling of La Poza de Ballesteros is from a west-facing parcel that gets plenty of afternoon sun. The 2013 version is still quite marked by its smoky new oak component, with both the nose a bit defined by the wood and the backend of the palate showing some still unincorporated wood tannins, but there is also plenty of promise here. The bouquet is very primary, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, smoky and spicy new oak and a touch of soil somewhere down deep. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully reticent, with a good, solid core of fruit, good focus and grip and a fair bit of backend tannin that needs to resolve with some extended bottle age. Despite the style of the vintage, there seems to be adequate stuffing to carry the new wood here with some long-term cellaring, but this will not be a lot of fun to drink until it has hibernated for a decade. 2027-2040+? **90+.**

#### **2013 Rioja “El Carretil”- Bodegas Artadi (Rioja Alavesa)**

The vineyard of El Carretil is the highest elevation of all the single vineyard bottlings from Artadi, with the soils here clay, sandstone and limestone. The 2013 version is quite black fruity and new oaky in character on the nose, offering up a youthful aromatic constellation of cassis, chicory, a bit of roasted venison, woodsmoke and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit pinched from its new oak component, with a good core, a fair bit of firm, dry-edged wood tannins and good length and grip on the chewy finish. Whereas the 2013 La Poza de Ballesteros has plenty of stuffing to eventually carry its new wood, I worry a bit here about the balance, as there is a lot of wood tannin waiting for integration and the finish has a decidedly dry edge to it from the oak. It will probably be nip and tuck whether or not this wine fully integrates is lumber with sufficient bottle age, but there is good juice under the wood and it will be quite good if it manages to integrate the oak with extended aging. **???**

#### **2013 Rioja “Valdeginés”- Bodegas Artadi (Rioja Alavesa)**

The 2013 Rioja “Valdeginés” from Bodegas Artadi hails from a south-facing, seven hectare vineyard planted on clay and sandstone. Aromatically, this is the most complex of the 2013 single vineyard wines that I tasted from the estate, showing lovely scents of black cherries, pomegranate, a nice touch of Rioja spices, woodsmoke, cola and cedary oak. On the palate the

wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a good core, impressive nascent complexity, ripe, fairly well-integrated tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused finish. The wood tannins start to stick out here a touch with some extended aeration, but of all the 2013 single vineyard bottlings, I like the oak integration on the Valdeginés the best, and this wine should really be quite lovely when it is ready to drink. 2024-2050. **92.**

**2013 Rioja “Viña El Pisón”- Artadi- Viñedos Lacalle y Laorden (Rioja Alavesa)**

The 2013 Viña El Pisón from Artadi no longer carries the bodegas’ name on the label, as it is now listed as hailing from Viñedos Lacalle y Laorden. Presumably this is in respect to the Lacalle family, who first planted vines in this vineyard in 1945. The 2013 Viña El Pisón is a deep, complex and black fruity wine, offering up a nascently complex bouquet of cassis, dark berries, coffee grounds, a bit of lead pencil, gentle balsamic tones, woodsmoke and spicy French oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely sculpted, with a fine core of fruit, impressive nascent complexity, lovely balance and a very long, suavely tannic and vibrant finish. The new oak tannins here are better integrated out of the blocks than in any of the other Artadi single vineyard bottlings from 2013 (though they do build as the wine sees some extended aeration), and this will clearly be a superb wine in the fullness of time. It will be very interesting to see how much Rioja personality it shows twenty years down the road, as it is a completely different expression of the Alavesa than a wine like Cuné’s Viña Real, but I can imagine this 2013 landing at the similar level of quality once it has aged properly. 2025-2075. **93+.**

**2013 Rioja Crianza- Bodegas Lecea (Rioja Alta)**

The 2013 Crianza from Bodegas Lecea is a really beautiful young wine and one of the best values in Rioja out in the market today. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, Rioja spices, dark soil tones, a touch of cigar smoke and a discreet topnote of toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and developing its velvety side nicely, with a good core, lovely soil inflection, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is a suave, classic Rioja that is just a touch bigger than a middleweight, but loaded with personality. Fine juice. 2017-2035. **90.**

**2012 Rioja Crianza- Mileto (Bodegas Alvia)**

The 2012 Rioja Crianza from Mileto is just a touch new oaky in personality, but also deep and very well-balanced. The wine spends twelve months *elevage* in a combination of American and French casks. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a touch of meatiness, Rioja spice tones, a touch of celery seed, a fine base of soil and moderate framing of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the already velvety finish. This has very classical texture on the palate and is really a classy bottle. 2017-2035+. **90+.**

**2012 Rioja “Viña Real” Crianza- Cuné (Rioja Alavesa)**

The 2012 Rioja “Viña Real” Crianza from Cuné is a fine young wine in the making, with plenty of early accessibility, but also the depth and balance to age very nicely and to develop more breed and complexity with some extended time in the cellar. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, Rioja spice tones, a fine base of soil, incipient smokiness and a fair bit of cedary oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent and light on its feet, with a good core, fine youthful complexity and a very long, well-balanced and modestly tannic finish. This bottling sees some French oak during its *elevage*, which is very well-integrated on the palate, but sticks out a bit

aromatically. I do not mind it *per se*, but the traditionalist in me would love to see this done away with and the wine raised entirely in older American casks. That said, this is still a very, very well-made wine! 2020-2050. **90.**



*Beautiful old vines at the Contino estate owned by Cuné.*

### **2012 Rioja Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alta)**

The 2012 Rioja Reserva from Cuné is a beautiful example of the vintage, offering up a bright and youthfully complex bouquet of black cherries, a touch of roasted lamb, Rioja spice tones, gentle notes of cigar smoke, a fine base of soil and a touch of cedary oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and already starting to get nicely velvety in the mid-palate, with sound acids, suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex, poised and beautifully balanced finish. Most Cuné fans, at least here in the US, do not pay a lot of attention to the non-Imperial or non-Viña Real bottlings, and that is too bad, as the “regular” Reserva from 2012 is outstanding! The very low yields of the vintage show here in really superb depth at the core, and though this wine is already drinking with plenty of style at age five, it will age long and gracefully and will be even better down the road! A Great value. 2017-2045+. **92+.**

### **2012 Viña Herminia Rioja “Crianza” (Rioja Baja)**

The 2012 Viña Herminia Crianza is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent Tempranillo and fifteen percent Garnacha and is raised in a combination of American and French oak. The 2012 comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a youthfully complex bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a nice touch of spice, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core,



incipient velvetiness, moderate backend tannins and very good length and grip on the promising finish. This is still a tad on the young side for primetime drinking, but it is certainly accessible. I would opt for giving it a couple more years of bottle age to let the tannins fall away a bit more and some secondary layers to emerge. Good juice. 2019-2040+. **89+**.

**2012 Rioja “Crianza”- Señorío de P. Peciña (Rioja Alta)**

The 2012 Rioja “Crianza” from Señorío de P. Peciña is a lovely young wine that handles the ripeness of the vintage very well indeed, coming in at a fairly robust (for this great classicist estate) 13.5 percent alcohol, but offering up traditional purity and nascent complexity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, Rioja spice tones, incipient notes of Cuban cigar, a fine base of soil, a touch of *garrigue* and toasted coconut from the older American oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a plush core, fine soil signature, tangy acids and just a bit of backend tannin on the long, youthful and classic finish. A lovely wine in the making. This is very easy to drink today, but it is still a puppy and five years down the road, it will really be starting to sing! 2022-2050. **91**.

**2012 Viña Otano Rioja “Reserva”- Union de Viticultores Riojanos (Rioja Alta)**

The 2012 Viña Otano Rioja “Reserva” is composed of a blend of eighty-five percent Tempranillo, ten percent Graciano and five percent Mazuelo. It was raised in a combination of French and American oak for twenty-four months. The bouquet is quite marked by its new oak, but shows good depth of fruit underneath in its mélange of red and black cherries, salty Rioja soil tones, clove-like spices, a touch of toasted coconut and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and just a bit too much new oak tannin perking up the long and nascently complex finish. This has absolutely superb and classic raw materials, but the oak is a bit sloppily done, with too much new French oak spice getting in the way on the nose and some uncovered wood tannins sticking out on the palate. If the bodegas will just keep using the same casks (or sell off the French barrels!), this is going to be a great source for Rioja, but I do not really see what the French wood brings to the equation here (other than distraction). That said, the wine has serious depth and may be able to absorb its wood tannins with further bottle age, and even though the balance is not ideal today, I could still easily drink this wine, given how beautiful the fruit and soil tones are here under the oak. This is a half-step away from an absolutely stunning wine- all that needs to be improved is better handling of the wood! 2017-2035? **87-91** (depending on how the new wood integrates with bottle age).

**2011 Rioja “Imperial” Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alta)**

The 2011 Imperial Reserva from Cuné is one of the riper young vintages of this fine cuvée that I have ever tasted, as the drought conditions in the vintage brought this wine in at an even fourteen percent octane. The ripe bouquet is still pure and classic, offering up scents of black cherries, black raspberries, cloves, Cuban cigars, Rioja spice tones, a solid signature of soil and a bit of cedary oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a plush core, lovely focus and grip, a touch of chewy tannin and a very long, complex and gently heady finish. This bottling seems even a tad behind the 2011 Viña Real Reserva in terms of evolution, and may well come around along the lines of the fine 1982 Imperial Reserva with sufficient bottle age. It is a lovely wine, but it is also very much emblematic of its drought vintage. 2023-2060. **92**.



**2011 Rioja “Viña Real” Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alavesa)**

The 2011 vintage was the first of two major drought vintages in Rioja, and the 2011 “Viña Real” Reserva from Cuné shows the added concentration of the very dry conditions of this summer, while still retaining its signature elegance. The bouquet is deep, primary and classically black fruity in personality, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, just a touch of celery seed, dark soil tones, Rioja spices and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a youthful profile, fine-grained tannins, sound acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very promising finish. This needs some time in the cellar to really blossom (though it is really not all that hard to drink in its relative youth!) and I would tuck it away for the next four or five years before having at it in earnest. 2021-2065+. **92+**.

**2011 Rioja “Reserva”- Señorío de P. Peciña (Rioja Alta)**

The 2011 Rioja “Reserva” from Señorío de P. Peciña has blossomed beautifully with that extra time aging, and is offering up beautiful and refined complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, red plums, cloves, gentle notes of cigar ash, salty soil tones, a touch of wild fennel and a topnote of toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows excellent mid-palate depth, with impeccable focus and balance, modest, buried tannins, bright acids and great soil signature on the very long, very refined and complex finish. This is a beautiful young Reserva that is starting to really drink well, but like the 2012 Crianza, it is still in climbing mode and its true apogee remains several years in the future. Great, great Rioja in the making! 2020-2055+. **93**.

**2010 Rioja “Imperial” Gran Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alta)**

The 2010 Rioja “Imperial” Gran Reserva from Cuné purports to be a touch riper than the Viña Real Gran Reserva in this vintage, coming in at fourteen percent, versus 13.5 percent, but the wine seems every bit as elegant as the Viña Real Gran Reserva in this excellent vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and starting to really develop some complexity in its constellation of black cherries, plums, cigar smoke, cloves, lovely soil tones, hints of the celery seed to come and smoky, spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a great core of fruit, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and superb soil signature on the very long, very refined and still fairly youthful finish. There is just a touch of backend heat here that needs to recede, so that this superb young Imperial can take its rightful place amongst wines like the 1981 and 1973! 2022-2075+. **93**.

**2010 Rioja “Viña Real” Gran Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alavesa)**

Cuné’s 2010 Viña Real Gran Reserva is an utter classic in the making, offering up superb depth and aromatic complexity on the nose, coupled with a potentially velvety palate impression in the fullness of time. The wine delivers outstanding nuance in its complex bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, cigar smoke, dark, Alavesa soil tones, espresso and a beautiful mix of coconutty and cedary oak tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and utterly suave, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive soil signature, moderate and buried tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and vibrant finish. The 2011 Viña Real Reserva is a really good wine, but it is swimming upstream against the vintage, whereas the 2010 Gran Reserva is nothing but smooth sailing! This is very easy to drink today, but it still has a long, long way to go, and I would try very hard to leave it alone in the cellar for at least another five years. Great juice! 2022-2085. **94**.

**2010 Viña Herminia Rioja “Reserva” (Rioja Baja)**

The 2010 Viña Herminia Rioja “Reserva” is a blend of eighty-five percent Tempranillo, ten percent Garnacha and five percent Graciano, with the wine again raised in a mix of French and American oak barrels. The wine is deep and classy on the nose, offering up a lovely nose of black cherries, cassis, *garrigue*, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a discreet touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and classically styled, with impressive velvety texture on the attack, a fine core, moderate tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and soil-driven finish. This is very approachable today, though still a puppy, and I would love to see it after it has spent four or five years in the cellar softening up and blossoming completely. Excellent juice. 2021-2055. **91+**.

**2010 Rioja “Viña Alberdi” Reserva- La Rioja Alta (Rioja Alta)**

The 2010 Viña Alberdi Reserva from La Rioja Alta is a really lovely bottle in the making, that is quite accessible today, but still in its infancy and will be even better with at least a few years’ worth of bottle age. The bouquet shows a touch of French oak spice, but otherwise is utterly classical in profile, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of red and black cherries, Rioja spice tones, a complex base of salty soil, incipient notes of nutskin and the aforementioned cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety, with a plush core, lovely focus and grip, impeccable balance and fine length and grip on the complex and vibrant finish. This is a beautiful bottle of wine. 2017-2050+. **92**.

**2010 Viña Otano Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Union de Viticultores Riojanos**

The 2010 Viña Otano Rioja “Gran Reserva” is made up of a blend of eighty percent Tempranillo, fifteen percent Graciano and five percent Mazuelo. The wine is aged in a combination of French and American casks for two years prior to bottling, with the 2010 vintage coming in at an even thirteen percent alcohol. The bouquet is pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a very pretty blend of black cherries, Rioja spice tones, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil, a touch of toasted coconut and a gentle topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, and still a fair bit of backend tannin in need of resolution on the long and promising finish. This is beautifully balanced and is quite approachable today, but it really deserves a bit more bottle age to allow the tannins to fade a bit more. Impressive juice. 2021-2055+. **91+**.

**2009 Rioja Reserva- Mileto (Bodegas Alvia)**

The 2009 Rioja Reserva from the Mileto label of Bodegas Alvia is composed of a blend of eighty-five percent Tempranillo and fifteen percent Mazuelo, with the wine raised in a combination of French and American oak. The wine offers up a deep and classy bouquet of black cherries, raspberry, a touch of meatiness, wild fennel, beautiful soil tones, a nice touch of spice and a discreet base of oaky nuances (nicely split between the toasted coconut tones of American wood and cedar). On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with an excellent core, fine focus and balance, modest tannins and lovely complexity on the long and elegant finish. Fine juice. 2017-2040+. **92**.

**2009 Rioja “Imperial” Gran Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alta)**

The 2009 Imperial Gran Reserva from Cuné is a young and very promising wine, which shows its warm vintage character on both the nose and palate and reminds me very, very strongly of the fine 1982 version when it too was young. The bouquet offers up a beautiful and youthful blend of black cherries, cigar smoke, lovely Rioja spices, a fine base of salty soil tones and incipient notes of the Rioja nuttiness to come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is

deep, full-bodied, pure and quite plush on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This needs at least a few years of time in the cellar to truly blossom and start to drink with more complexity, but its true apogee is probably twenty years down the road. Fine juice. 2021-2075. **93.**

**2009 Rioja “Viña Arana” Reserva- La Rioja Alta (Rioja Alta)**

The 2009 Viña Arana Reserva from La Rioja Alta is a lovely and utterly classic bottle in the making. This does not have the mid-palate depth of the Viña Ardanza bottling, but everything else is in perfect proportion and the wine is starting to really drink with style at eight years of age. The bouquet is complex and beautifully old school, offering up scents of cherries, raspberries, cloves, cinnamon, salty soil tones and toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and tangy, with lovely balance and focus, good, but not great depth at the core, fading tannins and good length and grip on the tangy and impressively complex finish. This will be one of those really good middleweight Riojas that ages forever and ever. 2017-2050+. **91.**

**2009 Viña Otano Rioja “Reserva”- Union de Viticultores Riojanos**

The 2009 Viña Otano Rioja “Reserva” is a blend of eighty-five percent Tempranillo, ten percent Graciano and five percent Mazuelo, with the wine again aged in a combination of French and American oak for two years. The wine offers up a lovely and quite classic aromatic profile of black raspberries, cherries, cigar ash, coconut, Rioja soil notes and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a plush core, good complexity and a long, still modestly tannic and well-balanced finish. There is still a bit of tannin here (some of it wood tannin), but it is drinking very nicely and will only continue to improve with further aging. Good juice and a fine value. 2017-2045. **90+.**

**2008 Rioja Reserva- La Antigua Clásico (Rioja Baja)**

The 2008 Rioja Reserva from La Antigua Clásico is predominantly Garnacha, as the wine is a rather unique blend of sixty percent of the aforementioned grape, augmented by thirty percent Tempranillo and ten percent Graciano. This is a very unique example of Rioja, as the north-facing vineyards here are located in the upper foothills of the Sierra de la Demanda Mountains that form the southern border of the Rioja region, in the highest elevation of any vineyards in the Rioja DO. Consequently, this is a very cool microclimate and the Garnacha vines here were planted in 1940. The wine is aged for four years in cask, in a combination of American and French oak. The 2008 Reserva is deep, pure and aromatically excellent, jumping from the glass in a mix of raspberries, cherries, wild fennel, *garrigue*, a touch of grilled meats, a complex base of stony soil tones and a very discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and classically refined and silky on the attack (in the best tradition of the old school in Rioja). The wine has plenty of mid-palate depth, a nice touch of pepperiness from the high percentage of Garnacha, a lovely core, excellent fine-grained, modest tannins and lovely brightness and bounce on the long, complex and very classy finish. Excellent and very elegant juice. 2017-2045+. **93+.**

**2008 Rioja Tempranillo- Livius (Bodegas Alvia)**

Livius is the top of the line label from Bodegas Alvia, with the wines coming in heavy glass bottles and undergoing malolactic fermentation in oak casks. The bodegas produces a tempranillo and a garnacha bottling under this label. Their 2008 tempranillo is produced from ninety-five to one hundred year-old vines and raised in a combination of American, French and Hungarian oak for eighteen months prior to bottling. The wine offers up a fine, blossoming bouquet of plums, black cherries, fresh nutmeg, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil and an

impressively discreet base of oaky tones that show both cedar and smoky topnotes. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely suave on the attack, with a plush core, well-integrated tannins, lovely balance and fine length and grip on the ripe and complex finish. This is something of a hybrid example of Rioja, as the wine has some of the trappings of the modern school, with its short cold soak, malo in barrel, single varietal, relatively short *elevage* and heavy glass bottle, but is also far more traditional in its gentle extraction, velvety texture and impressive complexity. Is this the very first modern-styled Rioja with which I have really been impressed? Yes! The wine is approachable today, but it still has some backend tannin to resolve and I would be inclined to give it at least a few more years in the cellar to let the tannins soften up a bit more. It is going to be long-lived and is really impressive juice! 2020-2050+. **94.**



### **2007 Rioja Garnacha- Livius (Bodegas Alvia)**

The Livius Garnacha bottling from Bodegas Alvia is also made from old vines, as these vineyards were planted between 1915 and 1940. Like its tempranillo counterpart, this wine undergoes a short cold soak prior to the onset of fermentation, but undergoes malolactic fermentation in tank prior to its sixteen month *elevage* in the same blend of American, French and Hungarian casks. The 2007 Livius Garnacha is excellent, wafting from the glass in a deep and complex nose of red and black raspberries, *garrigue*, roasted venison, a complex base of soil, Rioja spice tones, woodsmoke and a deft framing of gently cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great focus and balance, moderate, seamless tannins, good acids and impressive complexity and grip on the very long and refined finish. This is a tad lower in octane than the 2008 tempranillo version (13.5 versus fourteen percent)m, but equally suave in balance and really impressive! 2017-2045. **94.**

### **2007 Rioja Graciano- Livius (Bodegas Alvia)**

The 2007 Livius Graciano from Bodegas Alvia is a lovely wine that is showing excellent secondary layers of maturity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a smoky and nicely resolved blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, a fine base of soil, coffee grounds and a nice touch of dried spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, black fruity and surprisingly peppery in personality (as none appeared in the bouquet), with a fine core, silky tannins, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. There is still a bit of backend tannin to resolve on the finish, but at age ten, this wine is really starting to drink nicely and is very impressive. 2017-2040. **93.**

### **2007 Rioja “Viña Ardanza” Reserva- La Rioja Alta (Rioja Alta)**

The 2007 Viña Ardanza Reserva from La Rioja Alta is a young and ripe, but excellent bottle of classic Rioja. The bouquet is deep and complex, delivering a fine constellation of baked cherries, raspberries, cloves, a bit of roasted meat, coffee, salty soil tones and toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a rock solid core, a fair bit of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the still decidedly primary finish. The 2007 reminds me very strongly of the 1982 Ardanza when it was young, which aged very well with sufficient bottle age. This is, of course, approachable today, but it is still a fairly primary wine and its true blossoming is still several years down the road. 2022-2055+. **91+.**

### **2006 Rioja Reserva- La Antigua Clásico (Rioja Baja)**

The 2006 Rioja Reserva from La Antigua Clásico is a bit more evolved than the 2008 version- more than the two years difference in vintage might suggest, offering up a slightly old-fashioned, but complex and satisfying nose of raspberries, *garrigue*, roasted meats, pepper, bonfire and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open on the attack, with a good core, still a bit of chewy tannins perking up the backend and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is a very tasty drink, but it does not have the same polish and structural sophistication of the 2008 La Antigua Clásico, which may simply be a reflection of the character of the two vintages. This is still very good juice, but the superb 2008 is a step up. 2017-2035+. **90.**

### **1976 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1976 Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva is drinking beautifully as it nears age forty, wafting from the glass in a very complex and classic, red fruity blend of strawberries, cherries, cloves, nutskin, celery seed, coffee and a beautiful base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety, with a lovely core, superb complexity, bright acids and a very long, suave and refined finish. There is just a whisper of melted tannin still to be found on the backend here, indicating that there are still decades of outstanding drinking ahead for the '76 Tondonia Gran Reserva. 2016-2045+. **93.**

### **1973 Rioja “Imperial” Gran Reserva- Cuné**

I had not drunk a bottle of the 1973 Imperial Gran Reserva from Cuné since the autumn of 2014, when I was last in the Rioja region, and the wine has not been touched by time over this past two and a half years. At age forty-four, the wine is at its absolute summit of peak maturity and drinking with great vibrancy and breed, as it soars from the glass in a complex and pure blend of cherries, woodsmoke, Rioja spice tones, a beautifully complex base of soil, a touch of dried eucalyptus and a discreet framing of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is

deep, full-bodied and still shows the vigor of youth, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil inflection and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This bottle was a touch more red fruity than the one that I tasted at the bodegas in October of 2014, with just a touch of remaining tannin and the structure to continue to cruise along at this very high level for at least another thirty years! Great juice. 2017-2050. **94+**.

### ***Vinos de la Tierra de Castilla***

#### **2015 Tempranillo “Sinfonía”- Bodegas Abanico**

The 2015 Sinfonía” Bodegas Abanico is a fine follow-up to their 2014 I reported upon last year. As readers may recall, this wine is produced from forty year-old tempranillo vines in the hills outside of Madrid. It is a hot climate, but the 2015 comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and is not overripe in the least. The wine is raised entirely in older barrels and offers up a fine bouquet of cassis, cigar ash, a touch of coffee grounds, *garrigue*, a bit of roasted meats and a gentle autumnal topnote that recalls Alicante Bouschet. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, moderate, well-integrated tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and impressive finish. To my palate, this is even more complex than the 2014 and is an astonishing value at twelve dollars a bottle here in the states! 2017-2030+. **90**.

#### **2014 Mil Cepas- Manuel Manzaneque Suárez**

The 2014 Mil Cepas from Manuel Manzaneque Suárez is produced entirely from tempranillo, which in this region is known as Cencibel. The wine is cropped at a very low fifteen hectoliters per hectare, with the sandy soils here slowing ripening in the heat of summer, so that this is only 13.5 percent octane. The wine includes fifteen percent whole clusters, is fermented entirely with indigenous yeasts and raised in older French casks for fourteen months prior to bottling. The excellent bouquet jumps from the glass in a very refined blend of cherries, pomegranate, cigar wrapper, lovely spices tones redolent of fresh nutmeg and clove, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a gentle topnote of cedar from the older oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very transparent for young tempranillo, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, impressive complexity and a very long, vibrant and suavely-tannic finish. This is a very high class bottle of tempranillo that shares the aesthetic sensibilities of a top flight Burgundy, with more intensity of flavor than weight on the palate and great backend bounce and tang. Really impressive juice! 2017-2040. **93+**.

### ***Toledo***

#### **2010 Garnacha “Trés Patas”- Bodegas Canopy (Méntrida)**

The DO of Méntrida is located at the western end of Toledo, with the soils a rocky blend of slate and sand and often at fairly high elevations of five to six hundred meters above sea level. The 2010 Garnacha “Trés Patas” from Bodegas Canopy comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a superb and quite transparent bouquet of raspberries, smoked meats, *garrigue*, coffee and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively soil-driven, with a good core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This is a fine, sturdy, soil-infused and quite classic expression of Garnacha. It is not the most refined example of the varietal, but it is deep, honest and loaded with personality. 2017-2030. **88**.

### ***Tierra de Castilla y León***

#### **2013 Tumba del Rey Moro Comando- Fernando Garcia and Dani Landi**

The Tumba del Rey Moro Comando from Fernando Garcia and Dani Landi is an old vine bottling of Garnacha that was planted sixty to seventy years ago on a crumbling, almost inaccessible granite and sandy slope. The vineyard sits at an elevation of eleven hundred meters in the hills outside of Madrid and the two proprietors had to spend a great deal of time clearing a path into the plot and recovering the old vines from the encroaching wild. It is planted on ungrafted vines. The 2013 was only the second vintage produced from these old vines, which are fermented with indigenous yeasts and whole clusters and aged in five hundred liter casks. The wine comes in at an octane of fourteen percent and offers up a classic Garnacha bouquet of raspberries, fruitcake, a touch of stems, stony soil tones and plenty of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely transparent in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, moderate, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. There is just a bit of backend heat that pokes out on the backend here and keeps my score down a touch, but the complexity and soil signature here are admirable! 2020-2040. **91+**.

### ***Almansa***

#### **2015 Garnacha Tintorera “Altitud 1.100”- Bodegas Santa Quiteria**

As readers may recall, I really liked last year’s 2013 version of this bottling, which was very high quality and equally inexpensive! Garnacha Tintorera is the local name for Alicante Bouschet, with the new release just a touch riper than last year’s release, coming in at an even thirteen percent. The 2014 is another excellent wine, as this offers up a fine bouquet of blackberries, chalky soil tones, Alicante Bouschet’s autumnal tones, chicory and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and nicely light on its feet, with a good core of sappy black fruit, fine balance and grip and just a touch of backend tannin on the tangy and complex finish. I like how this wine closes with a nice touch of bitterness that plays off of the sappy core and really works nicely at the table. Once again, an absolute steal! 2017-2030. **89**.

#### **2015 Tintoralba “Garnacha Tintorera” - Bodegas Tintoralba**

The 2015 Tintoralba example of Garnacha Tintorera (the local name for Alicante Bouschet) is excellent, coming in at a very civilized 13.5 percent octane and offering up a bright and impressively complex bouquet of blackberries, black cherries, a touch of bonfire, beautiful soil tones, gentle meatiness, black pepper, espresso and a touch of that leafiness of Alicante Bouschet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with bright acids, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. This is a really lovely wine and one of the best values that I have tasted in the last couple of years! An excellent wine that is drinking already with impressive distinction for its modest price (thirteen dollars a bottle here in the US!), but which will also age very nicely indeed! 2017-2030+. **91**.

### ***Sierras de Malaga***

#### **2013 Laderas de Sedella- Laurin Rosillo**

After training in several regions, including Rueda, Rioja and La Mancha, Laurin Rosillo fell in love with an old vine parcel of vines on the steep mountain slopes of Sierras de Malaga, in the town of Sedella. This DO lies right on the Mediterranean coast, at an elevation of more than eight hundred meters, with the old vines a mix of Garnacha and the two local varieties of Romé



and Jaén and planted on soils heavily defined by slate. His Laderas de Sedella bottling is made from younger vines he has planted since his arrival in 2006, but aged in cement amphora for one year prior to bottling without sulfur. The 2013 comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and offers up a lovely bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gentle notes of *garrigue*, slate, charred wood and a touch of dried eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and structurally laid back, with a good core, not a ton of focus, but good length and grip on the tasty and modestly tannic finish. The young vines here show just a touch in terms of a lack of precision and grip, but the flavors and aromatics are very enjoyable. 2017-2025. **88.**

#### **2013 Sedella- Laurin Rosillo**

The Sedella bottling from Laurin Rosillo is the wine he makes from the old vines he found up in the mountains here, on crumbling slate soils that were planted in 1940. The vineyard is a field blend, which includes the local varieties of Romé and Jaén, as well as Garnacha and a few other unknown grapes. The wine undergoes its malo in a combination of French oak, cement vats and clay amphora, and then is aged in used casks fourteen months prior to bottling. The 2013 Sedella delivers a beautifully complex, Mediterranean bouquet of cherries, raspberries, *garrigue*, a touch of bonfire, lovely soil tones and roasted game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really quite suave and polished, with a fine core, a bit of backend tannin and lovely complexity and grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. 2013 is a cooler vintage in the area, but the wine still came in at 13.5 percent, and I can imagine that this could be too much of a good thing in a hot year. That said, the 2013 is outstanding and should age long and gracefully. 2017-2035. **92.**

### ***Canary Islands***

#### **2014 “Tradicional” Tinto- Frontón de Oro (Gran Canaria)**

The 2014 “Tradicional” Tinto from Frontón de Oro is composed entirely of Listán Negro and spends three months of its *elevage* in American oak barrels prior to bottling. The 2014 Tradicional offers up a bright and complex nose of dark berries, tree bark, botanicals, bitter almond and a fine base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and surprisingly powerful in profile, with tons of intensity at the core, modest tannins, tangy acids and great length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. This is a bit shy on the nose right now, and consequently, give no idea of the turbo-charged palate that awaits in the glass. This is ripe for a Canary Islands’ wine, coming in at a full fourteen percent, but it is very well-balanced and the extra element of ripeness just gives more depth and backend energy. A lovely bottle that could use a few years in the cellar to reach its apogee. 2020-2040. **92+.**

#### **2014 Malpaís- Frontón de Oro (Gran Canaria)**

The Malpaís bottling from Frontón de Oro is primarily comprised of Preto, with small percentages of Tintilla and Listán Negro blended in. These vines grow on mountain terraces nearly a thousand meters up from the sea. The wine is raised for four months in a mix of French and American oak prior to bottling. The 2014 Malpaís delivers a complex bouquet of black cherries, tree bark, botanicals, coffee grounds and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with just a whips of tannin, a fine core, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the bouncy and complex finish. Lovely wine, that closes with that classic interplay of sweet and bitter that I find so often in the wines of the Canary Islands. 2017-2035. **92.**

### **2013 Baboso Negro “Ignios Orígenes”- Borja Perez (Tenerife)**

The 2013 Baboso Negro from Borja Perez is fermented with native yeasts, sees its malolactic undergone in barrel and is raised in French oak barrels. The wine is quite ripe, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol and offers up a complex nose of black cherries, chicory, lovely soil tones, wood ash, gentle botanicals and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a plush core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and just a touch of backend heat on the long finish. Again, the confluence of sweet and bitter notes on the finish are quite classic, but I would have loved to have seen this wine just a touch less robust in terms of alcohol. 2017-2030. **88.**

### **2013 Listán Negro “Tradicional”- Monje (Tenerife)**

The 2013 Listán Negro “Tradicional” bottling from Monje also includes a percentage of Negramoll and the white wine grape of Listán Blanco, which has been added for centuries to the red wines of Tenerife to add a bit of lift and more acidity. The wine is fermented and aged for four months in thousand liter, ancient American oak casks, prior to bottling without filtration. The 2013 Tradicional offers up a lovely nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, bitter almond, gentle smokiness, a touch of botanicals and a fines base of sandy soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This wine closes with that lovely sweet/bitter interplay that one finds in the wines of the Canary Islands and many parts of Italy. My only concern about its potential longevity is that it is sealed with a (admittedly handsome purple) synthetic cork. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2035? **92.**

## ***Portugal***

### ***Colares***

*Colares is a tiny and shrinking wine region in Portugal, located just to the west of Lisbon along the Atlantic coastline. Once this was a large and thriving production area, which saw its height of European popularity during the era of phylloxera further north in France at the end of the nineteenth century. The sandy soils of Colares are inhospitable to the louse of phylloxera, which gave the region a great leg up during its peak of popularity in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and to this day, the remaining old vines are some of the few in Europe (alongside those of Germany) that can be grown on their own root systems, rather than being grafted onto American rootstocks to protect them from phylloxera. The inevitable growth of the metropolitan area of Lisbon in the second half of the twentieth century has claimed many of the old vineyards of Colares, as they occupy very desirable beachfront real estate for weekend vacation homes for city dwellers, but a very small area of vineyard land remains in this windswept corner of Portugal. The vineyards of Colares are some of the few untrained parcels left in Europe, with the old vines growing helter-skelter like giant snakes along the ground, with vineyard workers staking them up off the sand in the heat of summer to keep the growing grapes from being scorched. There are two workhorse grapes in Colares- Malvasia for the region's white wines and Remiss for the reds. Besides the reflected heat of the sandy soils, the other primary challenge facing the few remaining farmers working vines in Colares is the incessant wind off of the Atlantic Ocean, and most vineyards have to be protected from the wind by stone walls and other windbreaks. From its inception in 1931 until 1994, the only allowed producer of Colares by the dictatorship in the country was the Adega Regional de Colares, and the adega continues to produce most of the remaining bottles of Colares still made, though they will often*

*appear under several different labels. The wines here are very unique and exceptional in quality in both red and white, and let us hope that the twelve remaining hectares of vineyard land here in Colares can survive future growth of metropolitan Lisbon.*



### ***Colares Branco***

#### **2011 Malvasia “Arenae” Colares Branco- Adega Regional Colares (Francisco Figueiredo)**

The 2011 Malvasia “Arenae” Colares from Francisco Figueiredo at the Adega Regional de Colares is produced from sixty-plus year-old, ungrafted vines. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel, where it spend a year of its *elevage*, prior to being racked into ancient Brazilian oak *foudres* for another six months of aging prior to bottling. The 2011 is the newest release from the Adega, offering up a pure and youthful bouquet of peach, orange, dried flowers, salty maritime overtones and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, fine transparency, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is only beginning its journey in bottle and is probably three or four years away from truly blossoming, but it will be lovey when it is ready. 2020-2040. 92.

#### **2009 MJC Colares Branco- Adega de Colares**

The 2009 Colares Branco from Adega de Colares is composed entirely of Malvasia, spends four months on its fine lees and this is racked and aged for fully three years in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling. The wine is excellent and still quite youthful in profile, offering up a

fine bouquet of lime, sea salts, wild fennel, a lovely base of sandy soil tones and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nascently complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a long, classy finish that closes with good grip and the potential to continue to blossom with further bottle age. A lovely example. 2017-2030. **92.**

**2008 Malvasia “Arenae” Colares Branco- Adega Regional Colares (Francisco Figueiredo)**

The 2008 Malvasia from Francisco Figueiredo is starting to get to a good moment in its evolution for current drinking, as the wine has blossomed nicely and offers up a deep and complex nose of desiccated orange, salty soil tones, lemongrass, gentle notes of beeswax and a touch of walnut just starting to develop in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely focus and balance, a far more pronounced element of beeswax on the palate than the nose, bright acids and outstanding complexity on the long and vibrant finish. This still has years and years of life ahead of it. 2017-2035. **93+.**

**2006 Malvasia “Arenae” Colares Branco- Adega Regional Colares (Francisco Figueiredo)**

The 2006 Malvasia “Arenae” Colares Branco is at a very similar stage of development to the 2008, with perhaps a touch more nuttiness showing in the aromatic profile, as well as a bit of Sherry-like elements as it starts to cruise on its plateau of peak maturity. The bouquet is a mix of baked peaches, walnuts, lovely, briny, salty soil tones, a hint of the browned butter to come with further bottle age, gentle beeswax, dried flowers and a nice touch of candied orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its apogee, with a wide open and classy personality, lovely focus and grip, still lovely framing acidity and impressive length and grip on the soil-driven and complex finish. This will not be quite as long-lived as the beautiful 2008, but it is at its peak right now and drinking with plenty of style! 2017-2030. **92.**

**1997 MJC Colares Tinto- Adega de Colares**

The 1997 MJC Colares Tinto from Adega de Colares is made entirely from the Ramisco grape, which is planted on ungrafted vines at a bit higher elevation than the white grapes from the estate, as there is a bit more clay in the sandy soils at one hundred and twenty meters, which contributes to this wine’s fine structural backbone. The bouquet on the 1997 is excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, bonfire, salty soil tones, a bit of barnyard and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and vibrant, with no remaining tannin, but good freshness and bounce on the backend. The finish is focus, long and complex, with lovely balance and a closing note of bitterness that recall Montepulciano just a bit. A lovely wine from the outskirts of Lisbon. 2017-2030+. **91.**

***Colares Rojo***

**2006 Ramisco “Arenae” Colares Tinto- Adega Regional de Colares (Francisco Figueiredo)**

The Ramisco “Arenae” from Francisco Figueiredo, the head winemaker at the Adega Regional de Colares now for several years, is outstanding, being produced entirely from old vines lying above the beaches west of Lisbon. The wine includes thirty percent whole clusters, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised for three years in old *foudres* (made from Brazilian wood!) and then another year of *elevage* in old French casks prior to bottling. The 2006 Arenae offers up a pure and complex bouquet, replete with scents of black fruit, beach tar, new leather, wood ash and a nice touch of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and tangy, with a lovely core, impressive complexity, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. I do not have any experience with aged Colares, but this wine seems like it could easily last twenty or twenty-five more years in bottle. 2017-2045+. **92.**

#### **2005 Ramisco “Arenae” Colares Tinto- Adega Regional de Colares (Francisco Figueiredo)**

The 2005 Arenae from Francisco Figueiredo is a touch riper than the 2006 (thirteen versus twelve percent alcohol) and is absolutely superb on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of dark berries, coffee grounds, charred wood, a touch of chicory, salty soil elements and a touch of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a sappy core of fruit, terrific transparency, ripe, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a very long, tangy and complex finish. This is a step up from the very good 2006, as the extra element of ripeness here has really given this wine more backend dimension and breed. Fine, fine juice! 2017-2045+. **94.**

#### **2004 Ramisco “Arenae” Colares Tinto- Adega Regional de Colares (Francisco Figueiredo)**

The 2004 Ramisco “Arenae” from the ARC is also an excellent wine, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up a deep, complex and black fruity nose of sweet dark berries, baked cassis, chicory, lovely soil tones, cola, tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and chewy in personality, with a fine core, a fair bit of firm, well-covered tannin on the backend and impressive grip on the long and complex finish. This is a touch more nobly rustic in personality than either the 2006 or 2005, but it too has plenty of merit and is an excellent wine in its own stylistic variation on the theme of Colares Tinto. I would opt for giving the 2004 a few more years in the cellar to allow its backend tannins to soften a bit more. 2020-2045+. **92.**

#### ***Dão and Bairrada***

*While I have had the pleasure to visit Portugal on three occasions in the last several years, I have not yet had the pleasure to taste in the regions of Dão and Bairrada, and this is high up on my “to do list” for coming years. The two regions lie about halfway between the two principal cities of Portugal, Lisbon and Porto, running from just inland from the Atlantic coast about one hundred kilometers or so to the east. Bairrada is the more westerly of the two contiguous regions, with the Atlantic Ocean’s climactic conditions playing a significant role in the vineyards of Bairrada, so that rainfall here is plentiful during the year and temperatures are more moderate than further inland in Dão. The vineyards tend to lie on a patchwork of small hillsides, with their soils a mix of clay and limestone, and more than three quarters of the production of Bairrada is red wine. The principal grape of this region has always been the indigenous Baga grape, but in recent times, the wine authorities have allowed international grapes such as syrah, merlot and cabernet sauvignon, as well as Portuguese grapes from other regions, such as Touriga Nacional and Tinta Roriz to also emigrate into the region, altering the current wine landscape and perhaps threatening Bairrada’s unique wine culture of the past. The Dão region is cut off from Bairrada to the west by the mountains of the Serra do Caramulo range, with the official limits of the DO also bordered to the southeast by another mountain range, the Serra da Estrela. These two mountain ranges help to define the warmer summers and cooler winters of the Dão region, with the vineyards generally planted on stony granitic soils that help to give the wines of both colors here sturdy structural chassis and the potential for very long lives in bottle. The predominant grape of Bairrada, Baga, is also grown in the Dão, but here it has long been supplemented by Touriga Nacional, Alfrocheiro and Mencia as well.*

*The Caves São João winery was originally established in 1920 by the Costa family with a goal of producing Port-styled wines, but in the late ‘20s the production of Porto was officially delimited to its current region and the estate turned its attention to producing non-fortified red*

*and white wines from their home bases in Dão and Bairrada. The winery is based in the heart of the Bairrada region, but has always produced wines from both Bairrada and Dão. The winery has two additional labels it sells its wines under, as the Costa family created their Porta dos Cavaleiros label in the 1950s to augment their offerings of wines from the Dão, and their Frei João label at the same time for additional offerings from the Bairrada region. Happily, the tradition of holding wines back in the cellars here for many years, until they are mature, continues at Caves São João, and as market prices for older wines from more famous regions continue to skyrocket, the lovely, older wines from these two fine regions merit more attention from wine lovers without the flexible wine budgets of Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi. Caves São João and its sister labels have had long-standing agreements to purchase fruit from many small farmers in the two regions, as well as purchasing some wine from cooperatives in the two areas for blending into their bottlings. The wines are made from the indigenous grapes of the region, which include Baga, Touriga Nacional, Alfrocheiro and Mencia (amongst others) for the red wines and Arinto, Malvasia, Maria Gomes, Bical, Cercial and Rabo de Ovelha for the white wines. The wines of both colors from Caves São João are made in a very traditional style, with open top fermenters and extended aging of usually two years in cement tanks prior to bottling, with nary a new oak cask in sight. The young vintages are then left unmolested in the cellars for many years to blossom with bottle age (both reds and whites), so that the youngest current release that I tasted from any of these three labels for this report was the 1995 Poço do Lobo bottling under the Caves São João label- their youthful, twenty-one year-old red and white wines! Happily, the estate continues its practice of holding back its wines until they start to drink maturely and today it sits on more than a million bottles in their cellars! The wines are really very, very good and deserve more attention from lovers of mature, complex and soil-driven wines.*

*I should note that these bottles are all stored in the cellars on their original corks, so wines that are thirty or more years of age are going to often have fairly fragile corks. I have had far more success opening these wines with an Ah-So or Durand than a standard corkscrew (crumbly corks have in no way been an indication of the quality of the wine waiting beneath the closure!), and wines of this age naturally also have a fair bit of sediment and should be properly stood up well in advance and decanted prior to serving. Just a bit of respect for these older wines can go a long way to maximizing their very serious enjoyment, and this is particularly important in this imperfect world.*

### **Branco**

#### **1995 Quinta do Poço do Lobo Arinto Colheita- Caves São João (Bairrada)**

This is one of the most unique wines in the Caves São João portfolio, as this wine is comprised entirely of Arinto and spends fully three years in cement tanks, with a *flor* forming for a short period each year that the wine is in cement tank (dying off again as the temperatures in the cellar drop in the late autumn, only to return the following summer), prior to its bottling at age three. The 1995 is an excellent and still quite youthful wine, offering up a beautiful nose of fresh pineapple, salty soil tones, dried flowers, a touch of butter and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a fine core and lovely length and grip on the complex and quite vibrant finish. This is more than twenty years of age today, but still has many, many years of fine drinking ahead of it. 2016-2030. **90.**

### **1988 Branco- Frei João (Bairrada)**

The 1988 Branco from Frei João is made up of a blend of traditional white wine grapes in the region: forty percent each of Maria Gomes and Bical, fifteen percent Cercial and five percent Rabo de Ovelha. The wine is made with some extended skin contact and twenty-four months of aging in cement tanks prior to bottling. The 1988 is drinking very nicely today, offering up a fine, mature nose of orange peel, fresh limes, a touch of beeswax, a lovely base of soil tones (the vineyards are clay and limestone-based) and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with gentle acids, lovely focus and a long, fresh and classy finish. This is a very tasty, fully mature bottle for drinking over the next several years. 2017-2025. **88.**

### **1985 Dão Branco- Porta dos Cavaleiros (Dão)**

The 1985 and 1984 Dão Branco bottlings from Porta dos Cavaleiros have slightly different *cépages*. The 1985 is composed of a mix of twenty-five percent each of Cercial Branco, Bical, Malvasia, and Encruzado, with the wine spending twenty-four months in cement tanks prior to bottling. The wine is quite tasty, but rather dramatically more evolved on both the nose and palate than the fresh and impressively vibrant 1984 version. The '85 offers up a deep and tertiary bouquet of peach, salty soil tones, a touch of browned butter and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly vigorous, but with soft acids, not a ton of backend grip and a fairly short finish. This is still quite enjoyable to drink, but the '84 alongside of it shows more verve and is at its apogee still, whereas the 1985 seems to be starting towards a period of gentle decline. 2017-2025. **86.**

### **1984 Dão Branco- Porta dos Cavaleiros (Dão)**

The 1984 Branco from Porta dos Cavaleiros is composed of a mix of forty percent Cercial Branco and twenty percent each of Bical, Malvasia, and Encruzado. This is far more youthful today than the 1985, jumping from the glass in a complex and very classy aromatic constellation of fresh apricot, peach, dried flowers, sea salts, beeswax and wild fennel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, excellent framing acids and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and very tasty finish. This is superb. 2017-2030+. **92.**

## ***Tinto***

### **2012 Dão Tinto “Vinhas Velhas” Garrafeira- António Madeira (Dão)**

The 2012 “Vinhas Velhas” from António Madeira is an absolutely superb bottle of young Dão, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and possessing plenty of bright acidity to carry it long and far in the cellar. The pure and complex bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of sweet blackberries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of tree bark, coffee grounds and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a lovely core, excellent transparency, moderate tannins and a very long, vibrant and youthful finish. This will age as much on its bright girdle of acidity as it will on its tannins, and with its impeccable balance, and it will easily last fifty years in bottle! Fine juice. 2017-2070. **92+.**

### **1995 Quinta do Poço do Lobo Tinto Reserva- Caves São João (Bairrada)**

The 1995 Quinta do Poço do Lobo Tinto Reserva from Caves São João is composed of a blend of Baga, Castelão and a grape called Moreto, which was pulled up a few years back and is no longer part of the vineyard mix in Poço do Lobo. The wine offers up a complex and nicely mature bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a bit of tree bark, cigar smoke and a nice touch of spice



in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and nicely plush on the attack, with a rock solid, core, a nice touch of backend pepperiness and a long, moderately tannic and complex finish. This is a fine, fine bottle that is just reaching its plateau of maturity now at age twenty-two, but will continue to improve as the tannins further fall away with additional bottle age. Good old school juice! 2017-2040+. 92+.

#### **1995 Vinha Pan Tinto- Luis Pato (Bairrada)**

Luis Pato is probably the most famous producer in Bairrada, but this 1995 was my first introduction to his wines. This is one hundred percent Baga and excellent, offering up an impressively complex and *à point* bouquet of cherries, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, coffee, a bass-note of road tar, gentle meatiness and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with melting tannins, fine focus and grip and a very long, complex and classy finish. Fine, fine juice with years of life still ahead of it. 2015-2035. 93.



#### **1990 Tinto- Frei João (Bairrada)**

The 1990 Tinto from Frei João is comprised entirely from the Baga grape, with the vineyards planted in clay soils. This is very nicely low in octane by contemporary standards, coming in at 12.1 percent and was raised the traditional twenty-four months in cement tanks and saw no new oak. The wine is excellent and drinking very well at the present time, offering up a complex bouquet of desiccated black cherries, chicory, a superb signature of soil, a bit of charred

wood and a gentle topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely meaty in personality, with a fine core, lovely acids and still just a touch of tannin perking up the long, soil-driven finish. Fine juice with at least a couple of decades of life still ahead of it. 2017-2035+. **90+**.

#### **1990 Tinto “Reserva Particular”- Caves São João (Bairrada)**

This cuvée from Caves São João is the one I drank with the most frequency back in the day, with the current release at the time I was in school (and this dates me) having been the 1970 vintage! The 1990 Tinto Reserva Particular (please note that the label just says “Reserva” and is distinguished by being actually made of cork) is made up of a blend of twenty-five percent each of Baga, Alfrocheiro and Mencia (called Jaen in Bairrada), with the balance of the blend being twenty percent Tempranillo (Tinto Roriz here) and five percent Camarate. The wine is drinking excellently and is at the top of its game at age twenty-six, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of dark berries, espresso, bonfire, dark soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still modestly tannic, with lovely focus and grip and a long, robust, old school finish that really takes me back to those days at the university! This is really good wine with plenty of years still ahead of it and it may even improve a tad more as the tannins more fully resolve. 2017-2035+. **92**.

#### **1990 Tinto “Reserva Particular”- Frei João (Bairrada) served from magnum**

The 1990 Tinto Reserva Particular from Frei João is made from the same blend as the Caves São João 1990 Reserva and the wine is also outstanding. The deep and classy nose offers up a constellation of sweet cassis, dried black cherries, cigar ash, forest floor, a touch of new leather, hung game and dried eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, and strikingly well-balanced, with outstanding mid-palate depth, lovely soil signature, fine-grained, modest tannins and impressive length and grip on the refined and complex finish. Despite this hailing from the same *cépages* as the Caves São João Reserva, this seems just a touch more elegant in profile and merits just a hair better score as a result. Fine, fine juice! 2017-2040. **93**.

#### **1985 Dão Tinto “Colheita”- Porta dos Cavaleiros (Dão)**

The 1985 Dão Tinto Colheita from Porta dos Cavaleiros is really a beautiful and fully resolved wine at its zenith of peak drinking at age thirty-two. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite elegant in profile, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, saddle leather, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of coffee bean, balsam bough and just a whisper of barnyard in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and beautifully resolved, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent transparency, just a touch of old school tannin hanging around on the long, complex and *à point* finish. The blend on the ’85 is forty percent Alfrocheiro, twenty percent each of Mencia and Tempranillo, ten percent each of Baga and Preto de Mortágua (the indigenous name for Touriga Nacional). This is really a lovely bottle of old school wine, where the “noble rusticity” has nicely tilted to the noble side of the road with extended bottle age. 2017-2035+. **92**.

#### **1983 Dão Tinto “Reserva Seleccionada”- Porta dos Cavaleiros (Dão)**

The 1983 Dão Tinto “Reserva Seleccionada” from Porta dos Cavaleiros is a deeper-pitched and more meaty wine than the lovely 1985 Colheita bottling. The bouquet is deep, complex and tertiary, offering up a constellation of wizened black fruit, cigar ash, roasted game, a bit of Cornas-like pepper, a complex base of soil and a touch of autumnal elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really vibrant, with a superb

core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright, tangy acids, outstanding complexity and focus and still a bit of old-fashioned tannin perking up the long and soil-driven finish. I do not have the specific percentages for the *cépages* on this wine, but I would guess this has a fairly high percentage of Touriga Nacional in its blend (to go along with Mencía, Tempranillo and Alfrocheiro), as it has that fine earthiness one finds in Touriga Nacional. This has a touch of rusticity still about it, but its depth, complexity and vibrancy at age thirty-four are very impressive indeed. An excellent wine and a very classical expression of Dão! 2017-2040+. **93.**

#### **1980 Dão Tinto “Colheita”- Porta dos Cavaleiros (Dão)**

The 1980 Dão Tinto “Colheita” from Porta dos Cavaleiros is excellent, with a bit more of a soil-driven and broad-shouldered personality than the very elegant 1985 version, despite the wine being produced from the exact same blend as the ’85. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite defined by its excellent soil signature, wafting from the glass in a mix of baked cherries, dried berries, bonfire, very complex soil tones, whiffs of dried spices and faded *garrigue* and a nice topnote of dustiness that I recall so well from my early days drinking the wines of the Dão region. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully resolved, with plenty of mid-palate stuffing, fine focus and grip, still a bit of melting tannin and a very long, soil-driven and very well-balanced finish. This is excellent as well! 2017-2035+. **92.**

#### **1980 Tinto “Reserva Particular”- Frei João (Bairrada)**

The 1980 Tinto “Reserva Particular” from Frei João is made up entirely from the Baga grape and was aged the customary two years in cement prior to its bottling, all the way back in 1983. As it celebrates its thirty-seventh birthday, the wine is drinking beautifully, delivering a fine, meaty constellation of dark berries, cigar smoke, chicory, dark soil tones, spit-roasted game and some gently autumnal notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with excellent focus, melting tannins, good acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Another lovely, fully mature and still quite vigorous wine. 2017-2035. **91.**

#### **1974 Dão Tinto “Reserva Seleccionada”- Porta dos Cavaleiros (Dão)**

The 1974 Dão Tinto “Reserva Seleccionada” from Porta dos Cavaleiros is comprised of a blend of Touriga Nacional, Mencía, Alfrocheiro and Baga. Much like the 1983 version, the Touriga Nacional portion of the blend shows quite prominently on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is complex, tertiary and impressive, offering up scents of sweet dark berries, cigar ash, forest floor, hung game, coffee grounds, a touch of Latour-like walnuts and charred wood. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and fully mature, with fine mid-palate stuffing, melted tannins, excellent soil signature and a long, still slightly chewy and very well-balanced finish. This is more tertiary in profile than the wines from the 1980s (not surprisingly), but there is nothing structurally fragile here at all! This is a fine, old, nobly rustic bottle of Dão that is still in its plateau of peak maturity, but will probably want drinking over the next ten to fifteen years. Or, perhaps it will still be drinking much the same fifteen years from now! A lovely, old school bottle layered with complexity and soil signature. 2017-2030+. **91.**

## RICHARD OLNEY'S LIFE IN WINE



Richard Olney was one of the principle architects of America's wine and food awakening in the 1970s, and his influence continues to reverberate throughout both French and American wine and food scenes nearly twenty years after his passing in 1999. However, despite the seminal role he played in creating the American food culture of today, he has never received the same credit as some of his contemporaries such as Julia Child or James Beard, despite the strong probability that Richard's impact behind the scenes was actually greater. It is somewhat ironic that Monsieur Olney would come to be influential at all in his native land, as throughout his long career, he was far more respected in French culinary circles than he was amongst America's food cognoscenti, and in many ways, his influence in the culinary world was very much an "insider's secret" that was most keenly drawn upon at the time by pioneering American chefs such as Alice Waters and Jeremiah Tower. Richard was born in Iowa in 1927 and moved full-time to France in 1951, first living in Paris and then moving south to a rustic hilltop retreat that he restored himself over the town of Solliès-Toucas in Provence. He had originally moved from Iowa, first to New York and then Paris, to pursue a career as a painter, and he continued to paint throughout his career, even as his more commercially-inclined artistry began to revolve around his mastery of French cooking and wines. He is probably best known for his cookbooks on French country cuisine, which began in the US with his publishing of The French Menu Cookbook in 1970 and his seminal work, Simple French Food in 1974, but he had already been writing for French

publications for several years before Simon and Schuster came to call with a proposal for a cookbook project in the late 1960s.

In 1961, while touring Bordeaux with a group of French gastronomes and wine aficionados, he impressed with his deep knowledge of both French cuisine and wine and was soon commissioned to write a regular column with the influential Parisian publication of the time called *Cuisines et Vin de France* in 1962, and this blossomed into further writing on the culinary arts and vinous treasures prior to the publication of his cookbooks in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. A very gifted writer, as well as accomplished chef, wine taster and painter, his artistic vision was synthesized across all of these pursuits and he excelled in each and every one over the course of his long career. And yet today, while many of his protégés are recognized as deans of culinary or vinous accomplishment, Richard's prominent place in the awakening of American sensibilities at the table is often not given the wider publicity that it deserves. Household names in the world of wine and food today such as Julia Child, Alice Waters and Kermit Lynch all spent much time at Richard's table during their careers and his influence upon each and every one of the them cannot be overstated. As Alice Waters recalled about visiting with Richard in Solliés, "he was never didactic in his approach to sharing techniques or philosophies in the kitchen, as his home was really one big open room where everyone interacted while Richard was at the stove or the cutting board, and it was always so easy to pick up ideas from him while he was preparing a meal."

Richard had once dreamt of a quiet country retreat in Solliés-Toucas, where he could paint and work in relative solitude, but the rocky path up to his home was so frequently filled with friends and fellow foodies visiting from other parts of France or other corners of the globe—happy to drop in on Richard, share in his superb cuisine and drink deeply of both his immaculately well-stocked wine cellar and his philosophy of life. One imagines that extended stretches of solitude were few and far between for the vast majority of his life in Provence. Richard Olney's vision for both cuisine and wine was years ahead of his time, as he eschewed much of the overly fancy and fussy aspects of French *Haute Cuisine* that had grown up out of the first half of the twentieth century, focusing more on the fresh and seasonable as foundations of menu, and when the tides of change to lighter cooking began to gain adherents amongst the deans of the French culinary establishment in the 1970s, much of it could be credited to the groundwork Richard had laid. From the beginning of his writing life for *Cuisines et Vins de France* in 1962, his pieces intimately wove together the worlds of wine and food, with his articles in each issue always including menus and suggested wines to accompany each course. His recipes always relied on what was seasonal, emphasizing that to cook well, one had to be in tune with what was at its peak of flavor at that time of the year. As Alice Waters remembers, "when we speak today of the 'Farm to Table' style of cooking, that was all Richard's doing!" In the culinary world of cookbook authors, his knowledge of the world's great wines is unmatched before or since, and amongst his long list of publications includes two seminal books on wine, his 1985 book on Château d'Yquem and his 1991 volume on Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. Since his passing in 1999, it is hard to think of another culinary or wine authority that so beautifully mastered the harmonic convergence of the two worlds and so eloquently shared his insights with his readers.

Today, when Richard Olney's name is spoken (and this is not nearly often enough, given his seminal role in the worlds of food and wine as we know them today), it is generally reserved for his important contributions to the culinary world and his fine array of cookbooks that he published throughout his career. In addition to the five independent cookbooks that he crafted between 1970 and 1994, Richard dedicated six years of his life (1977 to 1982) to turning out a twenty-seven volume series on French cuisine for Time-Life Books, entitled *The Good Cook*, that explored in detail every facet of French culinary culture, with each volume dedicated to a specific topic (such as Lamb, Poultry, Salads, Cheese or Wine) and delving into the topics with such thoroughness that readers had mastery at their fingertips by the time they had finished each supplement. I am sure that Time-Life had no intention of putting together such a thorough and professional series when they hired Richard to undertake the project, but Richard Olney was never one to do things "half way" and what came out of this project is clearly one of the finest gastronomic reference works ever published in the English language! The Time-Life series was principally crafted in London, requiring regular and lengthy commutes for Richard from Solliés-Toucas to London to structure, research and edit each volume and produced a marvelous foundation of classic French cuisine for aspiring cooks and the series really deserves to be resurrected in some fashion for younger generations. The beauty of Richard Olney's interpretation of French cuisine did not rest on the inaccessible or luxuriant aspects of cooking, as in fact, up until the time he signed his first contract to produce The French Menu Cookbook in 1967, his rustic home in Solliés-Toucas was not even outfitted with a kitchen stove and he did all of his cooking on the grill outside on the terrace or in his fireplace. It was not that he was unfamiliar or unsympathetic to the luxurious side of *Haute Cuisine*, as many of France's most famous Michelin-starred chefs of his era were amongst his close friends and excursions to the restaurant temples of his day were a constant, but he had a vision of French culinary excellence that was built on the foundations of the country's traditional cultural legacy of fresh seasonal ingredients that made his cooking accessible to a wider public.

However, lost in all of this discussion of Richard Olney's important culinary contributions is the fact of his passionate expertise in the world of fine wines and his generosity in sharing his knowledge with like-minded travellers. As long-time friend Alice Waters of Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, wrote of Richard in the introduction to his autobiography, Relfexions, published posthumously in 1999: "Twenty-five years ago, scarcely anyone in American knew what an Hermitage or a Bandol or a Côte-Rôtie was, but because he took an interest in the education of my friend Kermit Lynch, an audacious young wine importer, and introduced him to many of France's most steadfastly traditional winemakers, today there is a thriving market in this country for their wines." Richard's passion for fine wines was forged years before he started to show the ropes to youngsters like Kermit Lynch back in the 1970s, as his autobiography is replete with descriptions of dinner after dinner throughout the 1950s and 1960s with accompanying wines of epic grandeur. Take, as just one example of the high level of wines with which his meals were often punctuated, a dinner in which Richard participated in early 1970 for a celebration of the career of retired Michelin three-starred chef, Alexandre Dumaine, who had sold his l'Hôtel de la Côte d'Or in 1964 and settled into a very quiet life back in his hometown village of Digoïn. The dinner was organized and prepared by Richard's friend, chef George Garin, of restaurant Chez Garin, widely thought at the time to be amongst Paris' finest dining establishments. The first courses were accompanied by a fine example of 1961 Bâtard-Montrachet, followed by Musigny 1937 (presumably Comte de Vogüé) with braised



calf liver and 1929 La Tâche with the cheese course. While this was of course a very special dinner to honor one of France's greatest retired chefs, it was also not that far out of the ordinary for Richard Olney and as one reads through his Relfexions, it is very easy to be swept away by the sheer beauty of the magical array of wines that were savored by Monsieur Olney over the course of his life. Clearly, he was a frequent and beloved visitor to Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, as Aubert de Villaine himself approached Richard about writing his subsequent book on the domaine that would be published in 1991.

Richard Olney had a reputation as a bit exacting or difficult amongst the world of cookbook authors and publishers, or as one person recalled, he was often described as a bit "prickly". However, when I spoke with Russell Hone, who worked very closely with Richard on the last of *The Good Cook* Series releases, which was the Wine volume, he commented that "Richard was not one to suffer fools gladly, and had little difficulty being curt to those he felt were pretentious or posturing- no matter their celebrity." He went on, "however, he was someone who was very serious in everything that he did and when we worked together, he would want his assistants to manage assignments to his standards and could let loose if sloppy work or short cuts were taken, but for all of that, he also inspired a real affection amongst his colleagues." Alice Waters amplifies this same point, recalling that "Richard was very much the perfectionist in everything he did, and he simply approached anything that he set his mind to with the idea of mastering it, and he had little tolerance for those who would take short cuts or only give half-hearted effort." She recalled one shared dinner at a well-known French restaurant in San Francisco at the time when Richard was visiting on one of his book tours, "where the green beans came out overcooked and Richard stood up and walked right into the kitchen to enquire how the chef could send them out to the table in such a condition!" That was Richard Olney in a nutshell- if something was worth doing, it was worth doing the right way, and if you were a chef who was content with less than one hundred percent effort, you were going to hear about it.

His reputation as a culinary and wine expert amongst the top French professionals of these disciplines was widely recognized and he was always treated with the utmost respect by the Michelin-starred chefs and great wine producers who were his friends and viewed him as a peer. Alice Waters remembers "that Richard was always better known and respected in France than he was here in the United States, where so many of his contributions were not widely recognized during an era where Julia Child was wielding such widespread influence with her various television series." A good indication of this respect of his French colleagues is easily seen in the quality of his wine cellar. Richard was never one who was overly comfortable financially, but his cellar would always be well-stocked with wines from friends such as Gérard Chave, Aubert de Villaine and of course, Lulu and Lucien Peyraud of nearby Domaine Tempier. Russell Hone recalls that the Bandol from Domaine Tempier was essentially Richard's house wine, but there were always fine old bottles from many other of France's greatest estates of the era in his cellar, though the small cellar dug into his hillside in Solliès was not all that capacious. As Russell recalled, "it was a rotating cellar, as Richard was always very generous with his best bottles and shared them with his frequent guests," rather than hoarding his finest and rarest wines.

One of the things I find most attractive about Richard's life in wine was the very obvious fact that he was not a wine snob obsessed solely with the "best of the best" of vintages and appellations, despite his connoisseurship and wealth of experience with France's greatest



bottlings, not to mention his close friendship with folks such as Aubert de Villaine of DRC. He writes of a casual meal he prepared at home in Solliés-Toucas with a few guests, including chef George Garin, in April of 1970, in which the main course was accompanied by the 1963 Château Latour, which he notes “was the first vintage after the British took possession of Château Latour” and where “it was said (but not confirmed) that to make it worthy of the new proprietorship, a certain amount of 1961 and 1962 had been assembled with the otherwise pathetic vintage”, making it “easily the best of the red Bordeaux that year.” His notes are replete with bottles of lovely Beaujolais (Château Thivin’s Côte de Brouilly was a particular favorite and another wine to which he introduced Kermit Lynch- who continues to represent the superb wine in the US to this day), St. Véran and other very well-made, less exalted wines. The Peyraud family of Domaine Tempier in Bandol became his lifelong friends and no doubt their stellar reputation in the world wine market today has much to do with Richard’s championing of their superb wines, which were constant tableside companions over his long lifetime. This would culminate in his last cookbook, called Lulu’s Provençal Table, which was published in 1994 and was tribute to Lulu Peyraud of Domaine Tempier. In the pages of his autobiography, he is back and forth between Tempier and his home often, with the Peyraud family often returning visits and sharing meals with Richard in Solliés.

After the release of The French Menu Cookbook in the early 1970s, Richard was approached to teach a cooking school in the town of Lubéron and he did so on two consecutive summers. Reading through this section of his autobiography, one is struck not only by the culinary expertise he shares with his students, but also the magic to be unlocked by great wines he chose to accompany the serious cooking. Cooking school weeks included wine tastings at the end of each day in the kitchen, as well two days reserved out of every seven for restaurant visits to the most talented chefs in the region, with vinous treasures organized to accompany special menus on these “road trips” for students. Richard would work months in advance, visiting restaurants to be included, tasting and working out menus with the chefs to accompany the wines that he sourced from his close friends in the wine regions of France. Witness just a couple of these meals and wines from the June 1973 class: with a lunch at the restaurant l’Hostellerie de la Fuste starting with 1966 Veuve Clicquot as the aperitif, some *jambon* accompanied by the 1971 Léon Beyer Riesling Réserve, duck with magnums of 1970 Joseph Drouhin Beaune “Grèves” and the cheeses with 1966 Romanée-St.-Vivant from Domaine Marey-Monge (DRC). Dessert of quince tart was accompanied by 1970 Château Filhot- not too bad for a bit of your “cooking school” curriculum! As was his custom, a grand dinner was shared at a Michelin-starred restaurant for a finale to each session, which in this same year was a brilliant meal crafted at restaurant l’Oustaù de Baumanière and included a wine lineup of Laurent-Perrier Grande Siècle to start, 1970 Joseph Drouhin Puligny-Montrachet “Clos du Cailleret”, 1964 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou, 1962 Château Mouton-Rothschild and 1959 Château Margaux with the cheeses, of which Richard reflects was “a wine whose shimmering, melting beauty brought tears to my eyes” and “that wine, alone, could have justified my summer” spent teaching the classes. Dessert closed with a 1955 Château d’Yquem. How many of us would not sign up for that cooking school in a heartbeat?

While Richard Olney’s career included several further cookbooks after his Simple French Food was published in 1974, the decades of the 1980s and early 1990s began to be progressively filled up with writing on wine. After Aubert de Villaine broached the subject to Richard of

penning a book on Romanée-Conti in 1984, the project had to be put on hold for a few years, as the head of his publishing firm, Henri Flammarion, was a huge fan of Château d'Yquem and asked if he would first write a book on Yquem to coincide with the celebration of the bicentennial of the property coming into the hands of the de Lur-Saluces family all the way back in 1785. The dinner organized by Henri Flammarion to convince Richard of the worthiness of putting the Yquem project ahead of the book on DRC finished with the 1937 vintage of Yquem—which would have been enough to convince me! The research for the excellent Yquem book was happily executed, replete with several epic tastings of Sauternes' greatest wine over the course of the year and a half of its writing, as well as several after the book was published in December of 1985 (just under the wire for the estate's bicentennial!), including one at the property itself organized by the (not yet infamous) Munich wine merchant, Hardy Rodenstock, in the autumn of 1986. Richard's Yquem book would go on to win a literary prize from Relais et Châteaux and make Monsieur Olney a reluctant celebrity in his adopted homeland of France. It gave him a level of fame which none of his cookbooks or the *Good Cook Series* had done previously. He followed up the release of his book on Château d'Yquem by plunging into work on his superb volume on Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, which would be published in 1991.



Richard Olney was already very well-versed in the magic of DRC wines, having been friends with Pamela and Aubert de Villaine for many, many years, hosting them for dinners during their visits to Provence and uncorking many superb bottles out of the depths of his cellar

to accompany the meals he prepared. Richard enjoyed serving venerable claret for red wines when Aubert and Pamela were amongst his dinner guests, and Relfexions is replete with menus and the fine bottles pulled from the cellar to accompany the courses during their many meals together. Here is just one example, from a meal in Solliés in February of 1984: Krug 1976 as the aperitif (Russell Hone recounted that Krug was absolutely Richard's favorite Champagne producer), 1928 Anjou (probably Moulin Touchais) with the soup, 1971 Haut-Brion and 1953 Mouton-Rothschild with the *Gigot Rôti* and 1900 Leoville-Poyferré with the cheeses. Dessert was accompanied on this particular day by that same 1937 Yquem vintage that had swayed Richard to write his first book on the great Sauternes estate. Down through the years, Richard had already been the guest at Domaine de la Romanée-Conti on many occasions for deep vertical tastings of the wines from the domaine, as well as meals in the home of the de Villaines, so I am sure that work on this second purely wine book was a labor of love from the outset and this clearly comes across in his writing. His work for the journal *Cuisines et Vins de France* back in the 1960s and 1970s had made him well-known to the proprietors of Burgundy's finest domaines, and shared meals with the likes of Robert Drouhin, Charles Rousseau and Hubert de Montille also fill the pages of his autobiography, in addition to his many visits to DRC.

Russell Hone, who was indispensable to Richard in the preparation of the wine volume of *The Good Cook* series and spent quite a bit of time with Richard over the following years, recalls that Richard's wine universe typically revolved around great claret, red and white Burgundy, Krug Champagne, Chave Hermitage and Domaine Tempier red and rosé, but he was always interested in well-made wines from all over France. Richard was a heavy smoker during his life (as was sadly the custom of his generation), and which probably caused his death of heart failure in 1999, but Russell recalled that "he was very reverential about serious wine and food and would insist that no one smoke during dinners after the *aperitif* had been served, until the meal was finished." At home in Solliés, meals would be taken as often as possible out on the terrace, under his grape arbor, often with the starting course being a composed salad gathered from his terraced garden on the property. The main course would often be something roasted-most often in the fireplace recalls Russell- and the cheeses would be local goat cheeses that "Richard kept in a little cold room off of the kitchen, that was dug into the hillside" and dessert would often be something along the lines of poached pears, drizzled with local Provençal honey. Russell remembers that you had to be careful going down in Richard's cellar to fetch bottles for dinner in the warmer weather, as it "had just been hacked out of the rock on the hillside and scorpions often chose to take refuge there from the heat of the day."

At the very end of 1982, when the finishing touches were put on the wine volume of the Time-Life series, Richard asked Russell if he would drive him back down to Solliés from London, as Richard never drove during his lifetime, and he had accrued a fairly decent cache of older bottles sourced from auction in London over the course of the six years that he spent half his time in the UK. Russell remembers well that drive down to Solliés, "where we stopped the first day for dinner at Gérard Boyer's Three-Starred La Chaumière in Paris (Monsieur Boyer would move his restaurant the following year to Les Crayères in Reims), where we had a splendid meal and where the bill arrived at the end of the dinner with a note of '*with our compliments*' and no charges, which would so often happen for Richard at France's best restaurants." Russell remembers that "Richard quickly asked me to go out and fish a few good bottles out of the cases in the car as a thank you- whatever I could reach, as the car was

absolutely crammed with boxes of wine- and a 1928 and 1929 claret were presented to the Boyers in appreciation of the fine meal.” The next day the pair arrived in Burgundy and had dinner with the de Villaines and stayed the evening, “with some absolutely superb old bottles of DRC” recalled Russell. As the road trip got closer to Solliés, Russell notes that the next day’s stop over was in Mauve to taste in the cellars with Gérard Chave “and then share bottles of great old Hermitage in his small farmhouse up in the vineyards of St. Joseph, with Gérard doing the cooking.” This was very much emblematic of Richard Olney’s life in wine and quite indicative of how greatly he was respected in his adopted France.

Today of course, this level of wine appreciation is only available to a very few, as wine prices in modern times would simply make this wine journey inaccessible to the vast majority of wine lovers. But, even back in Richard’s day, his means would not have been able to purchase so much great wine and it was partly the extraordinary generosity of France’s greatest wine producers who became Richard’s close friends that allowed the Olney table to always be so brilliantly graced with legendary wines. Russell Hone recalls that Rémi Krug was a great friend of Richard’s and would send cases of Krug to Solliés with some frequency, the de Villaines would often arrive with bottles of DRC during their visits and the Peyrauds would often drive over from Domaine Tempier with a few cases of Bandol to restock Richard’s cellar when they came for lunch or dinner. But Richard repaid their kindness by spreading the word amongst his many other visitors about these great wines, and it seems inconceivable to me that domaines such as Tempier and Chave would have found representation in the states at this time without Richard’s first introducing a young Kermit Lynch to these wines in the mid-1970s. As Kermit wrote in his book of his first visit to Richard in 1976, “after one week, Richard had introduced me to Hermitage, Cornas, Côte-Rôtie, Condrieu, Muscat de Beaume-de-Venise, Côte de Brouilly and Mercurey, in addition to Bandol.” Kermit continued, “moreover, he changed the way I tasted, judged and selected wines,” without giving any instructions, as Richard “valued finesse, balance, personality and originality” in a wine and if it “had something to say, he listened.”

Alice Waters of Chez Panisse in Berkeley became one of Richard’s lifelong friends after her first trip to Solliés in the mid-‘70s, and she would make frequent return visits to both Richard’s home and that of Lulu and Lucien Peyraud at nearby Domaine Tempier. Alice noted “that I am so happy that you are writing this article, for Richard was one of the most important people in my life- a dear friend, and a great inspiration for everything we believed in and were doing at Chez Panisse when we first started.” As Richard had visited California wine country on several occasions during the 1970s and 1980s, often accompanying French winemakers on visits, and Chez Panisse would often be the site of a special meal during these trips or during Richard’s book promotion tours to the Bay Area to accompany the release of his cookbooks or books on wine, I wondered about his feelings about California wine at that time. I asked Alice if Richard ever became an ambassador in reverse, introducing French wine professionals to the blossoming California wine community (in a similar way to his raising awareness of French wine and food in the US) and Alice thought for a moment, before responding that “I am not really sure that this was the case- though this is only really an impression- for though Richard truly admired the fine work that people like Paul Draper (of Ridge Vineyards) and Richard Graff (of Chalone Vineyards) were doing at that time, his wine universe was still essentially French wines.”

One of the subjects that I was most keen to broach with Alice Waters when she assented to be interviewed for this piece on Richard, was how his Time-Life Series *The Good Cook* was received in America when the volumes were released. My instincts had suggested that the series had travelled a bit below the radar in the US at the time, and Alice confirmed this, noting that “the series did not really generate a lot of publicity or garner strong sales at the time that they began to be available, and even when they were first released, it really took me some time to realize that it was Richard who was the creative force behind these great books and I began to search them out and read them avidly.” She continued, “I am glad that you have reminded me about them, as it has been years since I last had one out and here is one sitting on my shelf.” We paused a minute, while she shared some of the beautiful turns of phrase that Richard used in the volume she had in her hands and then she noted “that simply no one could write a recipe like Richard.” Volumes of *The Good Cook* series can still be found out there floating about in the used book market- I managed to purchase six volumes as I was researching this article- and I cannot recommend them highly enough to the serious home cook. Their thorough coverage of technique, their breadth of recipes and their wealth of kitchen knowledge makes them great culinary works and are really a buried treasure still waiting to be discovered by serious foodies. As Alice Waters commented, “Richard was very exacting in his approach in the kitchen, firmly of the opinion that if something was to be done, it should be done correctly, and this series gives people a chance to gain this expertise for use in their own kitchens.” It was this never ending commitment to excellence that would often find Richard at the stoves, even as an invited guest for dinner in someone else’s home, as seemed to be the case with so many of the meals he shared with Julia Child when she was at her home in Provence. As Alice commented, “I think that Richard really preferred it that way and he took far more pleasure crafting the meal, or getting up to handle the wine service for the dinner, rather than just being a guest sequestered in the dining room.”

Richard Olney was an artist who was also a great creator of communities of like-minded people in the world of food and wine, and this legacy has continued to resonate as the years have slipped by since his passing in 1999. Alice Waters recalled that “Richard had a real passion for the most important things in his life, and he always wanted to share them with friends, so that they too could discover this same passion.” I began working on this article while in Beaune this past November, and naturally I wondered if any of the *vignerons* in Burgundy still recalled Richard’s visits to the region, so I asked Jacque and Rosalind Seysses of Domaine Dujac if they had ever had the opportunity to meet Richard Olney on one of his frequent trips to Burgundy, as Domaine Dujac wines figure fairly prominently at several of Richard’s memorable meals in his autobiography. Rosalind remembered having prepared a dinner for Richard at Domaine Dujac at one time. As she recalled, “Jacques met Richard in the late 1980s through Aubert de Villaine and he came here to dinner once.” She continued, “having him to dinner was intimidating, although he was perfectly charming.” She then commented, “I still have his Vegetable volume (from the Time-Life series) on my cookbook shelf and continue to use it regularly.” When I asked Robert Drouhin of Maison Joseph Drouhin of his memories of Richard Olney, he immediately recalled the type of precise wine taster that he was when they would meet up in Beaune, stating “that Richard was not one of these tasters that would say a lot about the wine- there was not a long description of each wine like there is today- for him, a wine was either a ‘good wine’ or it was not, and once in a while, it was truly a ‘Grand Vin’ depending on its elegance and complexity.” Burgundy importer Becky Wasserman, who is married to Russell Hone, should perhaps have the

last word, for as I was leaving their home after Russell and I had spent a couple of late afternoon hours on a blustery Saturday in November chatting about Richard over a few glasses of 1963 Taylor-Fladgate, she turned to me and said, "I think that it is great that you are writing this article, for Richard was a wonderful man- truly a great man whose contributions should be far better known than they are today."