

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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CHÂTEAU AUSONE THE MOST MAGICAL TERROIR IN ST. ÉMILION



The entrance to the cellars at Château Ausone, which are dug right into the chalk and have vineyards above.

Château Ausone is one of St. Émilion's veritable First Growth wines, and along with Cheval Blanc, truly deserves its ranking in this most rarefied of Bordeaux air. However, unlike Cheval Blanc, where there has been remarkable consistency of style for many, many decades, any history of Château Ausone has to be written in two parts, as a new chapter began here when the property was stylistically shifted a bit by proprietor Alain Vauthier in 1995, when he decided to invite Michel Rolland into the decision-making process and the wine took on more of the opulent and modern personality for which Monsieur Rolland is known. This fabled property takes its name from the renowned Roman poet and First Consul, as well as Governor of Gaul, Ausonius, who lived in the fourth century AD. Ausonius was born here in the Bordeaux region in 320 AD, and was supposed to own a home on top of what is now the plateau of St. Émilion, as well as a second estate closer to what is now the center of the city of Bordeaux. Amongst Ausonius' many accomplishments, he was the first writer to extol the virtues of the wines of what became known as St. Émilion, and more specifically, those that were produced from the *terroir* that many historians believe is currently underneath the vineyards of Château Ausone. For this reason, the property took his name at the end of the sixteenth century, when the then

property owner, Jean Cantenat, officially bestowed Château Ausone on the placard of his beloved estate. He eventually passed on the estate to a relative, a Madame Lafargue, whose nephews in due course inherited the property and the family name of Dubois first became associated with Ausone through these nephews. The most important owner in the history of Château Ausone was Eduard Dubois, who became the proprietor in 1891, and it was under his tenure that wines from the property began their rise in fame at the close of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth. Edouard Dubois passed away in 1921, leaving the property to his widow, as well as his children from a previous marriage, who had married into the Vauthier family, so this is how the Dubois and Vauthier families came to co-direct the property for many years. Madame Héylette Dubois-Challon and the Vauthier family shared ownership at Ausone harmoniously for many decades, but by the 1980s, this relationship had become quite contentious and eventually the parties ended up in court on more than one occasion in order to try and settle disputes.

The inter-family squabbling finally reached a critical juncture in 1995, when Madame Dubois-Challon explored the option of selling her half of the property to the wealthy François Pinault, who had purchased Château Latour in 1993 and was still on the lookout for other Bordeaux investments. The Vauthiers sued to block Monsieur Pinault's possible purchase, arguing that they had the right to "first refusal" to purchase Madame Dubois-Challon's stake in Ausone, and they eventually prevailed in court and were able to buy out Madame Dubois-Challon's half of Ausone, (though she was granted the right to continue to live on at the château on the property until her passing in 2003). But, from the time of the final court decision in 1995, Alain Vauthier took over the sole direction of the property, even though the Vauthiers did not finish paying off Madame Dubois-Challon until 1997 for her fifty percent stake in Ausone. But, with the 1995 settlement, a long, contentious period of disagreement over the management of Château Ausone came to a close and the contemporary chapter at the property first began to be written. The irony of those days of non-stop feuding amongst the two ownership blocks at Ausone is that they also happened to be very, very good years for the quality of the wines here! Today, Alain Vauthier is in the position of Managing Director of Château Ausone, and since 2005 he has been joined at the helm by his daughter, a trained oenologist, Pauline Vauthier, who will eventually take over the top management position of this fine property and is now the estate's winemaker.

Château Ausone is the most prominent estate on the *Côtes* section of St. Émilion, with its tiny seven hectares of vines descending down the hillside from the walled-in and ancient town center that sits on the summit of the hill. Its immediate neighbor is Château Bélair-Monange just to its west on the slope, and in fact, from 1916 until the Moueix family purchased full control of the estate in 2008, Château Bélair was owned by the Dubois-Challon family as well. However, there are differences between the vineyard situations of the two estates, as half of Château Bélair's vineyards (prior to the incorporation of Magdelaine into the expanded Bélair-Monange in 2012) lie up on top of the plateau of St. Émilion, extending to the boundaries of Château Canon's vines, whereas Château Ausone's vineyards are almost entirely situated on the slopes of the *Côtes*. As I have written about in the past about the *Côtes* section of St. Émilion, particularly in my features on Château Magdelaine, the soils here are unique in all of Bordeaux, as the foundation is a profound base of limestone and clay, with much of the chalky limestone having eroded over the years from wind exposure into a fine, sandy powder and the wines from this part

of St. Émilion are always far more structured and minerally-infused from their active limestone soils than those from other sectors of the commune. Ausone's situation on the *Côtes* has long been considered the absolutely finest to be found on the hillside, as the vines face southeast in what is a shallow amphitheater, protecting them from both the frequently-blowing winds and other depredations that Mother Nature can throw at this sector of the Right Bank. So, for example, in the devastating Right Bank frosts of 1956, the *Côtes* section of St. Émilion in general and Château Ausone in particular were very well-protected and suffered virtually no damage from the freeze. In contrast, much of the remainder of the vineyard patrimony of the Right Bank had to be replanted in the wake of those brutal frosts. Consequently, for many years, Château Ausone had some of the oldest vines to be found in St. Émilion, as there was no need to do any replanting in the second half of the twentieth century.

However, the need to not have to replant following the catastrophic frosts of 1956 was not the first time that the sheltered vineyards of Ausone were a great benefit to the proprietors of the estate, as during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when phylloxera was ravaging the vineyards of the Bordeaux region, the perfectly situated seven hectares of vines here were largely left alone by the louse and this was one of the very last properties to actually graft over its vines onto American rootstocks. Consequently, during the 1880s and 1890s, the wine at Château Ausone was still made from vines planted on their original *franc de pied* roots and it was during this time that the property first came to be viewed as the preeminent estate in St. Émilion. One has to realize that in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century (and for several centuries earlier), the rigors of transportation at the time made the vineyards of St. Émilion virtual backwaters to the Bordeaux wine trade based in the bustling metropolitan hub, as the Médoc and Graves were far, far easier to ship wine from and the wine professionals in the city were far more focused on Left Bank wines as a result. A perfect example of this was when the prominent Cruse family decided to purchase a château in this era, Madame Cruse absolutely refused to even consider a property for sale in St. Émilion and they eventually settled on the purchase of the very good Margaux estate of Château d'Issan, despite the fact that the St. Émilion property that they had a chance to buy just happened to be Cheval Blanc! So, for Château Ausone to rise to such prominence during the last few decades of the nineteenth century really does say a lot about the exceptional quality of the wines that were being produced here at this time, given how far afield St. Émilion was viewed by the Bordeaux trade of that era.

It is not surprising that in the classification of 1855, that was originally created for an international exhibition in Paris and became codified as an official ranking of the Médoc (and Château Haut-Brion), St. Émilion properties were completely ignored. Edmund Penning-Rowsell, writing about the wines of Bordeaux back in 1970, recounts how the important wine books on the region in the mid to latter half of the nineteenth century almost completely overlooked the existence of the wines of St. Émilion until the last couple of decades of the century. There were some rumors in the early years of the twentieth century (once the estate had come to such prominence) that Château Ausone would have been included, alongside of Château Haut-Brion, as the only non-Médoc wine included in the 1855 Paris classification, but that its small size precluded its inclusion by the *Bordelais* merchants of the time. However, Mr. Penning-Rowsell is skeptical of this claim and I have seen no information one way or the other as to its validity. But, whether this assertion be fable or fact, it at least underscores just how highly the wines of Ausone were thought of in the first few decades of the twentieth century. It

was the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw Château Ausone first start to really come to prominence in the firmament of top Bordeaux estates, and one has to assume that not having to graft over their vineyards onto American rootstocks certainly helped when the wines here were starting to find a far wider and international appreciation for their excellence during this era. By the dawn of the twentieth century, there can be no doubt that Château Ausone was considered the very finest wine in St. Émilion, and alongside of Vieux Château Certan in Pomerol, the finest wine produced on the Right Bank in this era. Interestingly, amongst the St. Émilion *cognoscenti* in the 1870s and 1880s, it was initially Ausone's next door neighbor, Château Bélair, that was more widely recognized for the excellence of its wines, with Ausone coming in as a strong second place finisher on many professionals' lists of the very best wines of St. Émilion. As David Peppercorn notes in his 1982 book, Bordeaux, "Ausone moved ahead of other St. Émilions in general estimation only during the last decade of the nineteenth century, and there is a note in the sixth edition of Cocks & Féret (1898) explaining that for the first time Ausone had been placed above Bélair because of the superior prices it had been obtaining, but that this did not indicate that there had been any decline in the quality of Bélair."



As the twentieth century unfolded, Château Ausone cemented its hold on the very top position in St. Émilion, and continued to produce its wines from ungrafted, *franc de pied* old vines, as the estate was the very last in Bordeaux to graft over its vineyards to American rootstocks and they did not start this process until the 1920s! And, even as they were in the

process of starting to re-graft their vineyard, the estate continued to make great wines, and the decade of the 1920s is often cited as the absolute zenith of quality for Château Ausone, with the wines from the vintages of 1920, 1921, 1926, 1928 and 1929 often ranked amongst the very greatest ever produced at the property and amongst Bordeaux's most legendary wines. I have only been fortunate enough to taste the 1928 Ausone from this era, but it was indeed brilliant. Château Ausone also made some very good wines in the difficult decade of the 1930s, and though I have only drunk the beautiful 1937, there are good notes from older wine writers than I (hard to believe there are still some of those out there!) on the 1934 vintage here as well. However, something very interesting happened to Ausone's reputation in the subsequent decades, as the property has been purported to have gone into an extended slump and quality was alleged to have fallen off markedly from the end of the Second World War until the 1975 vintage, when the (then) young Pascal Delbeck was hired by Madame Dubois-Challon as the new winemaker at Château Ausone. Monsieur Delbeck was indeed young when he received the position as *Chef du Cave* at Château Ausone, as he had just received his degree in oenology and was still only nineteen years of age at the time! However, he hit the ground running and David Peppercorn cites the 1975 as the first brilliant vintage of Ausone since the 1937 and Robert Parker, notes very good things starting here under Monsieur Delbeck with the 1976 vintage, which is indeed one of the two very finest wines made in Bordeaux in this year (and utterly transcendental in quality from the general level of the 1976s- the other great '76 is Lafite).

However, the assertions of David Peppercorn and Robert Parker notwithstanding, the period from 1945 to 1975 (or 1976, depending on who you choose to believe on this score) was not really a period of underperforming or mediocrity at Château Ausone and I have had some absolutely marvelous wines in recent times from this thirty year span, including the 1949, 1959, 1964, 1966 and 1970, and I am fully of the opinion that there was no precipitous falloff in quality at the property during this three decade period and the wines remained every bit as beautiful and exotic in personality as they were on either side of this alleged slump. One has to wonder to what degree, if any, Messieurs Peppercorn and Parker were parroting the impressions of the influential (and aforementioned) Edmund Penning-Roswell, who wrote in 1970 that "many would agree that for a long time Ausone has not made wines up to first-growth standard." He continued, "I remember an excellent '20 and a good '24, but since the last war, I have never met an outstanding Ausone." Maybe I have just been lucky (or these other gentlemen unlucky), but I have had many truly brilliant bottles from this period of the perceived "slump" at Ausone and believe that such assertions are quite inaccurate, which at least has the present day benefit of sometimes offering up relatively better values for these vintages of Ausone prior to Monsieur Delbeck arriving at the property in 1975. Further on in this article, we will go into some of the possible contributing factors that may have added up to a general (and erroneous) perception of a slippage in quality at Château Ausone from 1945 until the 1975 vintage. In any case, most commentators seem to agree that from the arrival of Monsieur Delbeck at Ausone until his departure after the 1994 vintage, the property produced absolutely stellar wines, with several simply transcending the general quality of the vintage in Bordeaux (1976, 1979, 1981 and 1983).

For a very, very long time, the *cépages* of Château Ausone was a fifty-fifty blend of merlot and cabernet franc. In recent times, the Vauthier family has begun to put a bit more cabernet franc into the blend, so that it now has the slight ascendancy in the cuvée over the merlot in most vintages. As has been the case for several centuries here, the Vauthier family

continues to recognize the importance of old vines in the ultimate quality of the wine, and this remains one of the very few properties left on either side of the Gironde where the average age of the vines remains still around fifty years of age, and there are several blocks that are in excess of one hundred years old and which still contribute meaningfully to the *grand vin*. Perhaps this is another reflection of the blessed nature of the *terroir* at Ausone in their small, sheltered amphitheater of vines, as the old-time owners here were able to postpone their day of reckoning with phylloxera for several decades longer than other *Bordelais* proprietors, and the estate did not have to extensively replant after the frosts of 1956 on the Right Bank. In many respects, this profound appreciation for old vines on the part of the Vauthier family is more of a Burgundian attitude than it is a traditional Bordeaux mindset, as is the very serious understanding of the importance that the unique *terroir* at Ausone plays in crafting the personality of this magical wine. In recent times, the average age of the vines that go into the *grand vin* have been kept up by producing a second wine, La Chapelle d'Ausone, from the younger vines on the property, so that replanting can be done incrementally as necessity dictates, while still being able to keep the *grand vin* an old vine bottling. The first vintage of La Chapelle d'Ausone was the 1995, Alain Vauthier's first year flying solo in the management seat of the property.

Back in the late sixteenth century, the site of Château Ausone was also the home of a quarry, as vast amounts of limestone rock were chiseled away under the hillside and used to craft the walls that surround the ancient town of St. Émilion. The quarrying of stone here left a network of caves and tunnels under the plateau and these were converted later into homes (as is also the case in the area around Saumur and Chinon in the central Loire Valley) and eventually cellars for wine. Both the cellars at Château Ausone and Château Bélair-Monange next door are housed in the tunnels left behind from these old stone quarries. These limestone cellars provide an absolutely perfect medium for the slow evolution of young wines in cask, with very high humidity and constant temperatures leading to ideal conditions for the *elevage* of Ausone. I often wonder if the combination of the very high limestone content in the soils of the vineyards of Ausone, coupled with the very cool, high humidity cellars in which the *elevage* for this wine takes place are equally responsible for the very, very leisurely rate at which Château Ausone blossoms in the bottle. For, this is clearly one of the slowest evolving wines in all of Bordeaux, or at least this was the case before the stylistic shift began to take place for the *grand vin* here with the arrival of Michel Rolland as a consultant in 1995. As I said at the outset, the history of Château Ausone cannot be written in a single chapter. Prior to Monsieur Rolland's input, the wines at Château Ausone always started out life very tight, deep and seriously structured, with great promise often lying hidden beneath a serious chassis of tannin and very good acidity. In times when there was no institutional rush to drink Bordeaux before it was good and ready, this was hardly a problem, but as the pace of life sped up in the latter half of the twentieth century and people's attention spans declined, the slow unfolding of the magic of Ausone was seemingly seen as a detriment, not an asset.

Château Ausone was rather unique during the period when it was co-directed by Madame Dubois-Challon and the Vauthier family, as with Madame Dubois-Challon also owning next door neighbor, Château Bélair, for many, many years, both estates' wines were made and raised in the cellars at Ausone. Once Pascal Delbeck arrived as the *Régisseur* at Ausone in 1975, he also took over responsibility for the making of the wine at Château Bélair. But, given that both wines were raised in the cellars of Ausone prior to his arrival, I have to assume that his

predecessor also made the wines at both estates. In 1976, Monsieur Delbeck was able to start vinifying and raising Château Bélair in the freshened up cellars of that property and the cellars at Ausone were reserved from that point forward solely for its own wine's aging prior to bottling. Clearly Madame Dubois-Challon was very appreciative of the superb job which Pascal Delbeck did at both Ausone and Bélair, for when she passed away in 2003, still singly owning the latter estate, she left the property of Bélair to Monsieur Delbeck in her will. In fact, it was eventually the crushing weight of France's inheritance taxes (Château Bélair was worth a tidy fortune in 2003) that eventually forced Monsieur Delbeck to sell the property to Christian Moueix's firm and led to the reconstitution of the property as Château Bélair-Monange (and the eventual disappearance of Château Magdelaine). But, that is a story for another time. For the moment, suffice to say that the era of Pascal Delbeck at both Châteaux Ausone and Bélair was another golden age for each property, though this was not as universally recognized amongst wine journalists and the wine trade as seems to have been the case in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century.



Pauline Vauthier, the current head winemaker and future director of Château Ausone.

Today, the wine at Château Ausone is made by the combination of Alain and Pauline Vauthier and their very well-tenured *Chef du Cave*, Philippe Baillarguet. As I mentioned above, Michel Rolland was brought in as a consultant here in 1995 and not surprisingly, the style of Ausone shifted a bit at that time. Later picking dates to attain greater phenolic ripeness, more

new oak, and an increase in the percentage of cabernet franc in the blend were all incorporated during Monsieur Rolland's period of consultancy at Ausone. I am not certain if some of his other standard cellar practices, such as malolactic fermentation in small barrels and micro-oxygenation of the wine during the *elevage* were also practiced at Ausone from 1995 forwards, but, if history is any guide, one assumes that they may well have been. In any event, the second stylistic chapter at Château Ausone arrived with Monsieur Rolland. I have not yet gone into the style of the wines at Ausone prior to his consultancy in 1995, but will do so a bit further below, as those are really the wines that interest me from this great property. The wines made during Monsieur Rolland's tenure here became far more spit-polished stylistically (something which the old Ausone would never be accused!), with glossy, often quite gorgeous, sappy red fruit tones, a luxuriant foundation of nutty new oak and impeccable balance and precision. The vintages I have tasted during this era were truly very well-made and I have to confess that they never moved me all that much. But, unlike many of my colleagues, I had some depth of experience with the old style of Ausone, so I had no need for any "*Cuvée de Luxe*" veneer being laid over the magical *terroir* of Ausone, as to my palate, this was already one of the very greatest wines in all of Bordeaux and any stylistic change was simply ill-conceived from the outset. But, clearly my palate has little bearing on commercial aspects of the Bordeaux market and the changed style of Ausone was greeted with nearly universal praise by other journalists and the market and the price marched up accordingly, making Ausone subsequently one of the most expensive wines in the region. And, of course, vastly inferior in quality to what it once was.

In any event, Michel Rolland's contract was not renewed by the Vauthier family when it came up in 2013 and he has not been involved in the property since that time. As the last vintage of Ausone I tasted *En Primeur* was the 2012, I do not know if Monsieur Rolland's departure as a consultant here changed the styles of the wines yet again from the 2013 vintage forwards. But, it was never these more slickly put together, modern wines at Ausone that caught my attention initially, but rather the idiosyncratic, soil-driven and utterly exotic wines that were crafted here during the period of co-direction of the estate by Madame Dubois-Challon and the Vauthier family. As I have written about in my features on both Château Canon and Château Magdelaine, the fairly high percentage of active limestone that defines the *terroirs* of the St. Émilion *Côtes* wines produces far more tightly-knit and structured young wines than is the case anywhere else in Bordeaux. This is true of both Château Ausone and Château Bélair as well. The limestone soils here traditionally also produced wines of less dark color out of the blocks. So, it is quite easy to imagine as Bordeaux wines began to be more and more judged by how they showed in their youth that the wines from the *Côtes* might fall a bit out of fashion, and this was indeed the case with the wines from Ausone, Bélair, Canon and Magdelaine in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. Pascal Delbeck's 1975 arrival at the first two properties allowed for some subsequent critical acclaim for the wines, but they still did not set the market on fire the way the wines from many of the top estates in Pomerol did at the time, or some of the other properties in St. Émilion began to do as well during this era. This was particularly apparent as the decade of the 1980s wound towards its conclusion, as Monsieur Delbeck's arrival was now more than a decade previous and critics needed something fresher to catch and hold their attention. Monsieur Rolland's blossoming Right Bank consultancy at the same time seemed to serve that function perfectly, and as his fame grew (for what reason I will never understand, as I have drunk a great many of those wines and know their relative mediocrity firsthand), the newfound critical respect for Ausone that had only started in the mid-1970s began to wane.

However, despite their lack of fashionable *cachet* the wines at Ausone remained stunning. And also very old school in style, with the inherent structural reticence of young wines from the *Côtes* in St. Émilion amplified by both the prized nature of Ausone's particular *terroir* and those damp, constantly cold cellars carved out of the limestone plateau. Monsieur Delbeck's winemaking style was also decidedly old school, with modest amounts of new oak and none of the cellar techniques used by others at this time to make the wines more appealing for early-arriving journalists on the increasingly crowded pilgrimage routes of *En Primeur*. One has to assume that the animosity that grew between the Vauthier family and Madame Dubois-Challon during the late 1980s and 1990s, and which eventually ended up in that last bitter court battle, had much of its genesis in the continued traditional style of Ausone throughout this era, when wines from far lesser *terroirs* such as Angélu were garnering higher points from the most influential critics and one of St. Émilion's true First Growth wines was being treated as more and more of an afterthought. As one of Robert Parker's acolytes, Jeff Leve, wrote recently of the wines at Ausone during Pascal Delbeck's tenure, "tasting those wines shows how much progress has been made since the Vauthier era began" as "the Delbeck wines are frankly boring." In my experience, the assertion is completely devoid of fact, but it perfectly encapsulates (though perhaps not as articulately as some) the perception of inferiority in certain market circles of the classic Ausone wines produced in the 1970s and 1980s.

In reality, the old style of Château Ausone that is disparaged by Mr. Leve and his tribe was one of the most exotic, flamboyant and brilliantly complex wines to be found anywhere in Bordeaux, all wrapped up in a stunningly elegant package and driven by the inimitable limestone soils of this, the most gifted sector of the *Côtes* hillsides in St. Émilion. But, one had to have plenty of patience in this era to experience the magic! The old school vintages of Ausone took a long, long time to blossom, with the quarter century mark out from the vintage about the right moment to start drinking most of them. I have written in the past about how slow the wines from Château Magdelaine were to unfold with bottle age, and that twenty or more years were almost always required for the wines to start to really blossom and show their true characters. The same can be said for the wines of Château Ausone in their glory days, and if anything, they were even a bit slower to drop the veil. But, in due course, they always do, and once they are really opening up for business, one is hard pressed to think of any wine anywhere in Bordeaux (other than perhaps Pétrus and Lafleur) that can offer this degree of exoticism on both the nose and palate, and only Pétrus (since the 1961) can do so in such an elegantly styled palate impression. When Edmund Penning-Rowsell was writing about the glories of the Ausones from the 1920s, he was doing so in 1970, when the wines were already more than forty years of age! Is it any surprise that he would find the eleven year-old 1959 Ausone a pale imitation of the magic of the 1929? The wine was still closed down tightly I would imagine and decades away from truly blossoming. But, when I last had the pleasure to drink a bottle of the '59 Ausone (now a decade ago- one does not cross paths with that magical wine too often), it had blossomed with serious conviction and was sheer perfection!

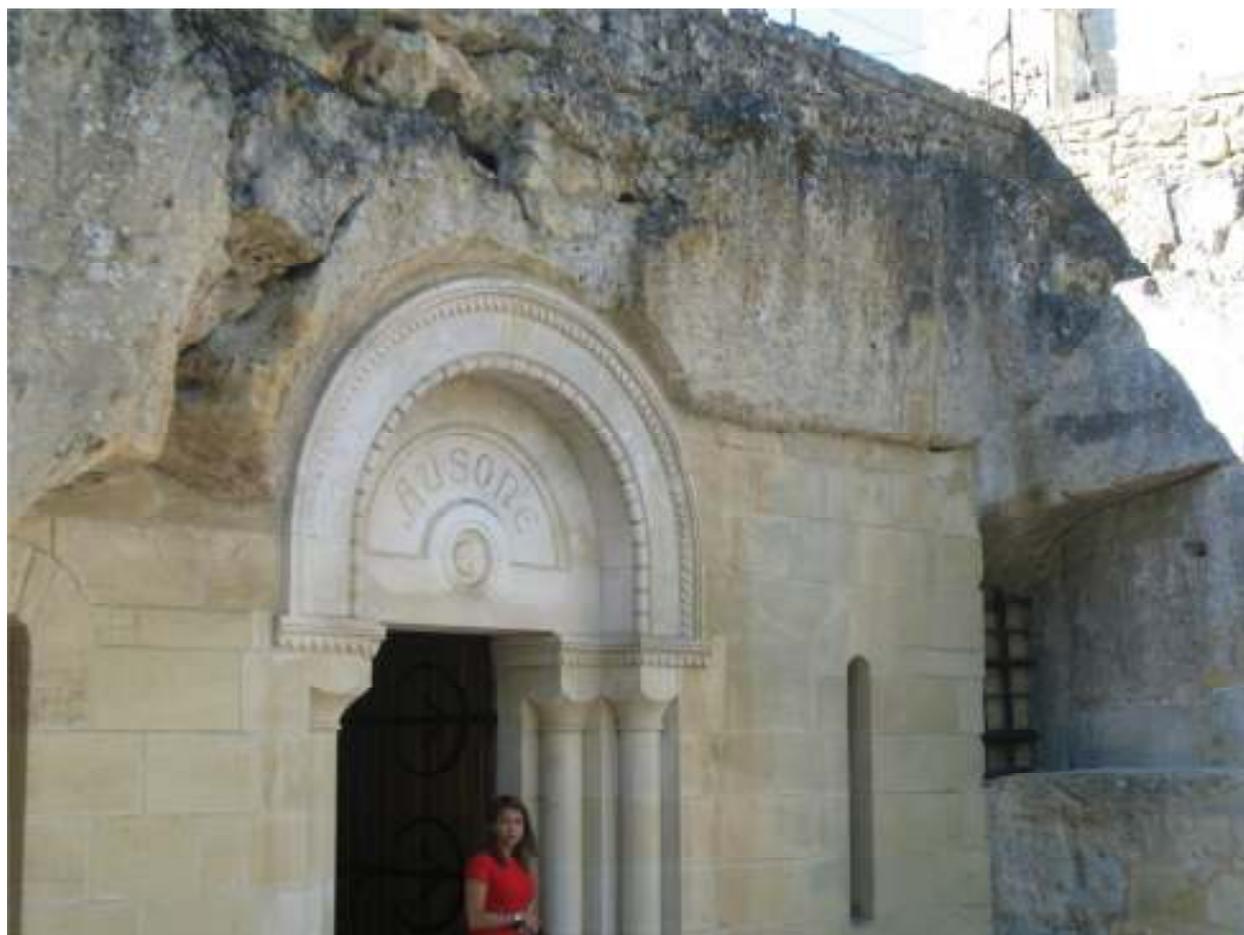
The old time English wine writers of Mr. Penning-Rowsell's generation understood that great claret took plenty of time in the cellar to unfold properly, and on most occasions they were perfectly content to allow time to run its course. But, other than with Château Latour, it seems to me that they did not have room in their pantheon for more than one First Growth that demanded the market indulgence to unfold at a glacial pace, and so Ausone eventually stopped being given

the benefit of the doubt and the vintages from 1945 forwards were dubbed as hailing from the “slump years”. In reality, it seems far more likely that these commentators could simply not see the forest for the trees, and as many other top estates on either side of the Gironde started to make a bit more modern wines as they recovered from the hardships of the second world war (and one can truly see this paradigm stylistic shift from the 1961 vintage forwards), the wines at Ausone were having none of that and continued to be made very much in their old, structured and soil-driven style that had made them so properly famous from the late nineteenth century onwards. But, as I hope some of my notes below on those vintages in question will attest, given sufficient bottle age, they have all come around beautifully and for example, today, the much-maligned vintages of Ausone from the decade of the 1960s are truly some of the most magnificent bottles of mature claret that one can ever hope to drink!

I have alluded to the “old” style of Ausone prior to Monsieur Rolland being retained to consult here by Alain Vauthier in 1995, but have not really attempted to describe this style in any detail. I will do so here, but a great, mature bottle of Château Ausone is not an easy wine to articulate, as it is truly a wine of immense complexity and wild exotic elements that are never found in any other wine in Bordeaux. The *cépages* traditionally at Château Ausone of fifty percent each of cabernet franc and merlot is hardly anything out of the ordinary on the Right Bank, though at neighboring Magdelaine, the merlot percentage of the cuvée was always considerably higher than at Ausone. But, a fifty-fifty blend is hardly anything that might lead one to expect an exotic personality in the wine, and it is really the glorious mystery of the underlying soils at Ausone that gives this wine its utterly unique and flamboyant personality. Old school Ausone at its apogee of drinkability always delivers beautiful fruit tones, which are most often quite red fruity in profile, but hardly typical of other St. Émilions, as along with the red cherries and red plums will often come notes of things like blood orange and pomegranate, which are hardly standard Right Bank fare! But, the glorious fruit of Ausone is only one element of a very complex aromatic and flavor profile for this wine, as it always presents additional facets of its personality in tones such as mocha, menthol, nuttiness, venison, chocolate, *sous bois*, truffles, cigar wrapper, smokiness and with truly extended bottle age, things like sealing wax and butterscotch as well! This is most emphatically not your standard, “meat and potatoes” St. Émilion!

All of those wild elements enumerated above are always the top half of the aromatic and flavor equation of old school Ausone, as the bottom half of the equation is firmly based in a stunningly pure and complex base of that limestone soil at the property. I do not have enough experience with old school Bélair to know if the limestone soil there plays as dominant a role in the wines as it does at Ausone, but certainly at Magdelaine (prior to its demise), the chalky soil element was every bit as defining as at Ausone. The difference between the two is that at Magdelaine, there was never the same wildly complex and exotic fruit and other elements to go along with the beautiful base of limestone, and this is where Ausone moves out into a universe of its own in the firmament of St. Émilion. Words really cannot do justice to the this magical combination of brilliantly complex, limestone minerality and wildly flamboyant, exotic fruit and other components, but they are beautifully synthesized in a great bottle of mature Château Ausone, and they are consistently found from vintage to vintage in all of the wines that I have been fortunate enough to drink down through the years. Perhaps it is just my formative training in the wines of Burgundy, but for me, it is much easier to reach out to the Côte d’Or for an

analogy for Ausone, as the wine seems to have the exotic and flamboyant fruit elements of La Tâche, coupled to the profoundly complex and defining minerality of great Musigny, with a touch of that idiosyncratic sealing wax element that is so prevalent in very old vintages of Clos des Lambrays from the 1920s and 1930s. Of course, all of these comparisons fall short of the mark, but I hope that they at least convey what kind of complexity can be expected in a glass of mature, old school Ausone!



The entrance to the old stone quarry tunnel under the Ausone vineyards, which now serve as the estate's cellars.

I should mention, that though old school Ausone is about as complex and exotic a wine that one could find in all of Bordeaux, it was never really a powerful wine, and this more elegant, light on its feet characteristic may be yet another element of how the fable of a “slump” at the property came into being, as the period of Ausone’s alleged mediocrity also coincides with the greater emphasis placed on powerful palate presence at many other properties, and this was particularly true of some of the estates with lesser *terroir* in St. Émilion that sought ways to garner attention for influential wine critics at the time. Of the last decade and a half of vintages at Ausone before Alain Vauthier shifted stylistic gears here with his 1995, the only really powerful vintages of Ausone are the 1982 and the 1989. And though both are really quite big wines in the context of Ausone’s traditional style (this is most obvious with the 1989, which though broader-shouldered than almost any other vintage of Ausone I have tasted, is still very much defined by its great limestone mineral drive), the vintages that surround them are not, and are really wines of

elegance, harmony and brilliant intensity of flavor, without any undue weight. As I said above, the old style of Ausone was really a universe of its own in St. Émilion. And the twenty year stretch where Pascal Delbeck crafted the wines here are truly an extraordinary run of brilliance, as wines such as the 1976, 1979, 1981, 1983, 1986, 1988 and 1990 (to cite just the ones I have drunk with pleasure in recent times) are truly brilliant, brilliant wines, and are unequivocally to be numbered amongst the very greatest wines produced on the Right Bank in their respective vintages.

As I mentioned above, Alain Vauthier took the decision to move immediately away from this style at Ausone when he brought in Michel Rolland to consult in 1995. Certainly, Monsieur Rolland did a pretty good job at Ausone and realized what was intended, as the market perception of the property's wines soared with the advent of his consultancy and the prices rose accordingly, as well as Robert Parker's scores for the wines. Mission accomplished. I should mention that the Ausone vintages that I have tasted here during the time that Monsieur Rolland consulted were also the finest wines I have ever tasted where Michel Rolland had a hand in the decision making process at a property, and I do not know if this was a result of Alain Vauthier not desiring to give him free rein or Monsieur Rolland respecting the historical legacy and quality of the *terroir* here. The possible motivations for moderation notwithstanding, certainly the Rolland era wines at Château Ausone were very well done in their more modern guise. But, the inherent exoticism and magical minerality of old school Ausone was certainly not easy to find in the young Rolland-consulted wines here, and it remains to be seen if those elements will be able to one day emerge from their hidden status and inform the mature wine to some degree. My gut instinct is that they were lost at the start and will never arrive with extended bottle age, but it is too early to say with certainty that this is the case, as the wines are still all too young today to show those elements, if they are ever going to add to the aromatic and flavor profile of the wine. In any case, I would not necessarily want to bet cavalierly against the incomparable *terroir* of Ausone making its presence felt, even in the spit-polished, *Cuvée de Luxe* style of those more recent vintages.

I mentioned at the outset that Château Ausone is indeed truly a First Growth in St. Émilion. In the first official classification of the wines of the commune, which was done in 1959, Ausone was accorded a ranking of "Premier Grand Cru Classé A", alongside that of Cheval Blanc, and no other properties in St. Émilion were ranked at this ultimate level. The communal wine authorities seek to revisit these rankings every ten years or so, and the most recent one a couple of years ago promoted both Châteaux Angélus and Pavie to this same level, so "officially", there are now four First Growth quality wines in St. Émilion. The promotions of Pavie and Angélus were quite controversial, and as far as my palate is concerned, completely off base if one is judging quality of wine, not just market willingness to pay the prices demanded at these two estates. But, in any case, I have never had any issue with the ranking of Cheval Blanc and Ausone at the very pinnacle of wines in St. Émilion and I have always thought of both of these as true First Growths. This is true of the post-1995 vintages of Ausone that I have tasted as well, as they are certainly still the equivalent in potential of wines like Margaux, Haut-Brion (in its current state of stylistic searching) and Mouton-Rothschild. But, as I said above, the wines at Château Ausone were far, far superior to my palate before Monsieur Rolland was brought on board.

Getting back to the era of traditional wines at Ausone, I wanted to address some of the possible reasons that the estate was alleged to have fallen off in quality after the Second World War. One of course was the possibility that the journalists and wine professionals of this era were simply not giving the wine sufficient time in the cellar to blossom and were writing it off before it had the opportunity to open up and start to deliver its true complexity and breed. But, there is another charge that I have heard bandied about concerning the vintages of Ausone from this period and that is that “the wines are terribly inconsistent from bottle to bottle” and one is lucky when one hits a good example. This is a charge I have heard more often in the US than I have in Europe, and can only speak to it by saying that this has unquestionably not been my experience with the wine, but I have not drunk enough Ausone over the years to claim to have a very, very broad base on which to judge this charge. However, here in the states, one has to remember that most top Bordeaux properties, and this includes Ausone, have been brought in by a wide number of different importers over the years, and not all of them were as careful back in the day with temperature control as we all hope they are today. So, variations from bottle to bottle with Ausone are as likely to happen as with any other classed growth from the old days, when different importers purchased and shipped the wine. This wide pool of importers was quite evident with our vertical tasting in February, as of the ten vintages assembled, we had four different importers and our bottle of the 1979 Ausone was indeed heat damaged (and was the only one in the lineup with that particular importer’s strip label). So here in the US market, variations from importer to importer seem far more likely to account for differences in the consistency of bottles of Ausone as anything that might have been amiss at the property during the alleged slump years.

In any event, while I remain uncertain as to what could have been the genesis for these claims of inconsistency and slump at Ausone during the period from 1945 to 1975, my own experience with well-shipped wines from this era has been truly memorable and the vintages I have tasted from this stretch number amongst the most beautiful bottles of Ausone I have ever tasted. Certainly, the long-running family feud between Madame Challon-Dubois and the Vauthier family, which apparently really started to fester and get in the way of winemaking decisions in the 1980s, was an impediment to seamless management of the estate for many years prior and was hardly a secret within the world of Bordeaux wines. As Madame Challon had selected and hired Pascal Delbeck in 1975, he was always seen as “her man” and his working relationship with Alain Vauthier deteriorated over time. According to many reports, Messieurs Delbeck and Vauthier worked together very well in their early years at the property (Alain Vauthier was born in 1950 and would have been five years Pascal Delbeck’s senior when he arrived at Ausone in 1975), with a shared conviction of how to chart Ausone’s course from the mid-‘70s forward, but things began to deteriorate in the 1980s. One has to assume that Monsieur Delbeck wanted to essentially keep the status quo, at least along the lines of what he had experienced since his arrival there in 1975, and Monsieur Vauthier was eager to follow a more modern course than being pursued (and highly praised by Robert Parker) by neighbors in St. Émilien. The style and shape of Ausone since the Vauthier family realized sole directorship of the property in 1995 and outright ownership in 1997 would certainly support this assumption.

But, one has to imagine that the friction between the two sides of the family ownership go back further, as there are many reports in contemporary books on the property that investment in the cellars and vineyards at Ausone was virtually non-existent going back to the 1950s and

1960s. This would be understandable in the 1950s, as all of France was trying to recover from the devastations of World War II and Bordeaux was not the super expensive wine that it is today, but rather, the very best value to be found in the world of wine! So, there were not the same piles of cash lying around to fund investments as has been the case in the region since the 1990s at the toniest addresses. In those old days, Ausone was not a wine that was aged in new oak (or very few new casks were brought in each year), fermentations took place in old, wooden vats and the wine was defined not by its winemaking, but by its *terroir*. The wine's *elevage* was leisurely in those older barrels and one assumes that it was bottled in stages, over an extended period of time, as was the case at so many other châteaux in this era. Things changed here incrementally when Pascal Delbeck arrived, with new wooden fermenting tanks brought in to replace the ancient ones (though the trend at this time was to install stainless steel or cement fermentation tanks at most other top Bordeaux estates) and the percentage of new oak used creeping up a bit, but certainly never approaching the one hundred percent new wood utilized today by the Vauthiers at Ausone.

When Alain Vauthier and his family won their court case in 1995 and could make all the decisions at Ausone, modernization in the cellars and in winemaking techniques were given a priority and the percentage of new oak used for the *elevage* rocketed up, so that today the wine has now long been aged in one hundred percent new oak casks. By the tail end of Monsieur Delbeck's tenure at Château Ausone, the two ownership families had been back and forth in court several times already, arguing about picking dates to start the harvest, new oak and replanting of the vineyards *ad nauseum*, and Madame Dubois-Challon truly seemed ready to hand off her half of Ausone to François Pinault. This generated the last court battle between the two families, as the Vauthiers successfully won this case in 1995 and Alain Vauthier was able to solely take decisions at Château Ausone. His first order of business was to send Monsieur Delbeck packing, so the 1994 was the last Ausone fashioned with Pascal Delbeck's input. However, as Madame Dubois-Challon had retained ownership of Château Bélair after the Ausone court decision in 1995, Monsieur Delbeck could still be found manning the helm next door and making the wine at Bélair for many more years to come. One has to imagine that this was a period of relative tension still at Ausone, as Monsieur Delbeck would meet regularly with Madame Challon-Dubois about the management of Bélair during these years, and she continued to live in the château on the Ausone property! As I will be writing a feature on Château Bélair in a coming issue, I will only touch upon on this period briefly. As Madame Challon-Dubois lived on at Ausone until her passing in 2003, and then bequeathed Château Bélair to Monsieur Delbeck in that year, he continued to still be at the next door property until 2008, when he was forced to sell Château Bélair to Christian Moueix and his firm in Libourne. So, for thirteen years after being shown the door at Ausone by Alain Vauthier, Monsieur Delbeck continued to work next door. I suspect that there were not a lot of neighborhood get-togethers thrown in that era.

Since 1995, Ausone has been the sole purview of the Vauthier family and the wine has changed into one of the better done, modern *Cuvée de Luxe* wines on the Right Bank. With Monsieur Delbeck eventually forced by the weight of French taxes to sell his last stake in Château Bélair to Christian Moueix in 2008 (the Moueix firm had been brought in as minority partners soon after Pascal Delbeck inherited the estate from Madame Dubois-Challon in 2003-again, no doubt due to tax issues), the air is no longer as thick in this part of St. Émilion and the not so friendly rivalry that must have been so pervasive from 1995 to 2008 between these

neighbors has faded into the tattered pages of Bordeaux history. Fortunately, as old school Bordeaux is such a long-lived wine in general, and particularly during the golden age at Ausone, there remains still the magnificent wines made here at the property from many decades ago to remind us of just how beautiful the *terroir* at Ausone can be when it takes center stage in the wines, and these brilliant wines continue to dazzle and offer insight into just what was lost at Ausone in 1995, when Alain Vauthier decided to change stylistic directions of this First Growth estate. I hope this article and the notes that follow will help to set the historical record right about Ausone from the period from 1945 to 1975, as this was most emphatically not a period of decline, as many commentators at the time would have us believe (and which so many today parrot, with little or no experience with the Ausone vintages in question), but rather, one last great blossoming of the old school style at Château Ausone, this, the most gifted *terroir* in the inimitable *Côtes* section of St. Émilion.



The modest chateau at Ausone, where Madame Dubois-Challon lived out her remaining years after the '95 split.

The following notes have generally been accrued over the last decade or so, as Ausone is a fairly small property and the well-stored examples are not all that easy to cross paths with in the US claret market. I first envisioned writing this story of Ausone as I was wrapping up my annual coverage of the *En Primeur* market in Bordeaux with the 2012 vintage and had experienced a half dozen years of the modern style of Ausone. So, I have included my *En Primeur* notes from those vintages in the following pages, to give some impression of the newer

style of wines at Ausone, as they are not the kind of wines that lead me to go out and buy bottles for my cellar and I do not have any recent notes on them from bottle. Several of the vintages reported on below from 1990 back to 1961 were tasted in the last month, as several of my friends and I were able to pool our fairly thin Ausone resources and put together a pretty good vertical tasting of the property to fill in a few of the gaps in my recent tasting notes, or bring more up to date notes on vintages I had not tasted in several years. But, we did not have every important vintage from the 1990 vintage back, so some of the notes below will date back five, six or even ten years ago, as I have had this article on the backburner for quite some time now. But, as old school Ausone is one of the longest-lived wines in all of Bordeaux, I firmly believe that even the older notes remain useful and accurate for the wines in question.

I should take a moment to recount how a single vintage of Ausone in the not too distant past re-ignited my love for this great St. Émilion in its classical guise. It was at a tasting of the 1970 Bordeaux vintage held out in Laguna Beach, California a handful of years ago, which I never had a chance to report on in the newsletter. My good friend, Jim Grossberg, had organized a wine weekend around the 1970 clarets and we held a pair of truly memorable tastings of the vintage (with several other very enjoyable 1970s tossed in from other parts of the globe), but as I had very recently written up the 1970s in a previous issue of the newsletter, I never used the notes from these tastings for another article on the wines. However, one of the wines in Jim's lineup (which we all contributed bottles to from our cellars) was the 1970 Ausone, which I had never tasted previously. Given that I still foolishly believed much of what I read in the wine press about the slump at Ausone in this era (Robert Parker scored the 1970 wine here all of 69 points!), none of us really had particularly high expectations for the '70 Ausone, but as one of the participants had it in his cellar, we figured "why not?" and put it in the lineup. Given the low Parker score, the gentleman in question brought two bottles of the 1970 Ausone with him, in case the first one was not good, which was a very kind gesture. When we served the decanter of the wine to the table (it had been given about thirty to forty minutes to blossom prior to serving) the wine was absolutely stunning, and as exotic and expressive as any great vintage of Ausone can be! We were besides ourselves with joy, as our expectations were quite low and the wine was absolutely brilliant! The well-known exotic aspect of great Ausone was very much in evidence and the wine seemingly changed personality every thirty or forty seconds, so that we kept smelling our glasses, finding different elements in ascendancy and not drinking the wine for what must have been a good half an hour. It was truly a thrilling ride! Finally, we had consumed the 1970 Ausone to everyone's utter satisfaction and were preparing to go onto the next flight of the tasting, when the gentleman who had brought the wine posed the question: "Anyone want to do that again?" and offered to open his backup bottle of the '70 Ausone on the spot! We took that ride again with the same thrilling results, before returning back to our terrestrial existences and moving on to the next flight of 1970 claret. And that is how I fell back in love with old school Ausone...

La Chapelle d'Ausone

2012 La Chapelle d'Ausone

The 2012 La Chapelle d'Ausone is a good wine that will make friends early, but really will be better if given a few years of bottle age to develop some secondary layers of complexity. The nose is a stylish blend of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of tobacco leaf, cigar smoke, soil and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and shows pretty good acidity for

the vintage here (seemingly more than the *grand vin* at this stage), with a solid core, modest tannins and good length on the focused and quite well-balanced, suave finish. A very pretty wine. 2018-2035. **89.**

2011 La Chapelle d'Ausone

The second wine from Château Ausone is quite good in 2011, but it shows a slightly graininess to its tannins and just a hint of resin to its new wood component- both of which are slight distractions, but do keep the score down just a touch. The nose is ripe and generous, offering up scents of sappy black cherries, woodsmoke, coffee bean and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a good core of fruit, firm tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. The wood is still sticking out a bit uncovered on the backend here, and the wine is currently a bit youthfully four-square, but I assume that time in bottle will solve both these minor issues. All in all, a pretty good wine. 2018-2035. **87-88+?**

2010 La Chapelle d'Ausone

The 2010 La Chapelle d'Ausone is very ripe, balsamic and liqueur-like on both the nose and palate, with a disjointed palate impression of hard tannins, overripe fruit tones and free-ranging acids. The bouquet is a syrupy blend of framboise, chocolate, balsamic tones, damp earth, smoke and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and coarse, with a very non-Ausone-like bluntness to the attack, a sappy core of fruit, hard acids and a long, chewy and overripe finish. At least the raw materials that went into the 2010 La Chapelle d'Ausone did not make it into the *grand vin*. 2020-2040. **84+?**

2009 La Chapelle d'Ausone

The second wine of Ausone is a very classy and thoroughly modern wine that will drink well with five or six years of bottle age. The nose is deep and complex, as it offers up scents of black cherries, cocoa, vinesmoke, fresh herbs, espresso, soil and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a really impressive base of soil for a more modern styled wine. The finish is long and shows just a bit of firm tannin that will want resolution. A extremely impressive second wine. 2016-2035. **87-90.**

Château Ausone

2012 Château Ausone

The 2012 Château Ausone is a very good wine, but one can see that the proclivity here these days to harvest late has not been a ready path to capture all of the potential of this superb Right Bank vintage. The Ausone team did not even get started picking their merlot until October 2nd (at Château Simard) and finished up bringing in the last of the cabernet franc from their various vineyard holdings on October 22nd. Overall, the entire portfolio shows just a touch easy-going as a result, as the perfect tension of balance in the Right Bank wines picked earlier is missing here. That said, the 2012 Ausone is not a bad wine by any means, as it offers up notes of black cherries, plums, coffee bean, tobacco leaf, complex soil tones, smoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and classy on the attack, with good, but not great depth at the core, a very luxurious palate impression and silky tannins evident on the velvety and laid back finish. One would probably have seen more grip and vibrancy if the fruit had been gathered a bit earlier, but perhaps the really chalky soils here were more difficult to manage during the drought and this was the best course to take. In any event, the 2012 Ausone a very pretty wine that will drink well fairly young for this cru, but, will not vie with the best wines of the Right Bank for top honors in this vintage. 2020-2045+. **91+.**

2011 Château Ausone

The 2011 Château Ausone is a step up from the very ripe and sturdy 2010, but there is a slight spark missing here this year. Of all the First Growths on either bank, this wine is more along the lines of the 2011 Mouton-Rothschild, which is technically quite sound, but somehow all the constituent components do not add up to a completely convincing whole. The nose on the 2011 Ausone offers up a nascently complex blend of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of pine resin, coffee bean, woodsmoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and primary, with a very good core, fine focus and a long, balanced finish that closes with fine-grained tannins. This is nicely polished on the backend and does not show any of the coarseness of less successful 2011s, and yet, there is not the same purity and poise on display here today as is found in the very best wines on the Right Bank in this vintage. Still a very good wine, but I was hoping for a masterpiece from Ausone in such a strong Right Bank vintage. 2020-2060+. 92.



2010 Château Ausone

The 2010 Ausone is a bit of a letdown, but this was not a particularly good vintage on the Right Bank. The nose is deep, sappy and very ripe, but nearly avoids overripeness, as it offers up a complex blend of black cherries, coffee, woodsmoke, tobacco leaf, a suave blend of classy new oak and just a touch of framboise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just a touch fiery, with firm, ripe and well-integrated tannins, some brusque acidity and a very long, complex and seriously tannic finish. The free range acids here are currently more worrisome than the hard tannins, as there should be sufficient depth of fruit here to eventually outlast the tannins. But those acids will need to be assimilated into the body of the wine to allow this wine to attain Ausone's customary level of seamless elegance when the wine

is eventually mature. At this point in time, this is not at all clear that this will happen, but perhaps the 2010 Ausone was just very late out of malo and the coarseness of the acidity today is simply a reflection of that phenomenon. However, no one at the château seemed non-plussed about the showing of the wine. 2025-2075. **87-92+?**

2009 Château Ausone

Oddly, at least at our tasting at the estate at the end of March, the second label was showing decidedly more interesting than the *grand vin*. I am sure that this is just a momentary occurrence and the ship will be righted soon enough, but the 2009 Ausone is a remarkably closed wine that is bound up in its substantial structure and digitally precise élevage and vinification. The rim of this wine is neon purple, and the nose offers up a very primary and sappy mélange of black cherries, chocolate, some reticent minerality and beautifully-integrated new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very tight, with a rock solid core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance and great length and grip on the ripely tannic and shockingly un-nuanced finish. Oddly, the sum of all these flawlessly crafted components does not add up to a wine of magical beauty, and today there is a slightly stillborn sense to the wine. The '09 Ausone will need a lot of time to unfold, and perhaps the profound *terroir* of the estate is simply lurking behind the wall of digitally perfect cellar technique and will emerge in the fullness of time. Perhaps. I am not completely sold on this being the case and look forward to being corrected way down the road. I will be happy to admit I was wrong if this does indeed come to pass, but today this is no slam dunk for future greatness. My impression is that this wine has been made in a slightly uncertain style, as part of it wants to ape the luxury cuvée style on display at Cheval Blanc or Lafite-Rothschild, and part of it wants to just embrace this magical *terroir*. The result is a beautifully crafted wine that does not seem to pull off either attempt with style at the present time. It will be very interesting to watch this wine unfold in over the coming decades. 2020-2050+. **87-93+?**

1990 Château Ausone

The 1990 vintage of Château Ausone is a stunning wine. There is a purity and soil signature front and center here that is not always evident in wines from this torrid vintage on the Gironde, and Ausone's signature elegance is now very much this wine's calling card. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, nutskin, cigar wrapper, chalky soil tones, a touch of blood orange and a lovely, floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and deep at the core, with superb transparency and grip, modest tannins and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. At age twenty-nine, the 1990 Ausone is just starting to blossom and drink with generosity and refinement, but the more exotic topnotes here have not yet fully emerged and there is even more magic to come for those who can defer gratification for another ten years! 2019-2060+. **96.**

1989 Château Ausone

Château Ausone in the 1989 vintage is a bit of a stylistic outlier for this great property, as the conditions on the Right Bank in 1989 crafted a very powerful example of this estate. I have read elsewhere that this wine is in excess of fourteen percent alcohol, but this is not reflected on the import label. The wine is not overripe in any sense, as it offers up a deep, complex and very pure bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, chocolate, licorice, gamebird, cigar smoke, just a touch of menthol, chalky soil tones, nutskin and just a whisper of incipient sealing wax appearing in the upper register with extended aeration. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, broad-shouldered and very precise, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent transparency and impeccable focus and balance on the long, ripely tannic and powerful finish. This remains a

very young wine and I have little doubt that the 1989 vintage of Ausone will effortlessly last a century in the bottle! An outstanding wine, but perhaps not my favorite style of Ausone from this golden era. 2029-2100. **94+**.

1988 Château Ausone

In contrast to the powerful 1989, the 1988 vintage at Château Ausone has produced an absolutely textbook example of this great *terroir* and this is now clearly my candidate for wine of the vintage in all of Bordeaux in this vintage! The wine wafts from the glass in a very refined aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, blood orange, menthol, gentle nutskin elements, a touch of eucalyptus, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones and lovely chocolaty tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows off really lovely mid-palate depth, with great soil signature, suave, seamless tannins, outstanding purity and focus and a very long, vibrant and complex finish. This will be more exotic aromatically with further bottle age, but it is already an absolutely complete wine and is a joy to drink today. That said, try to give it another four or five years in the cellar to let some of the inherent exoticism of old school to join the party. 2023-2080. **95**.

1986 Château Ausone

I had not drunk a bottle of the 1986 Ausone for a couple of years and the wine has gotten better with that extended bit of bottle age, as it is now wide open and really drinking well. The bouquet is pure and gorgeous, offering up a complex blend of black cherries, plums, nutskin, *pigeon*, a very strong base of chalky soil elements, Cuban cigar and a lovely topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with a good core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, melted tannins and a long, tangy and transparent finish of impressive complexity and breed. This is not a great vintage on the Right Bank, but the '86 Ausone is an excellent wine. 2019-2040+. **93**.

1985 Château Ausone

The 1985 vintage of Château Ausone was not particularly touted when it was released, but this is a great wine that should ultimately prove to be one of the greatest Ausones of the decade of the 1980s. The bouquet is deep, pure and youthfully exotic, as it soars from the glass in a very vibrant blend of baked cherries, blood orange, menthol, woodsmoke, glorious soil tones, a touch of dill and a potpourri of other more classic fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very intensely flavored, with a sappy core of fruit, great soil inflection, ripe, well-integrated tannins and superb length and grip on the tangy finish. A classic Ausone in the making, I would not touch the '85 for another decade, despite the fact that it is already quite accessible. There are just too many layers of complexity still to unfold here to be opening bottles right now! 2020-2070. **94**.

1983 Château Ausone

I had not had the pleasure to drink a bottle of the '83 Ausone in several years and this most recent bottle was every bit as brilliant as the last several I have been fortunate enough to share. The bouquet is pure, refined and blossoming into the Ausone realm of the exotic, offering up scents of red and black cherries, blood orange, nutskin, mocha, incipient waxy overtones, chalky soil, Cuban cigar wrapper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure, with a great core of fruit, magical transparency and mineral drive, melted tannins and a very, very long, complex and tangy finish. Though the tannins here have pretty much fallen away, the 1983 Ausone still has a lovely girdle of acidity and this will effortlessly carry the wine many, many decades into the future. It is certainly not a crime to be

drinking this great wine today, but it will still be drinking brilliantly thirty or forty years down the road! 2019-2065+. 96+.



1982 Château Ausone

Prior to this bottle, I had never tasted a pristine example of the 1982 Ausone. As I alluded to in the introduction, some importers seem to have been more scrupulous shipping this wine than others, and I was never fortunate with the 1982 prior to our vertical tasting in February. Happily, this most recent bottle was imported by Château and Estate and was in perfect form, so I was finally able to sample the magic of this wine, which was the most famous wine in Bordeaux during the period of barrel sampling of the '82 vintage! The bouquet is deep, pure and still youthful, offering up a mix of black cherries, plums, gamebird, a brilliant blade of limestone, nutskin, bonfire, dark chocolate and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and broader-shouldered than the 1983 paired up with it, with great building complexity, a plush core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and marvelous mineral drive on the very, very long and complex finish. Though this too is a fairly powerful vintage of Ausone, it is more precise and classically inclined than the 1989, and it ultimately will be the superior vintage of Ausone. 2030-20100. 97.

1981 Château Ausone

It is quite clear from tasting through many of the vintages of the 1980s that this was a magical decade at Ausone, and the 1981 is clearly one of the very finest wines produced on

either bank of the Gironde in this vintage. At age thirty-four, the wine is now just into its plateau of peak maturity, but it retains a bit of tannin and will continue to drink beautifully for many more decades to come. The deep, pure and utterly classic nose jumps from the glass in a blend of cherries, pomegranate, walnuts, fresh cocoa, a stunningly complex base of limestone soil tones and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite sappy at the core, with beautiful structure and grip, with modest tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and intensity of flavor on the long and utterly pure finish. A beautiful expression of this inimitable *terroir*. 2015-2040. **92.**

1979 Château Ausone

Our bottle of the 1979 Ausone at our vertical was cooked, so I have had to revert back to an older note on the wine. The 1979 Ausone is a glorious bottle of wine, and clearly one of the greatest wines of the vintage. The stunning bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, menthol, woodsmoke, chocolate, notes of venison, glorious soil tones and just a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and quite powerful for the vintage, with perfect focus and balance, excellent mid-palate concentration, and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. The tannins here are falling away, but the '79 Ausone has plenty of integrated, gentle acidity to carry it for years to come. What a pity that this château has gone over to the dark side, as this has to be one of the most unique and compelling *terroirs* in all of Bordeaux. Fine, fine juice. 2006-2030+. **93+.**

1978 Château Ausone

The 1978 Ausone is still a bit angular, and at this stage it is hard to tell whether this is a function of the relative youth of the wine, or rather, an inherent characteristic of this wine in this vintage. The nose is interestingly deep and black fruity, with scents of black cherry, herbs, leather, bitter chocolate, menthol, grilled nuts and earth. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, dark-hearted and a bit awkward, with good mid-palate depth, but (not yet?) the delineation and elegance one expects from this property in a top example. There remains a fair bit of tannin to resolve here, and this wine may yet blossom into an excellent Ausone, but that is not guaranteed from its showing today. Time will tell just how good this wine will be. 2005-2020. **86-90?**

1976 Château Ausone

For many, many years, the 1976 Ausone has always been ranked at the very pinnacle of the vintage, alongside the superb '76 Lafite-Rothschild. I have been fortunate to drink this wine on several occasions over the years and the most recent bottle, tasted at our vertical, continued to drink at its apogee and truly transcend the overall quality of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, tertiary and very elegant, offering up a complex combination of black cherries, red plums, chocolate, limestone minerality, gamebird, charred wood, lovely Ausone nuttiness and the first vestiges of autumnal soil elements. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with lovely focus and balance, fine mid-palate depth, melted tannins, good acids and a long, elegant and gently autumnal finish. This is a classic vintage of Ausone that is now at its peak, though of course, still with plenty of life ahead of it. Given the contrasting opinions of Messieurs Parker and Peppercorn about whether the 1975 or 1976 are superior, I am now ready for a bottle of the 1975, which I have never tried! Ausone is a great '76. 2019-2040. **95.**

1970 Château Ausone

The 1970 Ausone is a wine of very indifferent reputation, and while I have had a couple of pretty good, but not great examples of this wine in the past, the most recent couple of bottles were off the charts brilliant and clearly demonstrated that my previous experiences with this wine had not been representative of the true quality of this vintage at Ausone. This is one of the

most exotic vintages of Ausone I have tasted in many years, as the wine soars from the glass in a briskly changing aromatic kaleidoscope of cherries, blood orange, nutskins, coffee, a touch of mocha, a brilliantly complex base of soil tones and exotic herb tones in the upper register. For the first fifteen minutes that this wine is in decanter there is also an utterly beautiful and intense note of butterscotch that eventually subsides, but adds an almost surreal aspect to the wine. In fact, this exotic note of butterscotch is so beautiful that at this 1970 Bordeaux tasting, we opened the backup bottle of this wine an hour further into the tasting just so we could experience this sensory roller coaster once again! On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and utterly exotic, with a great core of red fruit, stunning transparency, tangy acids and absolutely magical complexity on the laser-like, supremely long and meltingly tannic finish. This is a brilliant vintage of Ausone that I woefully underrated back in the report on the vintage in 2006! 2011-2050+. **97.**

1966 Château Ausone

The most recent bottle of 1966 Ausone that I tasted was superb, offering up a deep and utterly classic, old school, exotic Ausone bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, menthol, a touch of nutskin, summer truffles, candle wax, cigar wrapper, mocha a beautifully complex base of chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and brilliantly complex, with a fine core of sweet red fruit, stunning soil signature, and simply superb length and grip on the focused, perfectly balanced and vibrant finish. The '66 Ausone is at the absolute top of its game today, but has decades of life still ahead of it. A superb and totally underrated vintage from this legendary estate. 2014-2040+. **94.**

1964 Château Ausone

The 1964 Ausone is a very good example of the vintage, but unless our bottle was not one hundred percent pristine, I would rank this in the “good, but not great” years for Ausone. Given how superb the 1964 vintage was on the Right Bank, one might have to term this very, very good wine as a mild disappointment in the context of what some of Ausone’s neighbors turned out in this year. The nose is deep, complex and lilting, as it wafts from the glass in an autumnal blend of fallen leaves, cherries, orange zest, woodsmoke, a touch of brown sugar, beautiful soil tones and coffee. On the palate the wine is medium-full, elegant and intensely flavored, with pretty good depth in the mid-palate, little remaining tannin, good acids and very long and focused on the refined finish. This wine built very nicely with extended aeration, putting on weight and really ramping up the grip on the backend. A very good '64, there is a distinct possibility that there are even better bottles of this wine out there than the one bottle I had the good fortune to drink. 2005-2030. **92.**

1961 Château Ausone

I had never previously tasted the 1961 Ausone, and sadly, our bottle at our vertical tasting in February had a mid-shoulder fill and was fairly oxidative in profile. However, despite its struggles against a failing cork, there was still enough here to see that this is a stunning vintage of Ausone, if one has the good fortune to capture a pristine bottle. There is brilliant depth and purity to the wine, with the inherent and supreme elegance of the '61 vintage finding a perfect dance partner with the old style of Ausone. On the palate the wine is very, very long and it is now at the very top of my bucket list to find another bottle in proper shape!

1959 Château Ausone

The 1959 Ausone is a perfect bottle of wine to my palate and I cannot imagine for the life of me why anyone would want to change a style that has produced such legendary wines in the past. The deep, utterly profound and complex nose soars from the glass in a blaze of roasted

plums, sweet nutskins, a touch of blood orange, black cherries, singed tobacco, a bit of candle wax, *sous bois* and coffee tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impressively tangy (particularly for a '59), with a stunning core of fruit, flawless focus and balance, just a touch of remaining tannin and magical length and grip on the seamless and so stunningly complex finish. This is the greatest vintage of Ausone I have ever had the pleasure to taste and clearly one of the most profound bottles of claret I have ever been fortunate enough to drink! 2009-2060. **100.**



1949 Château Ausone

I had never crossed paths with the 1949 vintage of Ausone, so I was absolutely thrilled to see it in the lineup of one of the recent dinners organized by New York's great connoisseur, Omar Khan. What surprised me most about the dinner was that I was the only one at the table who was not surprised by how magical this wine was drinking, as many others commented that the estate was so inconsistent in this era that "great bottles of Ausone were few and far between." As this has emphatically not been my experience, I was quite curious about their experiences. In any case, this bottle of 1949 Ausone was stunning and everything I have come to expect from this great estate. The bouquet soars from the glass in a very refined blend of red and black cherries, nutskin, sealing wax, cigar wrapper and a gloriously complex base of limestone soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and still plush and sweet at the core, with lovely acidity, melted tannins and impeccable focus and balance on the very, very long,

vibrant and complex finish. A beautiful bottle of Ausone at its apogee, but still with decades of life ahead of it. 2018-2050. **95.**

1937 Château Ausone

The 1937 Ausone is a great wine and clearly shows that one needs to wait patiently for this wine to fully reach its apogee in top vintages. The nose at age sixty-five jumps from the glass in a very complex mélange of marinated cherries, sweet nutskin, coffee, forest floor and damp earth. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and magically complex, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very, very complex and pure finish. For a claret of this age, the 1937 Ausone maintains exceptional structural integrity and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. Sadly, I have only tasted this great wine on one occasion- almost a decade ago- and I would love to cross paths with it again. 2002-2030+. **94+.**

1928 Château Ausone

This particular bottle was recorked at the château a few years before we had at it in the summer of 2002. I am not usually a fan of recorked bottles (other than the meticulously maintained old Nicolas bottlings), but this wine showed superbly well. There was no hint of young wine in this superb 1928, which is a magnificent bottle of wine, seemingly timeless in much the same manner as so many of the top 1928s. The bouquet is magnificent, soaring from the glass in a mélange of crystallized red berries, toasted nuts, layers of chalky soil tones, heather, earth and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and fresh, with stellar focus, a sappy core of fruit, and a long, heart-breakingly complex and elegant finish. While there remains a bit of well-covered tannin on the finish, this is one of the most polished 1928s that I have had the good fortune to taste. It will age for decades more on its impeccable balance, but it is a noble drink today. 2002-2045. **97.**

RECENTLY TASTED MÂCONNAIS AND CÔTE CHALONNAISE WINES



The beautiful Roche de Solutré, one of the two peaks that dominate the landscape in the north of Pouilly-Fuissé.

I wish I had the time to do this feature with more regularity, as the wines from these two more southerly districts in Burgundy seem to get better and better with each passing vintage. This is at least the case for the producers listed below, who eschew machine harvesting and seek to craft truly exceptional wines from their vineyard parcels in the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise, and I hope that one day, we can look back and no longer find any of the commercial, machine harvested and industrial quality wines that warped the perception of these two fine regions a generation ago (and are sadly still around, albeit in declining numbers). The one silver lining to my not having time to cover these two regions with the frequency with which they deserve is that I get to cover a couple of vintages at a time, which for this report are the years of 2016 and 2017. Getting to taste both 2017s and 2016s at the same time accentuates the stylistic difference between these two vintages, with the vibrant 2017s offering up plenty of early appeal and the 2016s showing rather atypical depth and structural reticence at this point in their evolutions and really deserving just a bit more bottle age to blossom properly. The two years are both of very high quality, but with the 2016s made from generally very short yields and the wines are more structured and concentrated than is typical of the two regions, while the 2017s offer up lovely bounce and early accessibility. Dominique Lafon, who is certainly one of the most important architects behind the renaissance in the Mâconnais, is very, very happy with the quality of his 2017s from his estate in Milly-Lamartine, as he terms the vintage “just classic for the region, with plenty of early appeal for people to enjoy immediately- the way Mâcon is supposed to be!” As Dominique notes, the 2016s are also very fine, but they need a bit of bottle age and it is pretty rare for a consumer buying Mâconnais wines to be willing to cellar them for any time before starting to drink them, so they are perhaps not quite as well suited to market

realities as the 2017s. I find both vintages more attractive in style than the more buxom 2015s, who offered up lots of easy-drinking appeal in slightly more tropical guise, due to the very warm growing season, but were perhaps just a bit riper than I find ideal for these two regions.

I do not get down to the Mâconnais with much frequency, despite being in Burgundy two or three times a year for the last fifteen years or so, as my schedule is always so densely packed with tastings in the Côte d'Or and Chablis, that I seldom have a chance to visit further afield in the Burgundy region. And despite having first visited Burgundy in 1989 and coming back here very often over the years, I have never had a chance to spend any time whatsoever in the Côte Chalonnaise, which is a shame, as I find myself liking the wines from this region more and more with each passing year. Perhaps, as is the case with villages like Auxey-Duresses in the Côte de Beaune, global warming has played a bit of a positive role in the Côte Chalonnaise in the last decade or so and the wines are a bit riper and more complete than they were when I first began drinking Mercurey and Rully in the decade of the 1980s? Or, is it that I am just paying more attention today? In any case, though I have yet to make time to get down to the Côte Chalonnaise for a proper tour of domaines and vineyards, I did make the effort to extend my search for samples for this article and have included a lot more red wines from the Côte Chalonnaise in the following report than has been the case in the past.

With my extended coverage of wines from the Côte Chalonnaise, I had a chance to reach out to Peter Weygandt, the American importer of one of my favorite estates in the region, Domaine Michel Juillot, and ask about the chance to taste a broader range of wines from the Juillot family. I have long been an admirer of this estate's wines, as their superb example of Corton-Charlemagne is one of my favorite two examples in the appellation (alongside of that from the Coche family, whose vines happen to lie right next door to those of the Domaine Juillot on the hill of Corton), and back in my wine merchant days, I used to offer a handful of the domaine's Mercurey bottlings in each and every vintage. But, with the aforementioned scheduling constraints when I am in Burgundy each year, I have never (yet) had the pleasure to visit Domaine Juillot (though I hope to get down there on this coming trip) and am hence, very happy to be able to present a bit of proper breadth of tasting notes on their current releases in this feature. Many thanks to Peter for his generosity in sending almost the entire range of current releases! I was very excited to find that they are every bit as beautiful as I remember from all those years ago (if not even better with the new generation, Laurent Juillot now in charge) and this domaine's range has to offer some of the finest values to be found in greater Burgundy, with both their red and white wine cuvées always cellar-worthy and ready to repay some patience with impressively complex and classy wines.

Most of my past features on these two regions have focused on the white wines here, but in the Côte Chalonnaise in particular, I have been really impressed with the handful of samples of red wines that I have tasted from the appellations here such as Givry, Mercurey and Rully. My most recent tastings of the fine pinot noirs from these appellations leads me to believe that the Côte Chalonnaise is certainly one of the current winners in this era of global warming, as the pinots here in recent vintages have far more physiological ripeness than *vignerons* here a generation back would have ever dared to dream possible, so that there is now a lovely core of sappy fruit to go along with what have always been lovely mineral undertow. They are beautifully complete, transparent and soil-driven pinots that offer up excellent complexity,

structural integrity and potential for impressive evolution in the cellar, and if one is dismayed by the uptick to nose bleed levels of pricing for favorite estates in Chambolle or Gevrey, then the Côte Chalonnaise is a very good place to look for red Burgundy values to replace those that have become inaccessible for many from the 2005 vintage forwards. And, if it were me, I would start with the brilliant reds being fashioned by Laurent Juillot at Domaine Michel Juillot, as they can put many an over-oaked Vosne-Romanée to shame these days!



The following notes are arranged first by region, and then by vintage, with Mâcon-Villages tasting notes listed to begin. As the trend in recent times has been for more and more bottlings from the Mâcon to specify which village the wines hail from, I have tried to list these wines alphabetically by their proper village, when they are designated as such on the label. The few bottlings of blended Mâcon-Villages that I sampled for this report are listed first for the Mâconnais section, followed by the village specific wines from this appellation. After the Mâcon-Villages level wines, I have broken down the report with sections on Saint-Véran and Pouilly-Fuissé and Pouilly-Vinzelles to close out the Mâconnais notes. Subsequent to these, I have listed the white wines from the Côte Chalonnaise in their own section, again listed alphabetically from Mercurey Blanc to Montagny to Rully Blanc. The final subsection of the report is devoted to some lovely red wines from the Côte Chalonnaise, with the appellations again listed alphabetically. The one deviation I have made in this article from previous iterations is that I have tried to group the 2017s and the 2016s closer together, so that readers

may make a quicker comparison between the two vintages of specific wines where I may have had the opportunity to taste both years. Given the differences in styles between these two high quality vintages, it seemed that it might be useful, as an example, to find the notes on the 2017 and the 2016 Macon- Bussière “la Monsard” from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon right next to each other, rather than segregated in different parts of the article based on vintage. So, each geographical grouping includes both 2017s and 2016s for ease of comparison.

Mâcon-Villages

2017 Mâcon-Villages- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2017 Mâcon-Villages from Maison Joseph Drouhin is a very pretty and quite classic example of its appellation. The bouquet is quite floral, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, fresh almond, a developing note of beeswax, spring flowers, toasty Mâconnais soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and impressively vibrant, with a very good core of fruit, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and lovely backend energy on the long and complex finish. This is a very lovely example of Mâcon-Villages, with impressive backend amplitude. A great value! 2019-2026. **90.**

2017 Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The la Monsard vineyard is located right at the foot of the limestone hill that crowns this part of Bussière and is really a fine *terroir*. The 2017 version from Dominique Lafon is excellent, with a touch of reserve that is most welcome in this very forward-styled vintage. The bouquet offers up a fine mix of apple, pear, orange peel, a complex base of chalky minerality and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively structured for the vintage, with fine mid-palate depth, lovely focus and grip, excellent mineral drive and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is lovely. 2019-2035. **92.**

2016 Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2016 “la Monsard” from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is a beautiful young bottle of Mâcon-Bussière, delivering a pure and very expressive bouquet of apple, a touch of tangerine, fresh almond, spring flowers, a fine base of limestone soil tones and a nice touch of upper register smokiness out of the blocks. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely transparency and impressive cut and grip on the poised and beautifully balanced finish. This is first class juice. 2018-2030. **92.**

2017 Mâcon-Chardonnay “Clos de la Crochette”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2017 Clos de la Crochette is a bit deeper and more serious structurally than the les Maranches. The bouquet offers up a ripe and pure blend of pear, tangerine, a lovely base of soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and classy, with fine mid-palate concentration, bouncy acids and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This is still a wine for drinking right out of the blocks, but there is a bit more structural chassis here. 2018-2030. **91.**

2016 Mâcon-Chardonnay “Clos de la Crochette”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2016 Clos de la Crochette is another very good bottle in the making. The nose is pure and nicely ripe, offering up a mix of peach, apple, lovely soil tones, a touch of citrus zest and a potpourri of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, good soil elements and a long, vibrant and zesty finish. Fine juice. 2018-2028. **91+.**

2017 Mâcon-Lugny “les Crays”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The Mâcon-Lugny “les Crays” is a new bottling from Maison Joseph Drouhin, though the family has produced wines from this *climat* for many years, in the past they had always blended it into their Mâcon-Villages cuvée. The 2017 les Crays is a very pretty and vibrant wine, offering up a fine nose of peach, apple, lemon zest, Mâconnais soil tones and white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, wide open and juicy at the core, with sound framing acids and a long, bouncy finish. This will be best drunk in its youth, but it has plenty of charm. 2018-2025. **90.**

2016 Mâcon-Lugny- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The Drouhin family’s 2016 Mâcon-Lugny is an excellent young wine, with the extra depth provided by the short yields of the vintage quite evident on both the nose and palate. The fine bouquet delivers scents of peach, apple, white lilies, chalky soil tones, a hint of almond paste and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and zesty, with quite a solid core for Mâcon, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This could do with a bit of time in the cellar to really start hitting on all cylinders. 2021-2030+. **90+.**

2017 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2017 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine from Dominique Lafon is quite lovely, with the good chalky soil tones here giving the wine a bit of cut and mineral drive on the palate. The bouquet is all charm, as it delivers scents of peach, apple, dried flowers, a touch of orange peel and a fine base of chalky undertow. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and a bit more complex than the Mâcon-Prissé, given its good minerality, with a fine core and lovely length and grip on the vibrant and zesty finish. Good juice. 2018-2030. **90+.**

2016 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2016 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine is one of the most refined wines in the Lafon Mâconnais lineup in this vintage, as it offers up a very elegant nose of apple, pear, a touch of Mâcon toastiness, spring flowers and a fine dollop of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and zesty, with lovely intensity of flavor, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. I really like the backend energy this wine is showing in 2016. 2018-2030. **91+.**

2017 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The Clos du Four is a warmer site than la Monsard and this shows in 2017 in a slightly more exotic nose and flavor profile. The deep and nicely musky bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, tangerine, acacia blossoms, complex soil tones and a bit of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite exuberant on the attack, with a plush core, fine focus and grip and very good backend tension on the long and classy finish. This is very good as well. 2019-2030+. **92.**

2016 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2016 Clos du Four from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is a lovely wine, with plenty of ripeness to its fruit component nicely coupled to a fine chassis with cut and structural tension. The bouquet delivers a fine mix of apple, peach, Mâconnais toastiness, orange blossoms, good soil signature and a nice bit of upper register nuttiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip and a long, snappy and nicely broad-shouldered finish. This is excellent this year. 2018-2030. **92+.**

2017 Mâcon-Péronne “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Tour Penet

The 2017 Mâcon-Péronne “Vieilles Vignes” from Anne Ramonet’s Domaine de la Tour Penet (yes, that Ramonet family, as Anne is Jean-Claude’s ex-wife) is produced from fifty year-old vines and is outstanding in this vintage. The wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation of apple, white peach, almond, chalky soil tones, fruit blossoms and a touch of upper register Mâconnais toastiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegantly structured, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely soil signature, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and classy finish. Mâcon does not get better than this wine! 2019-2030. **92.**

2017 Mâcon-Prissé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2017 Domaine Lafon Mâcon-Villages cuvées were all bottled in mid-August of 2018 and were showing nicely when I tried them in Meursault in November. The 2017 Mâcon-Prissé is very pretty and open-nit, offering up a bright bouquet of peach, apple, toasty soil tones and a lovely floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and juicy, with a nice core, sound framing acids and good length and bounce on the finish. Quite tasty. 2018-2030. **89.**

2016 Mâcon-Prissé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2016 Héritiers du Lafon Mâcon-Prissé is a lovely wine, with a bit more mid-palate stuffing than the 2017 version. The wine offers up a ripe and gently musky bouquet of apple, a touch of pineapple, lovely soil tones, almond and plenty of pungent floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, zesty acids and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2018-2025. **90.**

2017 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse- Château de la Greffière

When I think back and realize that the first vintage from Château de la Greffière that I tasted and sold was the 1988, I realize that this is my thirtieth vintage with this fine Mâconnais estate. Their 2017 La Roche Vineuse is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a bright and soil-driven bouquet of apple, peach, Mâconnais toastiness, spring flowers and a touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature and a long, zesty and very tasty finish. This is classic, honest and over-achieving Mâcon-Villages that offers excellent value- as was absolutely the same case back with the 1988 vintage! 2019-2025+. **90.**

2016 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse- Domaine Sylvaine et Alain Normand

The 2016 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse from Alain Normand is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, lemon blossoms, a touch of fresh pineapple, lovely soil tones and a nice touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full and rock solid at the core, with excellent soil signature, zesty acids and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is pure, unadorned and totally honest Mâcon of the highest order. 2019-2027. **91.**

2016 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Sylvaine et Alain Normand

The old vine version of Alain Normand’s Mâcon La Roche Vineuse hails from vines planted right after the Second World War. He raises this wine in a combination of older casks and some new oak and Monsieur Normand will often allow this an extended *elevage* if the wine asks for it. The 2016 Vieilles Vignes is a stunning bottle of Mâcon, wafting from the glass in a complex and very pure combination of pear, apple, acacia blossoms, chalky soil tones and just a

touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a superb girdle of acidity, a rock solid core, lovely backend mineral drive and a long, poised and complex finish. Great juice. 2019-2030+. **93**.



2017 Mâcon-Solutré- Domaine du Chalet Pouilly

The 2017 Mâcon-Solutré from the Léger family's Domaine du Chalet Pouilly is raised entirely in stainless steel and does not see any oak during its *elevage*. The wine offers up a bright and bouncy nose of apple, white peach, toasty soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids and good length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is classic Mâcon-Villages, with plenty of personality for drinking over the next few years. 2019-2022. **88**.

2017 Mâcon-Uchizy "les Maranches"- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2017 Mâcon-Uchizy "les Maranches" from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is another quite open and accessible example of the vintage, with plenty of charming fruit on display, but a pretty laid back structural chassis that suggests it will be at its best early on in its evolution. The stylish nose offers up scents of tangerine, apple, toasty soil tones, dried flowers and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, succulent and pleasingly plump at the core, with sound framing acids and a long, moderately complex and wide open finish. 2018-2028. **89+**.

2016 Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

Dominique Lafon’s 2016 Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches” is one of the riper wines in his lineup from this vintage, but that is typical of this *terroir*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a generous mix of peach, pear, nutskin, a good dollop of soil elements and a bit of upper register toastiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and generous on the attack, with a plump core, sound soil signature and a long, open and bouncy finish. As this is one of the warmer *climats* that Dominique works with in the Mâconnais, the wine never has quite the same palate tension as the Milly-Lamartine bottlings, for instance. But, this is still complete and quite tasty. 2018-2025. **90.**

2017 Mâcon-Vergisson- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

Vergisson is my favorite Pouilly-Fuissé village, and this lovely Mâcon bottling from the Guerrin family hails from two small parcels just outside of the Pouilly-Fuissé appellation limits. One of these two is a heavily limestone-based soil to provide mineral drive and lift in the wine, with the other a more clay-based parcel that adds some mid-palate fruit amplitude to the blend. The 2017 version is excellent, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of pear, golden delicious apple, almond, chalky soil tones, orange blossoms and a whisper of vanilla bean (which is not derived from oak, as this wine sees none during its *elevage*.) On the palate the wine is elegant, refined and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright, seamless acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. This is extremely classy Mâcon! 2019-2030. **92.**

2017 Mâcon-Verzé- Domaine Leflaive

The 2017 Mâcon-Verzé from Domaine Leflaive is an absolutely superb example of the vintage, with more cut and lift than the vast majority of Mâconnais wines from this year. The bouquet is pure and nicely mineral, offering up scents of apple, lemon, white peach, chalky minerality and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and mineral-driven, with excellent focus and grip and impressive acidity giving the wine fine backend vibrancy and precision. Impressive juice. 2018-2030. **92.**

2017 Viré-Clessé- Domaine Pascal Bonhomme

The regular bottling of Viré-Clessé from Pascal Bonhomme (he also produces a Vieilles Vignes cuvée) is made from vines that average thirty-five years of age. The wine is lovely in 2017, offering up a bright and classy bouquet of apple, a touch of pineapple, chalky soil tones, orange blossoms and a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and wide open finish. This is drinking with generosity right out of the blocks. 2019-2025. **90.**

2017 Viré-Clessé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2017 Mâcon Viré-Clessé from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is excellent and very refined in personality this year. The bouquet offers up a fine constellation of apple, pear, complex, chalky soil tones, orange zest and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and quite racy in personality (particularly for the 2017 vintage), with a fine core of fruit, excellent cut and grip, very good nascent complexity and a long, classy and nicely youthful finish. This will be approachable from the start, but really will deserve at least a year or two in the cellar to more fully blossom. 2020-2035+. **92+.**

2016 Viré-Clessé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2016 Mâcon Viré-Clessé from Dominique Lafon is my favorite of his 2016 range from the Mâconnais region, but this is often the case, as I am always attracted to this wine's very refined and transparent profile. The wine delivers lovely aromatic harmony in its mix of pear, apple, orange zest, acacia blossoms, a fine base of chalky minerality and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit out of the blocks, with fine intensity of flavor, lovely complexity and focus and a long, vibrant and still quite youthful finish. This is never the biggest wine in the Lafon Mâconnais lineup, but it is often the most complete and elegant and this is the case in the 2016 vintage. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2030+. **93.**

2016 Viré-Clessé “les Vercherres” Vieilles Vignes- Jean Rijckaert

The 2016 old vine bottling of Viré-Clessé “les Vercherres” from Jean Rijckaert is a fairly new oak version of this appellation, but also deep, complex and refined at the same time. The bouquet offers up scents of pear, apple, almond, chalky soil tones, a bit of white flowers and a generous serving of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, bright acids and good length and grip on the focused finish. This is a very well-made wine, but I might question the amount of new oak it carries (albeit, quite effortlessly), given the style of the *terroir* of Viré-Clessé, as this is the most elegant of all the Mâcon-Villages level communes. But, it is very well done in its style. 2019-2027. **91.**

Saint-Véran

2017 Saint-Véran- Domaine du Chalet Pouilly

The 2017 Saint-Véran from Domaine du Chalet Pouilly is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a bright and floral nose of apple, white peach, toasty soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and wide open in personality, with good framing acids, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant finish. This is not overly ambitious on either the nose or palate, but it hits all the right notes in its more limited range. 2019-2025. **88.**

2017 Saint-Véran- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The Drouhin family's 2017 Saint-Véran is one of the best recent vintages of this wine that I can recall, so I hope it shows up in the US this time sealed under cork, rather than screwcap. The bouquet is precise, complex and vibrant, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of apple, white peach, a touch of tangerine, chalky soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite classy in profile, with a good core, zesty acids and lovely balance and grip on the surprisingly complex finish. Lovely juice. 2018-2025+. **90.**

2017 Saint-Véran “Le Clos Vessats”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The 2017 Saint-Véran “Le Clos Vessats” from Domaine Guerrin et Fils in Vergisson is their younger vine bottling from this appellation, as this two hectare Clos is planted with fifteen year-old vines. However, the vineyard is steep and faces southwest in exposition, giving good mid-palate stuffing from these younger vines. The 2017 version is very pretty and quite classic in profile, offering up scents of apple, toasty soil elements, a touch of hazelnut, white flowers and a hint of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, focused and full-bodied, with a good core, zesty acids and very good grip and soil signature on the long finish. This is ready to drink right out of the blocks, but clearly has the balance to also age quite nicely. 2019-2025+. **89+.**

2017 Saint-Véran- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The relatively new Saint-Véran from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is a lovely and nicely structured wine in 2017. The bouquet is very elegant, delivering a blend of peach, apple, chalky minerality, dried flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely reserved in profile, with a lovely core of pure fruit, good soil signature, bright acids and a long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. Like the Viré-Clessé this year, this wine will be quite drinkable on release, but will be better with just a bit of bottle age. 2020-2035+. **92.**

2016 Saint-Véran- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2016 Saint-Véran from Dominique Lafon and his talented winemaker, Caroline Gon, has turned out beautifully. The wine is very pretty and very floral on the nose, offering up a lovely combination of peach, pear, chalky soil tones, a nice framing of vanillin oak and a gardenful of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely succulent on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and a long, vibrant and wide open finish. This is ready to go right out of the blocks and is a fine example. 2018-2025+. **91.**

2016 Saint-Véran “en Crêches” Vieilles Vignes- Jean Rijckaert

The 2016 Saint-Véran “en Crêches” Vieilles Vignes bottling from Jean Rijckaert and his talented young winemaker, Florent Rouve, is an excellent bottle of this fine appellation, done in the more new oaky, but very well-balanced style of Messieurs Rijckaert and Rouve’s wines. The bouquet is pure and classy, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, golden delicious apples, almond, white lilies, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit and soil signature, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the zesty finish. I like the wood treatment here better than in the domaine’s 2016 Viré-Clessé bottling, as Saint-Véran is not quite as delicate a *terroir* and the oak dovetails with the style of the wine better to my palate. Damn good Saint-Véran! 2019-2030. **93.**

Pouilly-Fuissé and Pouilly-Vinzelles

2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “Clos de la Chapelle”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

Domaine Clos de la Chapelle in Solutré is one of my absolute favorite producers of Pouilly-Fuissé these days and their 2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “Clos de la Chapelle” bottling, made from a vineyard planted in 1922, is a flat out stunning young wine. The wine is barrel-fermented (with one-quarter of the casks new and the others two years of age) and offers up about as sophisticated an expression of Pouilly-Fuissé as one can find in the appellation, since the grand old master, André Forest retired, all those years ago. The 2017 Clos de la Chapelle offers up a deep, precise and beautifully complex bouquet of pear, golden delicious apples, a touch of buttered almonds, beautifully refined, chalky soil tones, white lilies, a touch of candied citrus peel and a lovely base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, laser-like focus, bright acids, impeccable balance and a very, very long, vibrant and effortless finish. This reminds me very strongly of the last vintages of Monsieur Forest’s Vieilles Vignes bottling. 2019-2040+. **94+.**

2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “en Chatenay”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

This was my first look at the new Pouilly-Fuissé bottling from Dominique Lafon, which was first produced in the 2016 vintage. However, the wine was not yet bottled when I was visiting the domaine in Meursault last November, so I did not have a chance to taste the 2016. The 2017 version is lovely and had been bottled in mid-October of 2018, so was available for

tasting this year in Meursault. The bouquet is pure, refined and quite lovely, delivering scents of apple, pear, spring flowers, a lovely base of limestone soil elements and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and balance, lovely, zesty acids and a long, classy and quite vibrant finish. This is very, very good Pouilly-Fuissé! 2018-2035. **93.**

2017 Pouilly-Fuissé- Domaine Leflaive

Domaine Leflaive purchased their 2.7 hectares of vines in this appellation in the village of Solutré in 2012 and the 2013 vintage was the first commercialized. The vines range from twenty to fifty years of age and the 2017 version was raised in fifteen percent new oak. The wine is lovely, offering up impressive mid-palate depth and a fine girdle of acidity. The bouquet delivers a mix of apple, peach, chalky soil tones, a touch of nutskin, discreet vanillin oak and a lovely floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and beautifully structured, with a fine core, bright, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This will deserve a few years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge and is a first class effort. 2021-2040+. **93.**

2016 Pouilly-Fuissé- Domaine du Chalet Pouilly

The 2016 Pouilly-Fuissé from the Léger family's Domaine du Chalet Pouilly is excellent. Marie-Eve Léger and her father, Bernard co-direct the estate, with daughter Marie-Eve handling most of the winemaking responsibilities today. The family has five *hectares* in the appellation, located around the town of Pouilly. The Légers' 2016 Pouilly-Fuissé is a fine bottle, offering up a bouquet of apple, peach, a touch of hazelnut, chalky soil tones, a deft base of buttery oak and just a hint of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely concentrated at the core, with good framing acids (this does hail from the warmer, southern half of the appellation), lovely focus and balance and a long, complex finish. The shorter crop and greater concentration of the 2016 vintage are in evidence here, but in a very attractive manner. 2019-2025+. **90.**

2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Chapelle

I love the wines from Domaine de la Chapelle and their 2016 Vieilles Vignes version of Pouilly-Fuissé is drinking beautifully. The bouquet is deep and pure, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of apple, peach, Mâconnais toastiness, spring flowers, orange zest and a bit of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is going to age quite nicely and will continue to blossom for many years to come. 2018-2030. **92.**

2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “Clos des Prouges” Tête de Cru- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2016 Clos des Prouges Tête de Cru from Domaine Ferret is less ripe than the atypical 2015 version, as this wine comes in at a ripe, but classical 13.5 percent octane. As is customary for this single vineyard wine, it was raised in one-third new oak in 2016 and offers up a fine, youthful nose of pear, apple, a fine base of soil, a nice touch of almond, citrus blossoms and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a good core of ripe fruit, bright acids and impressive focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is tasty today, but will be even better with a few more years in the bottle. 2020-2030. **92.**



2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Crays”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The 2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Crays” from the Guerrin family is outstanding on both the nose and palate. These are the youngest vines of their three single *climat* bottlings, as they are just under fifty years of age, with the wine barrel-fermented in a combination of 228 and 400 liter casks. The wine sees twenty percent new oak each year and the 2016 version offers up a superb bouquet of apple, pear, almond, gorgeous, chalky soil tones, white flowers and a discreet framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great soil signature, bright acids and great focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is concentrated from the vintage characteristics, but also nicely light on its feet and vivacious. Dynamite Pouilly-Fuissé! 2019-2035. **93.**

2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “la Maréchaude”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The la Maréchaude bottling from Domaine Guerrin is produced from older vines than the les Crays, as these vines are more than sixty years of age now, but the soils here are deeper and have more clay, so the wine tends to be a touch more fruit-driven in style. The 2016 la Maréchaude is excellent, offering up a pure and classy nose of pear, peach, a hint of passion fruit, hazelnut, at bit of Mâconnais toastiness, fruit blossoms and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full and fairly powerful in profile (again, due to 2016s very short yields), with bottomless depth at the core, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. Stylistically, I have a slight preference for the more soil-defined les Crays bottling, but I can easily imagine that there are plenty of others that would prefer the la Maréchaude for its greater amplitude of pure fruit. Qualitatively, they are certainly equals. 2019-2030. **92+.**

2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “Sur la Roche”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

Like the les Crays vineyard, Sur la Roche sits high up in elevation at the foot of the *Roche de Vergisson* and is a very chalky, stony *terroir*. The Guerrin family has vines approaching sixty years of age in this parcel, which they barrel-ferment and raise in twenty percent new oak. The 2016 Sur la Roche is a beautiful young bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé, offering up a refined bouquet of apple, pear, almond, chalky soil tones, a dollop of gently musky flowers and a deft touch of buttery new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, vibrant and full-bodied, with great mineral drive, snappy acids and superb focus and grip on the long, complex and energetic finish. Brilliant juice. 2019-2035. **94.**

2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The 2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes” from Maurice Guerrin hails from a handful of parcels, all in Vergisson at higher altitudes and at least forty years of age. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised in fifteen percent new wood. The 2016 Vieilles Vignes is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a blaze of pear, white peach, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, apple blossoms and a discreet framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, impressive soil signature, bright acids and a long, pure and still fairly youthful finish. This is certainly approachable today, but will be even better if tucked away in the cellar for a bit of time, as the more structured aspect of the 2016 vintage should be taken advantage of to allow top wines such as this to fully blossom! 2021-2040. **93.**

2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “Maison du Villard”- Château de Lavernette

The Pouilly-Fuissé “Maison du Villard” is one of three different bottlings from this appellation produced by Xavier and Kerrie de Boissieu’s Château de Lavernette. These are old vine parcels near the village of Chaintré and were planted between 1959 and 1971. The 2016 Maison du Villard bottling offers up a nicely ripe and concentrated nose of apple, peach, toasty soil tones, a touch of hazelnut and just a hint of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2019-2027. **90.**

2016 Pouilly-Fuissé- Domaine Sylvaine et Alain Normand

The 2016 Pouilly-Fuissé from Sylvaine and Alain Normand is a lovely example of its appellation, offering up a bright and classy nose of pear, apple, toasty soil tones, spring flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with zesty acids, a fine core and impressive length and grip on the poised and very well-balanced finish. This is excellent, unadulterated, old school Pouilly-Fuissé! 2019-2025+. **90+.**

1997 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Vieux Murs” Vieilles Vignes- Reserve Caveau (Loron Père et Fils)

This is the Pouilly-Fuissé bottling from the Loron family, who owns Domaine des Billards, amongst other top Beaujolais estates. The wine is completely barrel-fermented and was raised in casks that were one to four years old at the time. The wine is drinking beautifully at age twenty, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of fresh apricot, pear, a touch of hazelnut, beautiful soil tones, just a whisper of honey and a gently exotic topnote of mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite zesty, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature and a very long, complex and fresh as a daisy finish. This is in its apogee, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. A superb example of mature Pouilly-Fuissé. 2017-2027. **92.**



2017 Pouilly-Vinzelles- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2017 Pouilly-Vinzelles from Joseph Drouhin is another very strong example of this forward and succulent vintage in the Mâconnais. The bouquet delivers a lovely blend of apple, tangerine, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite long, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature, fairly crisp acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and still quite primary finish. Good juice. 2018-2030. **90+**.

2016 Pouilly-Vinzelles- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Maison Drouhin's 2016 Pouilly-Vinzelles is deeper and more structured than the pretty 2017 version, and this wine could do with a bit of time in the cellar to blossom. The nose offers up a youthful blend of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, a touch of almond paste, gently musky floral tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep at the core and quite structured, with bright acids, excellent focus and grip and fine lift on the long, nascently complex finish. This is certainly drinkable today, but it is still a tad bound up in its structure and deserves a year or two to fully blossom. Good juice. 2020-2035. **90+**.

2015 Pouilly-Vinzelles- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2015 Pouilly-Vinzelles from Maison Drouhin is a lovely example of the vintage, synthesizing the ripe fruit of '15 with fine mineral drive and impressive lightness of step on the palate. The bouquet is deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of ripe peach, pineapple, orange peel, chalky soil tones, a touch of vanillin oak and a musky floral topnote. On

the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with impressive precision and cut, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a pretty big wine by the standards of the region, but with impressive detail and raciness. Fine juice. 2018-2025+. **91.**

Côte Chalonnaise Blanc

2016 Bourgogne Chardonnay- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Bourgogne Chardonnay bottling from Domaine Michel Juillot is fermented in a fifty-fifty blend of small barrels and large *foudres*. The 2016 version is a beautiful wine, offering up an expressive and precise bouquet of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, spring flowers, vanillin oak and a touch of almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature and a long, zesty and still quite primary finish. The short yields of 2016 are quite evident in the mid-palate density of this wine and I would opt for tucking it away in the cellar for a year or two and let it come out from behind its excellent structure. 2021-2040. **90.**

2016 Bouzeron Blanc- Domaine des Moirots (Christophe Denizot)

The Bouzeron Blanc from Christophe Denizot is a lovely bottle of Aligoté which he produces from thirty-five year-old vines and raised in cement eggs. The 2016 version offers up a complex nose of green apple, lime peel, a fine base of wet stone soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of dustiness in the upper register from the cement. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and transparent, with a good core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. A good example. 2019-2025. **88.**

2016 Givry Blanc- Domaine des Moirots (Christophe Denizot)

Monsieur Denizot's Givry Blanc is produced from seventy year-old vines, which he barrel ferments and raises in twenty-five percent new oak. The domaine's 2016 Givry Blanc is rather deep-pitched aromatically (if my bottle is representative), offering up scents of peach, apple, almond, a good base of soil, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and fairly complex, with a good core, good balance and a long, slightly chunky finish. The soils in this vineyard are clay and silt and the resulting wine does not have the lift of wines hailing from more limestone soils, but it does have fine depth and length. 2019-2023. **89.**

2016 Mercurey Blanc "les Champs Martins" 1er Cru- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Mercurey Blanc "les Champs Martins" bottling from Laurent Juillot is barrel-fermented and raised in twenty percent new oak. These are not particularly old vines by the domaine's standards, as they were planted in two *tranches* in 1973 and 1995, but the wine is beautifully expressive of its underlying *terroir* of limestone, clay and gravel. The 2016 bottling is superb, soaring from the glass in a very expressive bouquet of pear, apple, raw almond, chalky minerality, a touch of beeswax, white flowers and a judicious base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, bright, zesty acids and excellent balance and grip on the long and complex finish. I have never had an example of Mercurey blanc this serious and clearly, I have not been paying enough attention! 2019-2030+. **92.**

2016 Mercurey Blanc “Clos des Barraults” 1er Cru- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Clos des Barraults Blanc from Domaine Juillot is made from relatively younger vines, though they have all reached more than twenty-five years of age and are now what the Burgundians would term a *bonne age*. The 2016 Clos des Barraults offers up the sophisticated aromatic constellation that is the calling card of Laurent Juillot’s wines, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of green apple, lemon, chalky soil tones, spring flowers, a touch of fresh almond and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, a fine girdle of acidity and impressive focus and grip on the young and promising finish. This is not quite as open on the palate as the Champs Martins, and I would opt to give this bottling a year or two in the cellar and let it blossom properly (while, of course, drinking the Champs Martins Blanc). Serious juice. 2021-2035+. **92**.



2017 Montagny- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Maison Drouhin is really making beautiful wines in the last several years in Montagny and the 2017 is no exception. Fifteen percent of the cuvée was barrel-fermented in 500 liter casks in this vintage, with the rest raised in stainless steel, so there is just a touch of vanillin oak in the personality of the wine. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, vanillin oak and a lovely floral topnote redolent of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and classy, with a good core, fine soil signature and fine shape and grip on the long and vibrant finish. This is really a fine value! 2018-2033. **90**.

2016 Montagny “le Vieux Château” 1er Cru- Domaine des Moirots (Christophe Denizot)

The 2016 Montagny “le Vieux Château” premier cru from Domaine des Moirots is seventy percent barrel-fermented, with the balance of the cuvée raised in cement tanks. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of pear, apple, chalky soil tones, a touch of fresh almond, citrus blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a marvelous girdle of acidity, excellent balance and a long, vibrant and refined finish. I love the combination of good fruit concentration from the vintage and impressive backend mineral drive in this wine. First class Montagny! 2019-2030+. **91.**

2017 Rully Blanc- Domaine Jean Chartron

Jean-Michel Chartron’s 2017 Rully was raised in a combination of 228 and 500 liter barrels in this vintage, with just a touch of new oak added to the mix of primarily older vessels. The wine offers up lovely purity on the nose, delivering scents of pear, apple, chalky minerality, spring flowers and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full, complex and shows off a nice core, with bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and vibrant finish. Really quite a lovely example of Rully. 2018-2030+. **90.**

2017 Rully Blanc- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2017 Rully Blanc from Maison Drouhin is really an exceptional example of its appellation, offering up a pure and very refined bouquet of apple, pear, chalky minerality, spring flowers, a touch of lemon peel and a lovely, discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and focused, with an excellent core of fruit, stellar mineral drive, snappy acids and great focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is the best vintage of Rully Blanc I have ever tasted from Maison Drouhin! 2019-2030+. **92.**

2016 Rully Blanc “les Thivaux”- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Rully Blanc “les Thivaux” bottling from Laurent Juillot is raised in a fifty-fifty combination of smaller barrels (classic *barriques* and *demi-muids*) and three thousand liter *foudres*. The wine sees ten percent new oak each year (presumably part of the first half of the equation and is bottled after an *elevage* of one year. The 2016 les Thivaux is a beautiful wine, wafting from the glass in a complex nose of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, a touch of wet stones, fruit blossoms and a discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent transparency, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This is first class Rully! 2019-2030+. **92.**

2015 Rully Blanc- Maison Jaffelin

The 2015 Rully from Maison Jaffelin shows the riper side of this vintage, offering up a slightly tropical nose of pineapple, tangerine, stony minerality, dried flowers and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and succulent on the attack, with plenty of ripe fruit nicely buffered with a spine of Rully stoniness. The finish is long, wide open and tasty, with sound framing acids and a very easy-drinking structural profile. This will not make old bones, but is a very tasty wine for the near-term. 2018-2021. **88.**

Côte Chalonnaise Rouge

2016 Bourgogne Rouge- Domaine des Moirots (Christophe Denizot)

The Bourgogne Rouge bottling from Domaine des Moirots is produced from a variety of different parcels in the area, with the average age of vines thirty-five years of age. The 2016

version is very pretty, wafting from the glass in a vibrant mix of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of mustard seed, good soil tones and a bit of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, fine transparency and just a bit of backend tannin on the long and focused finish. This is a very tasty example that is drinking well out of the blocks, but will have no trouble keeping a decade in the cellar. 2019-2030. **88.**

2016 Givry- Domaine des Moirots (Christophe Denizot)

The 2016 Givry from Christophe Denizot is produced from thirty year-old vines and is raised in one-third new oak. The 2016 version is impressively pure and transparent in personality, offering up a bright bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, lovely soil tones, a bit of fresh thyme, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex and youthful finish. This needs a couple of years to blossom properly. 2023-2050. **88.**

2016 Givry “A Vigne Rouge” 1er Cru- Domaine des Moirots (Christophe Denizot)

The Givry “A Vigne Rouge” 1er Cru from Domaine des Moirots is a new parcel for the Denizot family, as they only purchased and planted this parcel eight years ago and this is currently the youngest vine cuvée that they produce. However, the 2016 has a lovely color from a short pre-fermentation “cold soak” and the wine offers up a very stylish nose of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, fresh nutmeg, gamebird, a good base of soil and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with a black fruity personality, suave tannins and a long, well-balanced and tangy finish of noteworthy complexity. This is a really good bottle of Givry that is quite tasty already, but will be even better with two or three years’ worth of bottle age. Fine juice. 2019-2035. **90+.**

2016 Mercurey “le Meix Juillot”- Domaine Michel Juillot

The 2016 Mercurey “le Meix Juillot” from Domaine Michel Juillot is an excellent wine in the making. It is a touch more black fruity in aromatic personality than these other Mercurey rouge bottling, offering up a complex bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, raw cocoa, lovely soil tones, fresh nutmeg, woodsmoke, a whisper of spicy oak and a hint of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. Fine juice in the making. 2023-2045. **90.**

2016 Mercurey “les Champs Martins” 1er Cru- Domaine Michel Juillot

The 2016 Mercurey “les Champs Martins” Rouge from Domaine Juillot hails from vines planted in 1974. The wine is raised in thirty-five percent new oak for eighteen months prior to bottling and the 2016 version offers up a beautifully refined and complex nose of red and black cherries, a touch of red currant, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones, gamebird, a discreet base of new wood and a lovely potpourri of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with an excellent core of fruit, superb backend mineral drive, impeccable focus and balance, bright acids and a long, complex and moderately tannic finish. This is very sophisticated Mercurey that is built for the long haul and will reward cellaring with a great bottle! 2024-2055+. **92+.**

2016 Mercurey “Clos des Barraults” 1er Cru- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Clos des Barraults rouge from Domaine Juillot is aged in thirty percent new oak for eighteen months prior to bottling. Like all of the Juillot reds, the grapes are completely destemmed prior to pressing and the pinot vines in this vineyard were planted in three waves, in

1972, 1980 and 1995, so they are a nice range now. The 2016 version is a beautiful wine in the making, offering up an elegant aromatic constellation of red berries, cherries, beautiful spice tones (mostly nutmeg and clove), a touch of meatiness, cocoa powder, complex soil tones and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent, with an excellent core, impeccable focus and balance, bright acids, fine-grained tannins and a very long, complex and utterly refined finish. This is one of the finest young bottles of Mercurey rouge I have ever tasted. It will be stunning, but give it time in the cellar to properly emerge. 2024-2055+. **93+**.

2016 Mercurey “Clos Tonnerre” 1er Cru- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Clos Tonnerre bottling of Mercurey Premier Cru from Michel and Laurent Juillot is one of their older vine cuvées, as these vines are closing in on sixty years of age. The *terroir* here is hard limestone and the 2016 Clos Tonnerre shows lovely structural sophistication to go along with its fine bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, vinesmoke, gamebird, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, a touch of raw cocoa and a discreet foundation of new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite refined in profile, with a superb core of fruit, excellent transparency and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. This needs some time in the cellar to properly blossom, but it will be excellent in due course. 2023-2055. **91+**.



2016 Mercurey- Domaine Gaëlle et Jérôme Meunier

The 2016 Mercurey AC from Gaëlle and Jérôme Meunier is a pretty and already quite expressive example of the vintage on the nose, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, fresh thyme, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee bean and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and nicely soil-driven, with a solid core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and youthful finish. Though the bouquet suggests this is accessible, the palate asks for a couple years' worth of patience. This is a good, solid example of Mercurey. 2022-2045. **88.**

2016 Mercurey “Premier Cru”- Domaine Gaëlle et Jérôme Meunier

Gaëlle and Jérôme Meunier's 2016 Premier Cru bottling of Mercurey is a bit deeper and quite a bit more complex out of the blocks than the very good AC version. The nose wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of cassis, black cherries, chalky soil tones, a bit gamebird, bonfire, fresh thyme and a judicious framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and impressively soil-driven, with an excellent core of fruit, ripe tannins, bouncy acids and a long, complex and quite serious finish. This is a notable step up in complexity and breed from the *villages*. 2024-2055. **90+**.

2017 Rully Rouge- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The Rully *rouge* bottling from Maison Drouhin is produced primarily from the domaine's own vineyards, augmented by a bit of purchased fruit. This is a cuvée that has notably jumped in quality in the last half dozen vintages and the 2017 is really a good bottle and a great bargain. The red fruity nose wafts from the glass in a fine mix of cherries, a touch of blood orange, bonfire, iron-infused soil tones and a nice touch of stem spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nicely mineral in personality, with a good dollop of sappiness at the core, quite modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the well balanced finish. This is still in cask. Good juice. 2018-2035+. **89.**

**WEINGUT KELLER'S BEAUTIFUL AND UNDERRATED
HUBACKER GROSSES GEWÄCHS**



On the last day of May of 2018, I was fortunate enough to be seated around a table on the terrace of a beautiful restaurant in Osthofen, Germany, getting ready to settle into a deep vertical of Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller's marvelous Grosses Gewächs bottling from the Hubacker vineyard in Dalsheim. It was quite a warm afternoon, but the wines were nicely chilled and we were more than comfortable as the food started to arrive to accompany the first full vertical of Hubacker that Klaus-Peter and Julia had ever attended. Hubacker is a bit the "forgotten man" in the star-studded lineup of Grosses Gewächs these days at Weingut Keller, but this is a great, grand cru *terroir* and it was nice to lean back in the chair and let the Hubacker take center stage for the next four hours or so, without the wine having to vie for attention with Morstein, Abtserde and all the other superb grand crus in the Keller portfolio at the present time. However, the Hubacker in the village of Dalsheim is a very important vineyard for the Keller family, as this was the first parcel of vines that they ever owned and its purchase predated that of their first parcels in the two Westhofen vineyards (Kirchspiel in 1999 and Morstein in 2001) by more than two hundred years! The Keller family has owned vines in the Hubacker since they first formed their family estate all the way back in 1789! The Hubacker vineyard is a slightly cooler microclimate than the three grand crus that Klaus-Peter now farms in nearby Westhofen (the Abtserde was also added to the family's lineup of Westhofen GGs in the 2006 vintage), so that it

is not atypical for the Kellers to pick the grapes here a couple of weeks later than those in their Westhofen grand crus or in their parcels in Nierstein.

Like the three grand crus in the village of Westhofen, the Hubacker is also a limestone-based *terroir*, but in this case it is a yellow-veined limestone that is quite unique in the Hügelland and produces wines of quite different character than those from the Abtserde, Morstein and Kirchspiel. The only other vineyard with which I am familiar where this yellow limestone also plays a prominent role is in the fine premier cru Burgundy vineyard of Beaune “Sur le Grèves”, which is located right up at the summit of the slope of the Grèves vineyard and which in recent times has become quite famous for its affinity to the chardonnay grape and considered, after the Clos des Mouches, the finest *climat* for producing white wines in Beaune. The Hubacker has this same type of yellow limestone and it too is a glorious place to grow white grapes, but here Riesling takes center stage and it produces one of the finest and most structured wines in the Keller all-star lineup of Grosses Gewächs. The vineyard has a south-easterly exposition which allows for perfect, patient ripening and plenty of morning sun, giving the wine often a nicely muscular structural chassis for long-term cellaring. The Kellers’ parcel in Hubacker was mostly re-planted in 1974, so these vines are now at a very good age, but one can imagine that as the vines age, the wine may get even better still! With the predominance of morning sun here, one might expect this to be one of the more delicately styled Grosses Gewächs bottlings from the Keller family, but this is not the case, and along with the Morstein, the Hubacker probably has the broadest shoulders of any of the GGs produced at Weingut Keller.

As I mentioned above, the Keller family’s ownership of vines in the Hubacker vineyard date back to the original formation of the estate in the year 1789. This is a famous date in history, as it was the start of the French Revolution and, indeed, a young Johann Leonhard Keller arrived in Dalsheim from Switzerland, looking to put more distance between his family and the turmoil spinning out of Paris at the time. One has to assume that for many in Europe at that time, it seemed like the conflagration that was the French Revolution was likely to continue to spread and the whole world was likely to end up in ashes! At this time, the Hubacker vineyard was owned by the church in nearby Worms, the Andreasstift monastery, which still stands today and is now the home of the city’s museum. As Herr Keller had good connections with the church, he was able to obtain the entire four *hectare* Hubacker vineyard and this was the foundation upon which the family estate was first built and it continues to be one of its most important vineyards. When I say that the Hubacker vineyard was the foundation for Weingut Keller, this is also true in a literal sense, as Johann Leonhard Keller was an expert in explosives and used these to blast out some of the large rock formations that were still placed in the vineyard, with the rubble from these used to build the foundation for the house and winery that are still used by the family today. After the removal of the rocky portions of the vineyard, which were carted over by horse to the family home village of Flörsheim-Dalsheim, Herr Keller was able to fully plant the four *hectares* of the Hubacker.

The vineyard was already long under cultivation prior to the Keller family purchasing it in 1789, as the area of the Hügelland in the Rheinhessen had been famous for its limestone-based vineyards since the Middle Ages and this was then still considered one of the greatest wine-producing regions in Germany. The administrators of the Andreasstift monastery were quite prescient in selling the Hubacker to Herr Keller in 1789, as they were able to avoid its seizure by

French administrators when Napoleon's armies surged east a few years later and confiscated ecclesiastical properties. However, like all of the other top vineyard sites in the Hügelland, the nineteenth century was a time of diminished reputations for this part of the Rheinhessen, and most of the German wine *cognoscenti* in this century felt this was one of the backwaters of wine production in the country. Part of the reason for this was that the global temperatures had fallen in the nineteenth century and getting good ripeness in the Hügelland was even more of a challenge than it was in other regions such as the Mosel, Rheingau and the vineyards overlooking the Rhine River in the Rheinhessen, as the reflected light off of the nearby water was very much needed to augment the power of the sun during this cooler century. However, the vinous excellence that came out of the top vineyards in the Hügelland only a century before was not completely overlooked, as Klaus-Peter Keller recalls that "Johann Philip Bronner, a German historian and wine-lover, already wrote around 1880 that great wine would be possible in vineyards around Dalsheim, if only temperature would be a bit warmer, as the soils are beautiful." Klaus-Peter concludes, Herr Bronner was "a visionary guy!"

When the German wine laws were changed in 1971, the Hubacker vineyard was expanded (like so many of the great vineyards of Germany, often incorporating areas that did not possess the same quality of *terroir* as the smaller, original delimitations) from its original four *hectares* to fully twenty *hectares*, but it is only the Kellers' four *hectare* portion of the vineyard, located at the top of the hill, that is actually allowed grand cru status. So, while there is a much larger "Hubacker" vineyard since 1971, the Keller family's parcel is effectively a *monopole* for the grand cru section of the vineyard. The difference in soil between the summit of the hill where the grand cru section of the vineyard is located and the lower sections of sixteen *hectares* are pretty dramatic, as there is far more clay mixed in with the limestone in the lower sections of the vineyard and the soils are notably richer for that reason. As I mentioned above, the Keller family started replanting much of the Hubacker in 1974. The reason for this was that the one *hectare* of the vineyard had previously been planted to several different grape varieties- Gewürztraminer, Silvaner, Rieslaner and Pinot Gris, in addition to the three *hectares* of Riesling, and the family wished to dedicate the vineyard primarily to Riesling. Today, all of the vineyard is planted to Riesling, with the exception of a twenty *ares* section that remains dedicated to Pinot Gris.

The vineyard's principal replanting in 1974 came not too long after Klaus Keller's marriage to his wife Hedwig (or Hedi as she preferred to be known) in 1972. Hedi Keller was already quite accomplished in the wine world in her own right when she met Klaus Keller "over a bottle of Rieslaner" as her son Klaus-Peter recalls, for "my mother worked at the wine school in Bernkastel and her special interest was clonal selection- so she looked for old *selection massale* plants in the Oberemmel Hütte and Scharzhof vineyards and brought the best cuttings to Dalsheim when they got married in 1972." With about one *hectare* of the Hubacker planted to other grape varieties at this time, it made sense to commit these over to Riesling for the most part (with only that small, twenty *ares* slice of old vine Pinot Gris retained). However, as Frau Keller had discovered some really exceptional *selection massale* cuttings in these top vineyards in the Mosel and Saar during her time in Bernkastel, the estate decided to switch over at the same time all of the lesser clones of Riesling in the three *hectares* dedicated to the variety in the Hubacker to these very high quality *selection massale* cuttings that Hedi had brought with her from the school in Bernkastel, so none of the Riesling vines in the Hubacker today date back beyond 1974.

The first effective vintage of the Hubacker GG that was produced was made by Klaus-Peter's father, Klaus Keller, in the 1990 vintage. At that time it was labeled as a Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Auslese Trocken, and Klaus Keller would follow up his 1990 Hubacker Auslese Trocken with versions again in 1993 and 1997. In the following year, Klaus Keller appended the initial "G" to the bottling for the first time in honor of his father, George Keller. So, his Hubacker Auslese Trocken was adorned with the "G" on the front label for both the 1998 and 1999 vintages. In the next year, to commemorate the birth of Klaus-Peter and Julia's second son, Max, the name of the bottling was changed to Hubacker "Max" for his birth-year vintage of 2000, and in the following vintage, the two were combined into what would eventually become the winery's most famous dry Riesling bottling, the limited and highly sought after G-Max *cuvée*. By 2001, the Keller family had parcels in both the Kirchspiel and Morstein as well, so I am not certain if the first G-Max bottling in this vintage came from the Hubacker, but a long-time client of the estate who I was seated next to at this vertical insisted that the 2001 G-Max is indeed made from Hubacker fruit. Given the incidence several years back of tourists cutting grapes from the Kellers' vines where they thought the G-Max came from, Klaus-Peter no longer shares the information about where he produces the G-Max and he logically declined to confirm his client's assertion about the 2001 G-Max.

Klaus-Peter's recollections of some of these very early examples of dry Riesling from the Hubacker (he was working part-time with his father at the estate in the late 1990s while finishing up his oenology studies) are quite interesting, as "the 1997 was completely dry and had no botrytis in it, but both the 1998 and 1999 included between five and ten percent botrytized grapes in the *cuvée*." He continued, "at that time, we looked to Austria for inspiration for the style of our dry Riesling from the Hubacker, and those late 1990s Austrian dry Rieslings often would contain a bit of botrytized grapes, but we moved away from this after only two vintages and made a very strict selection for the 2000 Hubacker that included absolutely no botrytis." One has to remember that in the late 1990s, this corner of the Rheinhessen was not yet known for dry Rieslings at all, and most of the Kellers' established Riesling clientele were fond of off dry and noble sweet wines, so these first bottlings of dry Riesling from the Hubacker were done experimentally, to see if there might be another direction that could be successful for Riesling from the Hügelland. As Klaus-Peter recalls, "already the 1990 trocken was a big success and VINUM wine magazine chose it as their WINE of the MONTH- it was important to have this positive feedback and our customers liked it a lot as well," so from Klaus Keller's very earliest vintage of dry Hubacker Riesling, it was clear that there was a possible future here for this style of wine from the estate. Most German vintners will point to the years of 1988 or 1989 as the start of our current period of global warming, so the timing of a 1990 Hubacker Auslese Trocken was perfect, as this epoch's warmer growing seasons that Herr Bronner had suggested back in 1880 were what was needed to recapture all of the magic of the top sites in the Hügelland was just beginning. And, with Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller's assuming direction at the winery in the 2001 vintage, the rest is history.



Klaus-Peter Keller, tasting grapes in the vineyard a few years ago, with our good friend Tino Siewert.

The Hubacker is unequivocally a great wine, which Klaus-Peter Keller describes “as often having the most exotic flavors (of the four Hügelland grand crus) with a deep mineral core.” The exposition of the grand cru section of the Hubacker is southeasterly, so the morning sun plays an important role here and the grapes tend to ripen a bit slower here than in the other Hügelland grand crus owned by the Keller family. There is now a small watchtower, or Türmchen, as these things are known in German, at the top of the crest in the Hubacker. It is not as ancient as some that one finds in other vineyards scattered around Germany, as it was built in 2000 to replace a little hut that was already at the top of the vineyard. As Klaus-Peter recalls, “my mother had always wanted to have one in the Hubacker and we finally managed this in 2000.” As I noted on my piece on Weingut Keller’s G-Max bottling last year, there have been some changes in the vinification of the Grosses Gewächs bottlings from Klaus-Peter in more recent times, and this of course extends to the Hubacker. Probably the most important was the purchase of a second basket press for the dry wines in time for the 2013 vintage, as Klaus-Peter feels that they get a more gentle extraction from this and allows “for more grip and tension” in the resulting wines. He is also moving the must from the press to the fermentation tanks earlier than he did in the first several vintages of his career, so they are a bit more cloudy at that time, but he feels it results in even greater elegance in the finished wines. The GGs have also moved down a bit in average alcohol in the last decade, as they would routinely be around 13.5 percent octane in the first decade of Klaus-Peter’s tenure, and today, they are generally between twelve and thirteen percent. This has been done by shortening the canopy in the vineyards, to slow down the process of photosynthesis a bit more and allow for good, long hang times for the grapes without the accumulation of too much sugar.

It was quite apparent during our vertical tasting of the Hubacker that the continual refinement of Klaus-Peter's touch in the cellar with his Grosses Gewächs bottlings (as he has garnered more experience with each of his *terroirs* and with making dry Rieslings in these beautiful vineyards) continues on unabated with each passing vintage, and he has clearly not yet reached the peak of his winemaking powers and we can clearly expect even more precision with future vintages. With this in mind, we actually organized our vertical Hubacker tasting from oldest to youngest vintage, reasoning that the more elegant and complete style of the Keller grand cru bottlings today would make it harder to appreciate the older vintages, with their slightly more powerful personalities. After we had completed the tasting, I came away convinced there would have been no problem if we had organized the tasting along the lines that I usually prefer, from youngest to oldest, as the superb *terroir* of the Hubacker, coupled with bottle age, would have more than made amends for the differences in general style of these grand cru bottlings between the earliest vintages and the most recent. Our tasting went from the 2016 Hubacker Grosses Gewächs all the way back to the 1997 Hubacker Auslese Trocken, and then we concluded with a pair of 1996s. One was a Spätlese Trocken from the Hubacker made by Klaus-Peter's father, Klaus Keller, and the other was an experimental wine produced by Klaus-Peter while he was still at school in Geisenheim, a Rüdesheimer Berg Roseneck Spätlese Trocken. Of course, there were a few other Rieslings as well at the table, so the pair of 1996s had a bit of a break between the conclusion of the vertical and their being served, as we shared some other very good bottlings prior to comparing the two Spätlesen Trocken 1996ers with the first "official" course of the dinner. And then, there were some fine bottles of claret to go along with the meat course, including a stellar magnum of 1983 Château Latour that was so good it caught me very much by surprise (and utterly crushed a monolithic 1986 Château Leoville Las Cases paired up with it). And then it was off to bed, as I had to be at Weingut Dönnhoff early the next morning...

Weingut Keller's Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs

2016 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2016 Hubacker GG is a superb young wine and really shows the great quality of this *terroir*. The nascently complex nose soars from the glass in a fine blend of grapefruit, tart orange, ocean breeze, crystalline limestone minerality, a hint of beeswax to come and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and racy, with impeccable balance, a lovely core, ripe acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and soil-driven finish. Great juice. 2030-2085. **95.**

2015 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2015 vintage of Hubacker from Klaus-Peter Keller was also showing beautiful potential. The wine was not particularly shut down compared to when I first tasted it, but it is still more than a decade away from really attaining its plateau of peak maturity. The youthful nose is pure and complex, offering up scents of lemon, pink grapefruit, incipient notes of beeswax, chalky minerality, an exotic touch of lilac, sea salts, orange peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nascently complex, with great precision and grip, ripe, seamless acids and excellent length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This too is going to be a legendary vintage of Hubacker! 2028-2085. **95.**



Julia Keller kindly sharing the very rare bottle of the 2000 vintage of Hubacker “Max” with a thirsty crowd.

2014 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2014 Hubacker since its debut in the spring of 2015 and the wine is aging very gracefully and has retained that sense of elegance that the 2014 vintage has bestowed upon it (with a bit of assistance from Klaus-Peter). The bouquet is still quite youthful and very refined, delivering a fine constellation of grapefruit, tart orange, lovely minerality, a touch of *fleur de sel*, dried flowers, wild yeasts and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is youthfully complex, full-bodied and shows off outstanding mid-palate depth, with superb soil signature, bright, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the very, very long and classy finish. This still needs at least another six or seven years of bottle age to start to really stir! 2025-2085. **94+**.

2013 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2013 Hubacker was the first in our vertical that was starting to show some signs of truly blossoming and had a bit of secondary complexity on display on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is lovely, offering up scents of blood orange, a touch of menthol, a bit of beeswax, lemon peel and a complex base of limestone minerality. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, excellent cut and grip and a long, complex finish. This is getting very close to its plateau of peak maturity. There is a touch of the flamboyant to the personality of the 2013 Hubacker that I like very much indeed! 2020-2075. **95+**.

2012 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

Klaus-Peter Keller's 2012 Hubacker is simply superb, and it is just starting to show the first signs of starting to stir and emerge from its hibernation. The bouquet offers up a classic blend of pink grapefruit, tart orange, crystal clear minerality, wild yeasts, dried flowers, citrus peel and the customary touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure in personality, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, vibrant acids and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex and utterly seamless finish. This needs time in the cellar, but is going to be a brilliant drink when it is ready to go! 2025-2080. **95.**

2011 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

Out of the blocks, I found the 2011 Hubacker to have fine potential, but its broader-shouldered personality was quite evident when tasted alongside of the other Grosses Gewächs bottlings in the Keller lineup. At age seven, the elegance of the wine is more front and center, as it offers up a lovely, youthful bouquet of blood orange, tangerine, citrus zest, chalky minerality, a fine sense of salinity, still a bit of wild yeasts and a blossoming note of petrol. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite young and racy, with the fine structure currently keeping everything a bit under wraps, but with excellent length and grip on the vibrant and very well-balanced finish. All this excellent wine needs is more bottle age. 2023-2080+. **94+.**

2010 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2010 vintage of Weingut Keller's Hubacker is far more open aromatically than the 2011 served alongside of it, but it is still a young wine and climbing in quality, so I would not touch a bottle for several more years. The bouquet is excellent today, jumping from the glass in a blaze of lemon custard, blood orange, a touch of smokiness, wild yeasts, lemongrass and a beautiful base of yellow limestone. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and snappy, with a very soil-driven personality, a superb core of fruit, excellent cut and grip and a long, complex and electric finish. This is a great, great wine in the making and will be one of the longest-lived Hubackers of the last dozen years! 2025-2090. **95+.**

2009 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2009 vintage was a warmer year than the very low yielding 2010, and this wine is getting very close to primetime drinking. The bouquet offers up lovely, well-measured ripeness in its aromatic constellation of sweet grapefruit, lemon, a touch of tangerine, beeswax, chalky soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent complexity and a long, bouncy and focused finish. This has excellent backend grip and almost gives an impression of a touch of tannin! 2021-2065+. **93+.**

2008 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2008 Hubacker from Klaus-Peter is one of the absolute classic examples of this great *terroir*. Though the wine is still in climbing mode and a few years away from its peak, the bouquet is already stunning and quite open, blazing from the glass in a mix of sweet pink grapefruit, very refined limestone minerality, lemongrass, a touch of wild yeasts, incipient notes of paraffin and an exotic topnote of fresh rosemary. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very complex, with a superb mid-palate core, ripe, seamless acids and a long, elegant and laser-like finish. A great vintage of Hubacker! 2022-2070. **95.**

2007 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

I like the 2007 Hubacker from Weingut Keller very much indeed, but this is a far more closed and adolescent wine than the 2008 or 2009. The youthful bouquet delivers scents of grapefruit, tart orange, limestone minerality, a touch of petrol, citrus peel, white flowers and just

a whisper of the beeswax to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and still nicely buttoned up behind its structural elements, with a rock solid core, racy acids and fine focus and balance on the nascently complex and snappy finish. Great potential, but let it sleep a while longer! 2023-2070. **94+**.

2006 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2006 vintage is a bit burly in personality (particularly in comparison to the following two years of 2007 and 2008), but the Hubacker is starting to drink very nicely and shows off a lovely synthesis of the vintage's musculature and the mineral drive of this fine *terroir*. The bouquet is a fine blend of candied lemon, sweet grapefruit, beeswax, chalky soil tones and a topnote of sea salts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely broad-shouldered, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is probably, stylistically, one of the least interesting vintages of the decade, and yet the Hubacker is delicious and only really pales in comparison to itself in other years. 2019-2050. **92+**.

2005 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2005 vintage of Klaus-Peter Keller's Hubacker is excellent, as the ripeness of the vintage here is beautifully measured and offset with great purity and bounce. The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of candied grapefruit, tangerine, yellow limestone, lemongrass, a beautiful base of chalky minerality and a saline topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with excellent focus and grip and a long, zesty and refined finish. The wine closes with a nice touch of citrus peel. 2019-2050+. **94**.

2004 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2004 vintage of Hubacker is one of my favorites from the first half dozen years of Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller's tenure at the estate. The more elegant side of the vintage allows for more stylistic similarities here with the wines that have been made from this lovely *terroir* in the last five or six vintages. The bouquet is pure and simply stunning, with the lovely fruit tones starting to take on a candied aspect that reminds me a touch of a mature Raveneau wine, with notes of lemon, tangerine, beeswax, yellow limestone, a touch of sweet core, sea salts and a topnote of dried flowers providing a very dramatic aromatic backdrop. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and wide open in personality, with racy acids, great focus and grip and a very long, very refined and dancing finish. A beautiful, beautiful vintage of Hubacker that is just starting to hit its apogee and still has decades of life ahead of it. 2019-2050+. **95+**.

2003 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

I had never previously tasted an example of the 2003 Hubacker and did not know what to expect from this very hot summer, but the wine is quite lovely and has very good acids and grip for this vintage (which is better in Germany in any case than any other European wine-producing region with which I am familiar). The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of orange, candied grapefruit, a touch of fresh rosemary, citrus peel, a good base of chalky soil tones and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite complex, with lovely depth at the core, good framing acids and a long, balanced and nicely mineral finish. This vintage of Hubacker, obviously, does not have quite the cut and grip of a classic year, but it is precise, rock solid at the core and very, very satisfying. 2019-2035+. **92**.

2002 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

I was expecting when we got back to the very earliest vintages made by Klaus-Peter that we would see a bit more muscular style, but this was not the case with the really refined and *à point* 2002 Hubacker. The nose is pure and very expressive, offering up scents of pink grapefruit,

tangerine, beautifully precise limestone minerality, beeswax and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and zesty finish. There is a lovely sense of roundness on the attack of the 2002 Hubacker today, but still with plenty of mid-palate stuffing and superb backend minerality. Fine, fine juice into its apogee. 2019-2040. **93.**

2001 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

2001 was Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller's first "official" vintage in charge of the family estate, though Klaus-Peter is quick to point out that his father was very active in the cellars in this year and the wine is really a collaboration. The wine is drinking brilliantly at age seventeen and belies the fact that this was indeed the first vintage of Hubacker GG. The nose is pure and nicely resolved today, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of candied lemon, salty limestone minerality, blood orange, a whisper of beeswax and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a great core of fruit, lovely transparency and grip, bright acids and simply superb length and grip on the electric finish. Great juice. 2019-2040. **95.**



2000 Hubacker Riesling Trocken "Max"- Weingut Keller

The 2000 Hubacker "Max" is a very good wine from what is not a top flight vintage in Germany. The wine stands out a bit aromatically from the 1997 and 2001 versions, which are also wines without botrytis, but which are generally superior vintages to 2000. The bouquet is

complex and nicely focused, delivering scents of lemon, a touch of menthol, chalky soil tones, beeswax and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and a bit leaner than the 1999 version (which has a touch of botrytis), with a good, solid core, bright acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. I did not note the alcohol level on the 2000, but this is probably 13.5 percent back in those days. This is a good wine, but it was a dramatic step up when the 2001 was released. 2019-2040. **90.**

1999 Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Auslese Trocken “G”- Weingut Keller

I have never been a fan of dry Rieslings with a bit of botrytis in them, and both the 1999 and 1998 versions of Hubacker seem a bit clumsy from their tiny amount of noble rotten berries included. The 1999 Hubacker “G” comes in at a ripe 13.5 percent and is more advanced aromatically than the 1997 version, offering up a fully mature nose of yellow plum, grapefruit peel, a touch of corn, a good base of limestone and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite mature, with a good core, sound framing acids and fine length and grip on the slightly warm finish. This is holding up well, but shows a bit of its alcohol on the backend and is not as refined as the wines from 2001 forwards, when botrytis was scrupulously avoided for this bottling. 2019-2035. **89.**

1998 Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Auslese Trocken “G”- Weingut Keller

The 1998 vintage is not quite as strong as the 1999, so this wine is even a bit more down the line in terms of maturity. The bouquet is now getting a bit tertiary, offering up scents of grapefruit, barley sugar, rosemary, orange peel, a bit of new leather, chalky soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still with a good core of fruit, with moderate acids and a bit of alcohol again poking out on the finish. Not bad, but keeping the botrytis out of the Hubacker dry bottling was a very, very good idea. 2019-2035. **88.**

1997 Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Auslese Trocken - Weingut Keller

I liked the 1997 vintage of Hubacker quite a bit better than the 1998 and 1999 versions, despite the overall quality being not too far off between the three, as there was no botrytis included in the 1997 version. The wine offers up a ripe and complex bouquet of tangerine, sweet grapefruit, a touch of bee pollen, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and *à point* finish. This is quite good. 2019-2040+. **91+.**

1996 Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Spätlese Trocken - Weingut Keller

The 1996 Hubacker Spätlese Trocken is not really cut from the same cloth as the Grosses Gewächs bottlings today, as this is only Spätlese level of ripeness and came in at only eleven percent alcohol. But, the wine is quite lovely in its more middleweight guise, offering up an aromatic constellation of lemon, pink grapefruit, chalky undertow, citrus peel, dried flowers and a nice touch of rosemary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and zesty, with a solid core, lovely balance and grip and a long, racy finish. This is very good, but does not have the palate presence or the precision of the wines today. 2019-2035. **89.**

1996 Rudesheimer Berg Roseneck Riesling Spätlese Trocken – Klaus-Peter Keller

I had written about the 1996 Rudesheimer Berg Roseneck Spätlese Trocken on a previous occasion, as this was the first wine that Klaus-Peter Keller really made on his own back in his days at school in Geisenheim. It is really an excellent wine and shows a lovely window into what was to come in the subsequent two decades! The wine is a bit riper than the Hubacker 1996, coming in at 11.5 percent octane and offering up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, tart orange, excellent soil complexity, still a touch of wild yeasts, dried flowers and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full, elegant and quite refined in profile, with a

good core, excellent complexity and grip and a long, precise and classy finish. Fine, fine juice with many years of life still ahead. 2019-2035+. **93.**

**RECENTLY-TASTED AMERICAN WINES
(AND A FEW NEW WORLD FRIENDS) FEBRUARY 2019**



I always look forward to my semi-annual reports on Old School and Neo-Classical American wines, as there are tons and tons of these beauties being produced out there today, with many of them often below the radar and offering up remarkably good values. While a significant percentage of the wine world remains fixated on the “processed food” style of wines that came to define much of Californian wine in the decade of the 1990s and first years of the new millennium, there has also clearly been a serious rejection of this stylistic paradigm by a growing number of (often quite youthful) winegrowers on the west coast of the United States, and their numbers are happily growing with every passing vintage. With each iteration of this report, I am introduced to new (to me) producers who are making beautifully distinctive and world class wines that are low octane, unmanipulated bottlings that often speak beautifully of their underlying *terroir*. A perfect example of this is Halcón Vineyards, run by winemaker Paul Gordon in the Yorkville Highlands section of Mendocino County. Paul’s started in 2005 and his specialty out of the blocks has been his superb, classically-styled Rhône blends, straight syrah or petite sirah, which he has planted in his home vineyards that sit at elevations of 2500 feet above sea level and open to the cooling winds off of the Pacific Ocean in the Yorkville Heights AVA of Mendocino County. In the last few years he has branched out to make a few bottlings of pinot

noir as well from purchased fruit (including the Bearwallow Vineyard made famous by Rhys Vineyards), and I liked absolutely everything that I tasted from Halcón Vineyards and am delighted that Paul reached out to me to send samples. Do try these wines, as they will not disappoint!

With these bi-annual reports on American wines, there is no real set rhyme or rhythm to which wines make their way into the articles, as a few unsolicited samples start to show up a couple of months ahead of one of the features and I then start to look back to see whose wines I have not tried in the last year. I send out notes to producers, or they email me to see when I might be writing about the region, and once the mountain of accrued samples looks overwhelming enough, I stop the solicitations and try to hunker down and taste through the beautiful largess sitting in my cellar of current releases. Without any set schedule for the articles and no set lineup of producers for each feature, it really is happenstance which wines get covered in each piece on American wines, and I just try to jump around from article to article and get to my favorite producers when I can, but always knowing that I cannot possibly cover everyone who is deserving of being placed in the article, as there are just too many bottles to taste and I eventually find myself behind schedule and have to stop contacting producers and distributors about getting samples sent over. One of the things I try to studiously avoid is tasting too many wines at one time, as I cannot think of anything more disrespectful to the winegrowers who have invested a year of their lives in the wines in front of me, than to try and plow through fifty or a hundred samples in one day just to get caught up with my scheduling needs. I would rather cover less ground and try to do so with a bit of the same attention to detail as the producers used to craft these wines! For this report, I tried to focus more heavily on some of my absolute favorite producers from Oregon, as the last American feature covered more ground from wineries in California and Washington and I wanted to play catch up a bit with the beautiful wines from Oregon. As I mentioned in my feature on the wines of the state back the summer before last, after my first (and long overdue) visit to Oregon wine country, this is one of the most exciting wine-producing regions to be found anywhere on the globe today and there are so many good things happening amongst the state's very talented cadre of wine producers that I cannot possibly keep pace with everything of promise that is just over the horizon here. It has been a beautiful couple of years of discovery and re-discovery of the Oregon wine scene for me personally, as I happily offered the wines from many of the state's earliest pioneers- people like Dick Erath, David Lett, Dick Ponzi and David Adelsheim- in my early wine merchant days in the first half of the 1980s, and then sadly lost track of the state's wines a bit as my career path took me off in other directions for a while.

Happily, in the spring and summer of 2017 I got my act back in gear and have been happily playing catch up with what is going on at the top estates in Oregon, thanks to a visit out there in the summer of 2017 and some fine guidance from an old New York friend, Mike Wheeler, who decamped the city grind for the open skies of the Pacific Northwest several years ago and staged an intervention by sending me a mountain of samples from some of his most talented winemaking friends in Oregon in the spring of 2017. The combination of the two extended re-introductions that spring and summer to what is going on in the contemporary wine scene in Oregon was more than sufficient to want me to stay on top of each passing vintage here and to get myself back on the road out west whenever these cranky old knees are ready to kick up a bit more road dust. Happily, many of my absolute favorite producers in Oregon were kind

enough to send a generous range of samples of 2016s and 2017s for inclusion in this article, so there are plenty of notes on the beautiful wines from gifted producers such as Kelley Fox, Brianne Day, Division Wine Company, Michael Sterling at Franny Beck, Johan Vineyards, Domaine Drouhin, Roserock, Mike Franchere and Louis Jadot's new Oregon project, Résonance, beautifully run by Jacques Lardière, which I had somehow missed trying in their first vintage. As I said above, there just comes a point where I have to stop asking for samples, as I know I have more bottles than I can comfortably tackle for the feature, and so a few others of my favorites in Oregon wine country, such as Patricia Green Cellars and Walter Scott Wines are not covered here, though, of course, they certainly deserve to be. But, there will be another article on the region in the near future to make amends.

There are a few wineries included in this report whose wines are completely new to me and I am very grateful to their proprietors for having sought me out and sent samples of their current releases. I have already mentioned one of these estates, Halcón Vineyards in Mendocino County in California. Paul Gordon is the owner and winemaker of Halcón and he is doing outstanding work in the Yorkville Highlands appellation of Mendocino, which happens to be one of the coolest in all of California. He is friends with Jean Gonon of Saint Joseph fame in the northern Rhône and there is a remarkable similarity to their winemaking sensibilities, though they of course, work with quite different *terroirs*. Another new winery that really stood out to me in this report was Seth Long's Morgen Long Vineyards in Willamette Valley. This is a chardonnay-only label, with Seth buying fruit from some of the top vineyards in the area. Seth has worked his way up in the winemaking food chain, with *stages* at Willakenzie Estate, Akarua in New Zealand, with Jeff Brinkman and Kevin Harvey at Rhys Vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains and at Domaine de Montille in Burgundy, before launching his first vintage on his own in 2014. There were only three and a half casks of Morgen Long chardonnay in the inaugural vintage of 2014, but he is poised to be far better known when his 2017s are released, as there are fully thirty-six barrels of chardonnay from several different vineyard sites waiting in the wings. Seth kindly sent his four bottlings of chardonnay from the 2016 vintage for my edification, and I was very, very impressed. They are exceptional wines, with more than a passing resemblance to the wines of Domaine Guy Roulot, with great mineral drive, very pure, precise fruit tones, outstanding structures for cellaring and little or no new oak (depending on the *cuvée*). Most of his 2016s are probably already sold through, but get ready for the release of his 2017s, as they should be outstanding and far more widely available, as there were only seven and a half barrels produced in the 2016 vintage.

This article also includes new releases from the very talented Jamie Kutch in Sonoma County and Rajat Parr of Domaine de la Côte and Sandhi in Santa Barbara, as well as many other fine producers who have been featured in these pages in the past. There are even a few new timeless releases from the trailblazing husband and wife team of Terry and Frances Leighton of Kalin Cellars, including the first red wine that has been released from the estate from the twenty-first century, a new release from Cathy Corison and the customary handful of older wines drunk out of my cellar and featured here as well. I am currently working on a feature on the 1977 vintage of California cabernet sauvignon for later this spring, as this severe drought vintage has surprisingly blossomed in the last year or two, after seemingly being bound up in its rather tough structural elements for most of the last forty years, and out of nowhere, is now one of the most beautiful vintages for drinking from this great decade of California wine. For that reason, though

I have drunk a few 1977s already, I am holding those notes back for the vintage feature in one of the coming couple of issues. A few producers whose wines I hoped to have covered here are not to be found in the pages that follow, as two of California's most important historical estates, Heitz Wine Cellars and Stony Hill Vineyards, were both sold in the last several months and now have new owners. Repeated efforts to get someone at the new Heitz to return my calls or emails about samples were ignored, and though I was hoping to see Stony Hill samples, they fell through the cracks and the mountain of samples was sufficiently daunting in my cellar that I did not follow-up a third time to try and get the bottles in house in time for the article.



In any event, the lack of notes on Heitz and Stony Hill hardly takes away the luster from what is a very deep report on the wines from some of the most important American west coast wine regions. There are literally hundreds of wines covered in the following pages that I would be delighted to have in my cellar, as these are authentic, high quality, *terroir*-driven wines that are crafted to age long and gracefully and beautifully pay homage to the pioneering spirits of the previous generations of winegrowers in California, Oregon and Washington who have made all of this possible. As an addendum, at the end of the article, I have tacked on a few other new world wines to further add to the article, mostly because the wines are brilliant and I am not sure when I might be able to write a proper regional feature on those wines. So I include them there, though wines from New Zealand and Australia really are a bit beyond the proper scope of this article. But, by tucking them in here, readers can have notes on the wines and they can find their

way into the database for future reference. The article is structured as most other American wine features have been in recent times, with the wines grouped first by varietal. Within each varietal section, the wines are listed first chronologically by vintage, and the alphabetically by producer. Occasionally, the alphabetical grouping will be eschewed if the technical details provided by the producers indicated a quality hierarchy of various single vineyard or specific block bottlings. In those cases, I tried to taste the wines as suggested and have listed them accordingly, to respect their proper places in the hierarchy of cuvées from these talented winegrowers.

Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and Other Fun White Varietals

2017 Chenin Blanc- Beau Rivage (Clarksburg)

This wine is made by William Kelley, better known these days as The Wine Advocate's Burgundy specialist (amongst his many hats he wears over there). As he notes, "it is produced from Clarksburg grapes using Kalin Cellars methods" and comes in at a cool and racy 12.1 percent octane. The wine is barrel-fermented and then aged in neutral casks for ten to twelve months prior to bottling. The wine is outstanding, offering up a pure, youthful and complex bouquet of quince, green apple, beeswax, lanolin, dried flowers and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, a lovely girdle of acidity and a long, nascently complex finish. This is still a young wine, and though it is tasty, it deserves a few years in the cellar to really start to blossom and show some secondary layers of complexity. This is a lovely wine that will age many, many years, will be more complex with some bottle age, and is an absolute steal at its price! 2019-2030+. **91+**.

2017 Chenin Blanc "Inondé" Willard Farms - Division Wine Company (Columbia Valley)

The 2017 Chenin Blanc from Kate Morris and Thomas Monroe is raised in a combination of older Burgundy casks and stainless steel, with the 2017 coming in at a quite ripe 14.3 percent octane. Despite its surprising ripeness, the wine is precise and pure, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of apple, quince, complex soil tones, a hint of lanolin, bee pollen and spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with lovely delineation and bounce, good complexity and a long, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. This is a very good, ripe, but zesty Chenin. 2019-2030. **90**.

2017 Sauvignon Blanc "Environs" Redford Wetle Vyd.- Division Wine (Eola-Amity Hills)

Division Wine Company's 2017 Sauvignon Blanc "Environs" from the Redford Wetle Vineyard is one of their most limited release wines, as there were only sixty cases produced. The wine is pretty ripe, coming in at fourteen percent octane, but bright and zesty on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up scents of pineapple, tangerine, a touch of grassiness, lovely soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fairly ripe personality, moderate acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. I tend to like more cut and grassiness in my sauvignon blancs, as this wine reminds me a bit of some of the California versions of this varietal I have tasted where the primary goal is to avoid grassiness- the heart and soul of the varietal's personality in my book and a desirable trait. This is a tasty wine, but it is not cut from my personal stylistic cloth. 2019-2022. **88**.

2017 Barbie Pinot Blanc- Kelley Fox Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

Kelley Fox has made this bottling in memory of her mother Barbara, who passed away in this vintage. The grapes were sourced from the Freedom Hill Vineyard in the Eola-Amity Hills appellation, and Kelley fermented them in a single, older acacia wood puncheon. This is an

outstanding wine and may well be the finest example of this varietal I have ever tasted. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of white peach, apple, almond, lovely, salty soil tones, orange blossoms and a distinct, but discreet framing of acacia wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely snappy, with an excellent core of fruit, beautiful soil signature and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is a stunning bottle of pinot blanc that will age effortlessly for many, many years. 2019-2035+. **94.**

2016 Grüner Veltliner- Johan Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2016 Grüner Veltliner from Johan Vineyards is a very fine example of this varietal, which I have to confess is not one of my favorites when it gets too high in octane, but which is not the case here. The wine is still pretty ripe, coming in at 13.6 percent octane, but manages this nicely to offer up scents of apple, orange peel, lemongrass, a nice touch of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core, great mineral drive and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. This is absolutely superb! 2019-2030. **93.**

2016 Chenin Blanc “Saini Farms”- Leo Steen (Dry Creek Valley)

The 2016 Chenin Blanc bottling from Saini Farms made by Leo Steen is a fine young wine, but it has a very good chassis of acidity and will be even better with a bit more bottle age. The youthful nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, lanolin, salty soil tones, dried flowers, bee pollen and just a whisper of vanillin oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, very good focus and grip and a long, balanced and promising finish. This is certainly very easy to drink today, but the real complexity here is still buried behind the wine’s girdle of acidity and waiting a few years will pay dividends. 2021-2040. **91.**

2015 Pinot Gris “Drueskall”- Johan Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2015 Pinot Gris “Drueskall” from Johan Vineyards sees plenty of skin contact, with the wine ranging from ten to thirty days on the skins, depending on which portion of the blend we are speaking of, with the assembled wine then spending fifteen months in older barrels prior to bottling. With the extended skin contact, the color is that of a dark Rosé, and the wine offers up a deep and complex bouquet of strawberries, sweet onions, a touch of rhubarb, lovely soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and modestly tannic finish. This is an utterly unique spin on pinot gris that is really more light red wine than it is white, and it will be very good with a wide variety of cuisines at the table (I would love to pair it with grilled salmon and smoked morels, just as an idea). It should age beautifully on its combination of bright acids and gentle tannins. Very cool juice. 2019-2035. **91+.**

2015 Chenin Blanc “The Steen”- Leo Steen (Santa Ynez Valley)

The 2015 Chenin Blanc “The Steen” bottling from Leo Steen hails from a heavily-limestone vineyard called the Jurassic Park Vineyard. The vines were planted in the 1980s, so these are pretty old vines by California standards. The wine is fermented in cement eggs and raised for five months in older barrels prior to bottling. The 2015 version is starting to blossom beautifully, offering up a precise and complex nose of apple, chalky soil tones, a hint of fresh pineapple, bee pollen, spring flowers, a discreet note of orange peel and still a touch of youthful lanolin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still quite primary, with a rock solid core of fruit, very good soil signature, bright acids and a long, balanced and promising

finish. This is lovely juice that still deserves some time in the cellar to really come into its prime. 2022-2040. **92.**



Chardonnay

2017 Chardonnay “Russian River Valley”- Bravium Wines (Russian River)

The 2017 Chardonnay “Russian River Valley” from Bravium is a fine young wine, but it is still fairly tightly-knit and demands a bit of aeration for drinking it today. With a bit of time in decanter, the wine blossoms nicely to offer up a pure and classy nose of pear, apple, lovely Goldridge soil tones, orange zest, a touch of acacia blossom and a lovely, delicate framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with bright acids, lovely balance and a long, bouncy finish. This needs another few months to really blossom properly, but there is depth and distinction here and this is going to be very good when it blossoms. Give it six months to really start hitting on all cylinders. 2019-2030. **90+.**

2017 Chardonnay “Johan Vineyard” Trois- Division Wine Company (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2017 Chardonnay “Johan Vineyard” bottling from Division Wine Company is a young and nicely cool climate example of this varietal, for though it comes in at a nice 13.1 percent octane, it is zesty and reserved in personality. The bouquet delivers a fine, youthful blend of pear, fresh almond, a bit of apple pie spice, complex soil tones, white flowers, fresh nutmeg and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, fine focus and balance and a long, youthful and very

promising long finish. Dick Ponzi made a really good chardonnay all the way back in the 1988 vintage and this wine reminds me stylistically very much of that wine, though I do not know why. This is eminently drinkable today, but its glory lies in the future and tuck it away in the cellar for a couple of years and watch the magic unfold. 2021-2040. **91+**.

2016 Chardonnay “Dundee Hills”- Arterberry-Maresh (Dundee Hills)

The Dundee Hills bottling of chardonnay is made up of a blend from the family’s home plot of Maresh vineyard and fruit from the Weber Vineyard, which was planted in 1983. The 2016 Dundee Hills chardonnay offers up a bouquet of pear, apple, a nice hint of spice, a bit of almond, good soil signature and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely zesty, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive and a long, complex and fairly open finish. This has the acidity to age very well, but it is not quite as reticent out of the blocks as the Maresh Vineyard bottling and is the one of these three I would reach for first for current drinking. Good juice. 2019-2040. **91**.

2016 Chardonnay “Dux Vineyard”- Arterberry-Maresh (Dundee Hills)

The Dux Vineyard cuvée of chardonnay from Jim Maresh is the youngest vine fruit that he works with, as this vineyard was only planted in 2011. The 2016 version is very pretty, offering up a clean and precise bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of citrus peel, a nice dollop of soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and focused, with respectable mid-palate depth, lovely acidity and grip and a long, youthful finish. This (understandably) does not have quite the same mid-palate core as the other two Arterberry-Maresh chardonnay bottlings from 2016, but that is the nature of younger vines, and there is still plenty here to enjoy. 2019-2030. **89**.

2016 Chardonnay “Maresh Vineyard”- Arterberry-Maresh (Dundee Hills)

The Chardonnay “Maresh Vineyard” bottling from Jim Maresh hails from ungrafted vines planted in 1983. This family vineyard lies between five hundred and eight hundred feet in elevation, making it one of the slowest to ripen in the Dundee Hills. The 2016 Maresh chardonnay comes in at 12.8 percent and offers up a fine young nose of apple, quince, spring flowers, fresh almond, a nice base of soil and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely balanced for aging, with bright acids, a good core of fruit and fine focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is still a puppy and deserves some time in the cellar to start to blossom and unlock its secondary layers of complexity. It will be lovely. 2021-2040+. **90**.

2016 Chardonnay “Russian River Valley”- Bravium (Russian River Valley)

It has been nearly a year since I tasted a bottle of the 2016 Bravium “Russian River Valley” bottling of chardonnay and the wine has blossomed beautifully. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, acacia blossom, alluvial soil tones, a nice touch of almond and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent acids and a long, balanced and beautifully focused finish. This is classic Russian River chardonnay that is opening up beautifully, but has the chassis to age nicely for the next decade or more. Fine juice. 2019-2030+. **91**.

2016 Chardonnay “Stangeland Vineyard” Deux- Division Wine Co. (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2016 Chardonnay Deux bottling from the “Stangeland Vineyard” from Division Wine Company hails from a parcel of vines planted in 1978 and was raised in a “one wine” cask. The 2016 version comes in at a cool 12.9 percent octane and offers up an excellent bouquet of apple, pear, fresh almond, a lovely base of soil tones, fruit blossoms and just a hint of vanillin

oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven in personality, with excellent acids and focus, lovely grip and a long, complex finish. This is a fine bottle that is tasty out of the blocks and should age very nicely as well over the next ten to twelve years. 2019-2030+. **91+**.

2016 Chardonnay “Cuvée Arthur”- Domaine Drouhin (Willamette Valley)

The 2016 Chardonnay “Cuvée Arthur” from Domaine Drouhin is a very pretty wine that offers up lovely complexity on both the nose and palate. The wine delivers an esthery and quite complex bouquet of pear, apple, bee pollen, chalky soil tones, vanillin oak, citrus zest and a nice touch of salinity. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and nicely racy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely cut and grip and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is fourteen percent octane and carries its ripeness very elegantly and will age beautifully- if one can keep one’s hands off of the wine in the cellar! 2019-2035+. **93.**

2016 Chardonnay “Rutherford”- El Molino Winery (St. Helena)

I have always liked the wines from El Molino, which strike me as having often found a way to outwit global warming and deliver elegance and complexity from their warmer microclimates in the heart of Napa. However, their 2016 Rutherford bottling of chardonnay is a pretty ripe character this year, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane and has sacrificed just a bit of the winery’s customary precision to the ripeness. The bouquet is ripe and complex, offering up scents of pear, pineapple, lovely soil tones, orange blossoms, citrus peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit blurry from ripeness, with lovely flavors and a good core, but not the focus and detail of some past vintages. The finish is long and zesty, with the alcohol quite well handled, but the overall sense is of a wine swimming upstream against a remorseless tide of too much ripeness. It is not bad for drinking over the near term, but El Molino has always made chardonnays that aged remarkably well and I have a hard time imagining this will be the case with the 2016 version. 2019-2024. **87.**

2016 Chardonnay “Loubejac Vineyard”- Morgen Long (Eola-Amity Hills)

Seth Long’s 2016 chardonnay bottling from the Loubejac Vineyard is his youngest vine cuvée, as these vines are only eight years of age, but he has crafted a lovely bottle from them. The wine sees no new oak and after one year in older casks, spends three to four months finishing up in stainless steel prior to bottling. The wine offers up a bright and stylish bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of almond, beeswax and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely complex, with good backend acid lift, lovely focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. 2019-2025. **90+**.

2016 Chardonnay “Yamhill Vineyards”- Morgen Long (Yamhill-Carlton)

The Yamhill Vineyards bottling of chardonnay from Seth Long is made from a thirty year-old vineyard, that is planted on *franc de pied* rootstock and is sadly, now struggling against phylloxera and probably losing in the not too distant future. But, for now, good wine is hailing from this vineyard, as the 2016 Morgen Long version delivers a superb bouquet pear, apple, hazelnut, a touch of iodine, beeswax, a complex base of soil and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent mineral drive, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the vibrant finish. This really opens up nicely in decanter and will age long and gracefully. First class juice. 2019-2030+. **92.**

2016 Chardonnay “Eyrie Vineyard”- Morgen Long (Dundee Hills)

Jason Lett has just started selling the production from a small parcel of vines in the old Eyrie Vineyard to Seth Morgen Long, with these vines having been planted back in 1968 on a base of volcanic soils. Like all of Seth’s wines, the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts,

goes through full malo and is bottled after and *elevage* of fifteen months, with one year in natural barrels and the last three months in stainless steel tanks. There is only a single barrel of this beautiful wine, which was raised in a “one wine” French cask. The wine is a bit reductive out of the blocks and demands decanting to really blossom, but with twenty minutes of air, offers up a stunning nose of golden delicious apple, pear, almond blossoms, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a touch of iodine and a whisper of vanillin oak from the one year-old cask. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and gorgeously pure and refined, with a rock solid core, stunning mineral drive, bright acids and impeccable focus and grip on the long and very complex finish. This is a stellar bottle that will age long and gracefully. 2019-2035. **94.**



2016 Chardonnay “Sandi”- Morgen Long (Willamette Valley)

Seth Long’s “Sandi” bottling of chardonnay is named after his mother, who passed away in 2016. It is a blend of sixty percent Loubejac fruit, thirty percent Yamhill and ten percent Eyrie, and is his only 2016 chardonnay bottling that saw any new oak, as this was raised in forty-five percent new oak. It was bottled unfined and unfiltered and offers up a stunning and very refined bouquet of white peach, apple, acacia blossoms, orange zest, a fine base of soil, a touch of almond and a beautifully discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely girdle of acidity, fine focus and grip and a long, pure and vibrant finish. This is outstanding. 2019-2030+. **94.**

2016 Chardonnay “Hyland Vineyard”- Résonance (Louis Jadot) McMinnville

The 2016 Chardonnay from the “Hyland Vineyard” is the first vintage of this varietal to be made by Jacques Lardière under the Résonance label. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane and delivers a very promising, young bouquet of apple, pear, orange blossom, a touch of fresh nutmeg, hazelnut, a lovely base of soil tones and a deft base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, impressive nascent complexity and a long, vibrant and racy finish. This is an excellent wine in the making, with a chassis that will carry it effortlessly far into the future. It is approachable now, but I would tuck it away in the cellar for at least a few years and let that secondary layer of complexity emerge fully. 2021-2045. **92.**

2016 Chardonnay- Roserock (Drouhin Oregon) Eola-Amity Hills

The 2016 Chardonnay from the Drouhin family’s new Roserock estate is a lovely young wine in the making, with a fine structural chassis destined to carry it effortlessly well into the future. It is a pretty ripe wine at 13.9 percent alcohol, but fresh and pure, offering up a classy bouquet of pear, white peach, fresh almond, citrus peel, lovely soil tones and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite youthful in profile, with outstanding soil signature, a good core of fruit, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the pure and primary finish. This is a wine that really deserves some bottle age to start to show some of its secondary layers of complexity. It will age long and gracefully. 2021-2045+. **92.**

2016 Chardonnay “Bentrock”- Sandhi (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2016 Chardonnay “Bentrock” from Sandhi is an outstanding young wine. The bouquet is pure, refined and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, a hint of fresh pineapple, gently musky floral tones, hazelnut, a beautiful base of white soil and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core, lovely soil signature, bright, zesty acids and a long, complex and utterly suave finish. This is a beautiful bottle of chardonnay. 2019-2040. **93+.**

2016 Chardonnay “Mount Carmel”- Sandhi (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2016 Mount Carmel bottling of Sandhi is another simply outstanding chardonnay. Like the 2016 Bentrock, this comes in a bit riper than past vintages of the wine, as it is fully 13.5 percent octane, but it retains the same Sandhi sensibilities of balance, purity and minerality. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of pear, apple, spring flowers, a fine base of soil, a hint of butter and a lovely base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, a great girdle of acidity, gorgeous balance and a long, vibrant and classy finish. I love the backend tension in this wine, which really deserves a year or two in the cellar (at least!) to start to blossom and show some of its secondary layering of complexity. Exceptional juice. 2021-2040+. **93.**

2016 Chardonnay “Sanford and Benedict”- Sandhi (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2016 Sanford and Benedict bottling is the lowest octane of the 2016 single vineyard bottlings that I tasted from Sandhi, as this wine comes in this year at an even thirteen percent. The wine is excellent on both the nose and palate and fully does justice to this great *terroir*, as the bouquet delivers a fine aromatic constellation of apple, white peach, fresh almond, a complex base of white soil tones, fruit blossoms and a gentle touch of butter oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and gorgeously detailed, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and supremely elegant finish. As I was tasting this wine, I was thinking that it captures the aesthetics of Domaine Leflaive’s Pucelles coupled to a completely different *terroir*. It is a simply beautiful wine. 2019-2040. **94.**

2016 Chardonnay “The SV Link”- Leo Steen (Santa Cruz Mountains)

Leo Steen’s 2016 “The SV Link” bottling is a lovely bottle of low octane (12.5 percent), zesty and complex chardonnay. The bouquet is pure and beautifully expressive, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of apple, pear, hazelnut, lovely minerality, a touch of gentle leesiness, white flowers and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and beautifully defined by its underlying minerality, with tangy acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is excellent juice! 2019-2030. **92+**.

2016 Chardonnay “Russian River Valley”- Tongue Dancer Wines (Russian River)

The 2016 Chardonnay “Russian River Valley” bottling from Tongue Dancer Wines is a bit lower in octane than its pinot noirs, as this wine comes in at 14.1 percent alcohol. The wine is entirely barrel-fermented and raised in twenty-five percent new oak in this vintage. It offers up a ripe, youthful nose of pear, pineapple, a nice touch of soil, dried flowers, gentle spices and a deft touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and still quite tightly-knit, with a good core of fruit, good structure and grip and a long, slightly warm finish. This has not yet blossomed, but should do so in the next six months or so. It is a good wine, but does not have the precision of some of its compatriots at lower octane. 2019-2025. **88**.

2016 Chardonnay “Chapel Vineyard”- Trail Marker Wine Co. (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2016 Chardonnay “Chapel Vineyard” from Trail Marker Wine Company is nicely low octane and soil-driven in personality, coming in at 12.7 percent and reveling in the stony soil elements of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The bouquet offers up a complex constellation of apple, almond, gentle leesy tones, a hint of butter, dried flowers and a superb base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and soil-driven, with an excellent core of fruit, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and well-balanced finish. This is completely unadorned chardonnay and is very impressive in its nobly rustic style- the kind of chardonnay a yeoman farmer homesteading on the eastern Colorado planes in the 1870s would have heartily approved! 2018-2028. **91**.

2016 Chardonnay “Manchester Ridge Vyd.”- Trail Marker Wine Co. (Mendocino Ridge)

The 2016 Chardonnay “Manchester Ridge Vineyard” bottling from Trail Marker Wine Company is a nicely low octane and pure example of this varietal, coming in at 12.7 percent and offering up a complex nose of peach, pear, salty soil tones, a touch of raw almond, white flowers and a bit of paraffin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven, with bright acids, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. Stylistically, this is a lot like a top notch Mâconnais wine, but with different *terroir* and more depth at the core. Good juice. 2019-2029. **89+**.

2015 Chardonnay “Rutherford”- El Molino Winery (St. Helena)

El Molino’s 2015 chardonnay is a whisper less ripe than the 2015 version, tipping the scales at 14.4 percent, but seems decidedly cooler in aromatic and flavor profile. The bouquet shows lovely detailing in its blossoming nose of pear, peach, a touch of tangerine, gentle notes of beeswax, a very refined base of soil, dried flowers and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and classy, with a lovely core, good soil signature, bright acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This carries its alcohol so much better than the 2016 version and it seems like there is more of a gap in octane than the one-tenth of one percent listed. This is El Molino chardonnay as I have always remembered it- outstanding! 2019-2035. **92**.

2015 Chardonnay “Visdom”- Johan Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2015 Visdom chardonnay from Johan Vineyards is pretty ripe by their standards, coming in at 13.2 percent octane, but this was a torrid summer in Oregon. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised in thirty percent new oak for eighteen months prior to bottling. The team at Johan Vineyards bottles this wine unfiltered and allows a whisper of the fine lees into each bottle, to continue to protect the wine from oxidation, so the wine is a tad cloudy as a result. But, it is superb on the nose, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, fresh almond, a beautiful base of soil tones, vanillin oak and a nice touch of leesiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, excellent transparency, lovely balance and an excellent girdle of acidity to carry it far into the future. A superb bottle of chardonnay. 2019-2035+. **92+**.

2014 Chardonnay “Rutherford”- El Molino Winery (St. Helena)

The 2014 Chardonnay “Rutherford” from El Molino is also plenty ripe, coming in listed at 14.6 percent octane, and unlike the beautiful 2015 version, this wine too seems a bit muddled aromatically from its level of ripeness. The bouquet has almost a stewed fruit aspect to its blend of cooked pineapple, apple, dried flowers, a bit of soil, coriander seed, citrus peel and a discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and surprisingly, a bit more precise than the nose suggests, with a good core of fruit, sound acids and a long, chunky and pretty well-balanced finish. This is okay and is not hot on the backend, but is pretty four-square by the high standards of El Molino chardonnay. Why such high octane? 2019-2025. **87**.

1995 Chardonnay “Cuvée D”- Kalin Cellars (Sonoma County)

The 1995 Chardonnay “Cuvée D” from Terry and Frances Leighton’s Kalin Cellars is the long-awaited ’95 Dutton Ranch bottling, where the couple has not (to my knowledge) been buying fruit from for many years, and I believe that this is the last Dutton Ranch bottling from Kalin in the winery’s extensive cellars. The wine is fully into its apogee at twenty-four years of age, showing a lovely golden color and a deep and complex bouquet of tangerine, fresh apricot, salty minerality, hazelnut, a touch of butter, dried flowers, citrus zest and a lovely base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with excellent focus and grip, a deep core and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a ripe chardonnay, coming in at 13.5 percent octane, but it is pure and in perfect harmony today. 2019-2030+. **92**.

Rosé

2017 Rosé of Pinot Noir- Franny Beck Wines (Rickreall)

The 2017 Rosé of Pinot Noir from Franny Beck Wines is a lovely bottle of rosé, offering up a youthful bouquet of melon, strawberries, dried flowers, a touch of orange peel and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and succulent, with a good core, just a wisp of residual sweetness, good acids and fine length and grip. Despite this wine not being bone dry, it is definitely built for the table and really would be lovely with salmon in particular. Good juice. 2019-2023. **89**.



Gamay, Cabernet Franc and Loire-Styled Blends

2017 Gamay Noir “Lutte”- Division Wine Company (Willamette Valley)

The 2017 Gamay Noir “Lutte” from Division Wine Company is a beautifully aromatic middleweight, coming in at a cool 12.4 percent octane and offering up a vibrant nose of cranberries, cherries, vinesmoke, a touch of pepper, a good base of soil and a dollop of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, complex and gently weedy finish. This is marvelously true and at peace with its varietal character, like a top flight Cru Beaujolais. Lovely juice. 2019-2025. **89.**

2017 Gamay Noir “Cru” Methven Family Vineyard- Division Wine Co. (Eola-Amity Hills)

Division’s 2017 Gamay Noir “Cru” bottling from Methven Family Vineyard is just a whisper riper than their Lutte cuvée, coming in at 12.6 percent alcohol and offering up a tad more precision on both the nose and palate, from its single vineyard origin (rather than the blended Lutte). The bouquet jumps from the glass in a lovely blend of cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, a touch of espresso and a superb base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with excellent acids, modest tannins, a very good core of fruit and a long, bouncy and very well-balanced finish. This is excellent. 2019-2030. **91.**

2017 Gamay Noir “Renardière” Redford-Wetle Vyd.- Division W. C. (Eola-Amity Hills)

The Gamay Noir “Renardière” from the Redford-Wetle Vineyard is Division Wine Company’s most refined and aromatically high-toned bottling of this varietal in 2017. Like the 2017 Lutte cuvée, this is nicely low octane at 12.4 percent and offers up a brightly red fruity nose

of strawberries, cranberries, violets, complex soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs and a hint of blood orange in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and still fairly primary, with a good core, a lovely girdle of acidity, a bit of backend tannin and a long, youthful and discreetly weedy finish. This is certainly approachable today (and all too easy to drink), but it is still a puppy and significantly more complexity will emerge on both the nose and palate if it is given a couple of years in the cellar to properly blossom. 2021-2030+. **91+**.

2017 Cascadia- Franchere Wine Company (Willamette Valley)

This is not really a “Loire-inspired blend”, but I did not really know where to slot it in the article. The wine is a blend of ninety percent Pinot noir (fifty percent whole clusters, forty percent destemmed), coupled with five percent Gamay, four percent Grüner Veltliner and one percent Syrah. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel tanks for seven months and comes in at a cool 12.3 percent octane. The 2017 Cascadia offers up a bright and red fruity nose of cherries, pomegranate, a bit of cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, fresh herb tones, pepper and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and still a bit marked by its youthful stems, with good intensity of flavor and transparency, modest tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. I really like what the whole clusters bring to this wine, which leaves it just a touch herbaceous today, but which will morph to exotic spice tones with just a bit of bottle age. This is easy to drink already, but I would tuck it away in the cellar for a year or two and let the herbs change to spices and the charm really emerge here. 2020-2030+. **90**.

2016 Cabernet Franc “Ascona Vineyard”- Leo Steen (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2016 Cabernet Franc bottling from the Ascona Vineyard from Leo Steen is an excellent wine and the spitting image of Chinon. The wine comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of tree bark, cigar wrapper, a nice touch of spice elements, lovely soil signature and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and intensely flavored, with outstanding focus and grip, moderate, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is just terrific and if you are a fan of the great red wines of the Central Loire Valley, this outstanding wine should most emphatically be on your radar! 2023-2050+. **93**.

Off the Beaten Path Varietals and Blends

2016 Vicis “Momtazi Vineyard” Red- Day Wines (McMinnville)

The 2016 Vicis cuvée from Brianne Day all hails from fruit purchased from the biodynamically farmed Momtazi Vineyard in McMinnville, but the *cépages* is a bit out of the ordinary, as this wine is composed of a blend of sixty-seven percent pinot noir, seventeen percent pinot blanc and sixteen percent pinot gris. Brianne’s goal was to make a lighter, fresher red than straight pinot noir, so she co-fermented the three varieties and then aged the wine ten months in older oak casks prior to bottling. The wine offers up a bright and red fruity bouquet of cherries, strawberries, vinesmoke, a lovely touch of brown spice, excellent soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bouncy and intensely flavored, with a nice touch of pinot noir sappiness at the core, excellent mineral drive and a moderately tannic and well-balanced finish. This is a very fine bottle that is quite approachable today, but will not disappoint if given a few years in the cellar to further soften up the backend tannins, as despite one-third of this blend being white wine grapes (if pinot gris is really a white wine grape...), this has a nice chassis of structure. Good juice. 2021-2040+. **90**.

2015 TNT “Layne Vineyard” Red- Day Wines (Applegate Valley)

The 2015 TNT “Layne Vineyard” Red from Day Wines is made entirely from the Tannat grape, which one seldom encounters in the US. This vineyard was originally planted in 1975 and budded over to Tannat in 2009; it is a high elevation and cool vineyard and the 2015 TNT is pretty remarkable to have made it to fully thirteen percent octane. The wine includes twenty-five percent whole clusters and is raised in older oak casks. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a ripe and classic nose of black cherries, cassis, grilled venison, espresso, cigar ash and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and impressively light on its feet, with excellent soil signature, a fine core of fruit and a long, ripely tannic and nicely tangy finish. This is good juice which is eminently drinkable today, but will be even more interesting with a bit of bottle age to allow the tannins to soften up a bit. 2022-2045+. **89.**

2015 Blaufränkisch- Johan Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2015 Blaufränkisch from Johan Vineyards is an outstanding wine that clearly benefitted from the cooling ocean breezes that flow in from the Van Duzer Corridor each evening, as this wine comes in at 13.2 percent octane in the torrid summer of 2015. The grapes were entirely destemmed for this vintage and the cap is punched down by foot, prior to being racked to older French barrels for a bit more than a year and a half of *elevage* prior to bottling. The wine delivers a lovely and precise bouquet of sweet dark berries, black plums, chicory, beautiful soil tones, a hint of tree bark, bitter chocolate, fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully tangy for a 2015, with a lovely core of fruit, outstanding soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a dynamite wine that deserves some time in the cellar to really blossom, though it is already pretty easy to drink and one will understand if gratification cannot be deferred! But, for my bottles, I would salt it away for five to seven years and really let the magic unfold, as this is going to be dynamite wine! 2025-2055. **92.**

Zinfandel

2015 Zinfandel “Bacigalupi Vineyard”- Gracianna (Russian River Valley)

Gracianna’s 2015 Zinfandel from the Bacigalupi Vineyard is a big boy, coming in at a hefty 15.8 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a jammy and very ripe nose of strawberry *confiture*, spice tones, a nice touch of soil, dill and chocolate-covered raisins. On the palate the wine is big, full-bodied and surprisingly well balanced for such a high level of alcohol, with a chocolaty attack, a good core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and fairly warm finish. This wine really carries its octane pretty well and is not a bad drink for those that can handle that level of alcohol. I am quite surprised! 2019-2025+? **88.**

1970 Zinfandel “Napa Mountain”- Mayacamas Vineyards (Mount Veeder)

My experience with Bob Travers’ zinfandel bottlings is very meager, compared to his cabernets, so I really did not know what to expect with his 1970 Napa Mountain Zinfandel. I found this single, lonely bottled at an auction and thought I might as well give it a try, as it is such a great vintage. The alcohol here at 13.5 percent was markedly below the 1973 bottling of fifteen percent, which was the only other technically “dry” Mayacamas zin I had tasted from Bob’s era. After the wine was delivered, I waited more than a year to let it settle in from travel (as it had come from California) before finding a proper occasion to open the wine. It was truly brilliant and far exceeded even my wildest hopes. The bouquet is deep, pure and very complex, soaring from the glass in a blaze of raspberries, red currants, oodles of exotic spice tones, a

gorgeous base of soil, a bit of old cabernet-like petroleum jelly and a lovely topnote of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stunningly transparent, with a fine core of fruit, still good, tangy acids, a whisper of backend tannin still persisting and stunning length and grip on the impeccably balanced, complex and vibrant finish. I wonder how this wine was in its relative youth, but would guess that it was pretty tannic and just packed with fruit and probably needed more than a decade to start to really soften up enough to drink. Today, it is at its apogee, but with its tangy acids and superb balance, I would expect it is still good for several decades into the future! A brilliant wine. 2019-2040+. **94.**



Halcón Vineyards was a new producer to me and I was very, very impressed! A superb pinot and two great syrahs!

Petite Sirah, Syrah and Rhône Blends

2016 Syrah “Havlin Vineyard”- Franchere Wine Company (Van Duzer Corridor)

Franchere’s 2016 Syrah from the Havlin Vineyard is beautifully low octane in this vintage, tipping the scales at a discreet 12.3 percent alcohol, but that is the beauty of the cooling evening air that comes in over the Van Duzer during the growing season. The wine is fermented solely with indigenous yeasts and included just over a quarter whole clusters in this vintage, prior to being raised in older French barrels for twenty-four months. The wine delivers a classic bouquet of pepper, black raspberries, cassis, grilled meats, a touch of black olive, lovely soil tones and a bit of spiciness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully soil-driven, with a good core, ripe, nicely-integrated tannins and

excellent length and grip on the complex and tangy finish. This is a puppy and really should be properly cellared for at least a few years to let its secondary layers emerge, but it is so well balanced out of the blocks that it is going to be very, very tempting to drink the wine in its youth! Great juice. 2024-2055. **92+**.

2016 Syrah “Alturas”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2016 Syrah “Alturas” from Halcón Vineyards includes four percent viognier, which was co-fermented with the syrah. The wine utilized fifty percent whole clusters and was raised in fifteen percent new oak (one new five hundred liter puncheon amongst the older barrels). The wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane and is outstanding on the nose, soaring from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, black olive, superb soil tones and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and soil-driven, with excellent mid-palate depth, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced young finish. This is quite top flight Saint Joseph-like in style and is going to be outstanding. At \$32 per bottle, it is a tremendous value! 2025-2055+. **92.**

2016 Syrah “Elevación”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

Halcón Vineyards’ 2016 “Elevación” Syrah is the most limited wine in their lineup, as there is only a single, five hundred liter puncheon produced of this superb wine. It was made entirely with whole clusters and, like all of the estate’s wines, entirely with indigenous yeasts. The wine is a tad cooler than the Alturas, tipping the scales at a very civilized 13.2 percent and offering up a beautifully complex bouquet of dark berries, black olive, pepper, roasted game, lovely spice tones, a complex base of soil and just a bit of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more elegant structurally than the excellent Alturas Syrah, with a fine core of fruit, superb soil signature, ripe seamless tannins and a very long, complex and impressively refined finish. If the above is Saint Joseph-like, this is the Hermitage of the Yorkville Highlands. Great juice- make every effort to find a few bottles, as you most emphatically will not be disappointed! 2026-2060. **94.**

2016 Esquisto- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2016 Esquisto form Halcón Vineyards is a Rhône-styled blend of seventy percent grenache, twenty percent mourvèdre and ten percent syrah. The 2016 version included thirty percent whole clusters and was raised in older French puncheons and comes in at 14.1 percent alcohol. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic Châteauneuf-like mix of raspberries, fruitcake, bonfire, a bit of olive, pepper, smoked meats and autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is robust, full and chewy, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature and a long, tannic and well-balanced finish. This has plenty of structure, but also plenty of stuffing to stand up to it, and this will be a fine bottle when it is ready to drink. 2026-2055. **89+**.

2016 Petite Sirah “Tierra”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2016 Petite Sirah “Tierra” from Halcón Vineyards included fifty percent whole clusters this year and was raised entirely in older French oak. The wine comes in at 14.1 percent octane and offers up a complex and peppery nose of blackberries, cassis, woodsmoke, plenty of pepper, hung game, cedar and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with broad shoulders, ripe tannins and a long, peppery and very promising young finish. This is quite structured out of the blocks, but it has excellent potential and only needs some time in the cellar to blossom. 2024-2050. **90.**

2016 Hock & Deuce “Mae’s Vineyard” - Day Wines (Applegate Valley)

Brianne Day’s 2016 Hock & Deuce from the Mae’s Vineyard is a blend of eighty-five percent syrah and fifteen percent viognier, with the wine coming in at a very civilized octane of

12.75 percent this year. The wine is still quite youthful and needs a bit of aeration to blossom aromatically, but once it does, it offers up a fine bouquet of dark berries, bonfire, smoked meats, lavender, a fine base of soil tones, chicory, just a whisper of cedar and a graceful topnote of spices. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very soil-driven in personality, with fine depth at the core, moderate, seamless tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, nascently complex and very classy finish. This is outstanding wine- just give it some time alone in the cellar! 2023-2055. **91+**.

2015 Syrah “Gamine” Mae’s Vineyard - Division Wine Company (Applegate Valley)

The Division Wine Company 2015 Syrah “Gamine” bottling from Mae’s Vineyard is a lovely young wine in the making. The wine comes in at a ripe, but well-measured 13.5 percent octane and offers up a pure and already quite complex bouquet of cassis, black olive, pepper, a hint of chocolate, hung game, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and soil-driven finish. This is outstanding syrah! 2024-2055+. **92+**.



Pinot Noir

2017 Pinot Noir “Anderson Valley”- Bravium Wines (Mendocino County)

The 2017 Anderson Valley bottling of pinot noir from Bravium is a bit riper than the 2016 version, with this vintage tipping the scales at 13.5 percent octane. The wine offers up lovely transparency in its bouquet of black cherries, beetroot, very pretty spice tones, espresso, dark soil tones, fresh herbs and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, young and tangy, with a full-bodied format, plenty of ripe fruit down in the core, very good soil signature and a long, ripely tannic and very well-balanced finish. This needs some time to blossom, as today it is still quite primary in personality. But, there are good things waiting in the wings here. 2022-2050. **89+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Wiley Vineyard”- Bravium Wines (Anderson Valley)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Wiley Vineyard” from Derek Rohlffs at Bravium is nicely low octane, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up admirable purity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a red fruity and youthful blend of cherries, raspberries, a hint of beetroot, mustard seed, fresh thyme, gorgeous soil tones, cedar and a hint of the cola tones to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is bright, detailed and tangy, with a full-bodied and youthful format, a good core, lovely transparency and a long, moderately tannic and bouncy finish. This is still a young wine and has a nice girdle of acidity to carry it far into the future, but it deserves some time in the cellar to properly blossom. It is going to be excellent. 2025-2055. **91+**.

2017 Vin de Days Rouge- Day Wines (Dundee Hills)

The 2017 Vin de Days Rouge from Brianne Day really does not belong here, as though it is a blend of ninety-four percent pinot noir and three percent each of gamay and cabernet franc, it is made as an easy-going quaffer for early drinking and is not as ambitious as Brianne’s excellent pinot noir bottlings. But, here it is. The 2017 version is a tad young and reductive when first opened and needs a bit of time to pull itself together, but once it blossoms, it is lovely, offering up scents of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, lovey herb tones (mostly thyme and coriander seed), a nice touch of soil and a bit of roasted gamebird in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bouncy, with fine transparency, modest tannins and a long, tangy and ripe finish. This comes in at a surprising 13.5 percent octane and is nicely assertive on the palate, though impeccably balanced. I was anticipating a wine that was a bit more discreet on the palate, but this is most delightfully no wallflower! 2019-2029. **89**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley” Un- Division Wine Co. (Willamette Valley)

The 2017 Willamette Valley pinot noir from Kate Norris and Thomas Monroe at Division is outstanding. It is a blend of several top vineyards and comes in at a fairly ripe 13.7 percent octane, but carries its alcohol fairly well. The sappy nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of dark chocolate, fine soil tones, violets and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and long, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the gently warm finish. This is just a touch warm for my palate, but it is nicely balanced for its octane level and does not lack for precision or soil signature. 2019-2035. **88**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Eola Springs Vineyard” Deux- Division Wine Co. (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Eola Springs Vineyard” from Division Wine Company is a superb bottle in the making. The wine comes in at 13.8 percent octane and offers up a beautifully perfumed and refined bouquet of plums, black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of cocoa powder, violets, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme and a discreet base of cedary oak. On the palate

the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced young finish. This is going to be first class pinot noir with a few years' worth of cellaring! Very impressive. 2023-2055+. **92+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Westside Reserve”- Gracianna (Russian River Valley)

The 2017 “Westside Reserve” Pinot Noir from Gracianna hails from the Bacigalupi Vineyard and comes in listed at a hefty 14.8 percent octane. On the nose the wine carries its ripeness very well and offers up a nice signature of soil to go along with scents of cherries, beetroot, mustard seed, woodsmoke and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and not as precise as on the nose, with a jammy palate impression, good focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, gently warm finish. This would need to be a full point lower in alcohol for me to drink it with pleasure, but there are some really good qualities here in its riper guise, and clearly, with less octane, this could be a far more interesting bottle. If your tolerance to higher alcohol levels is better than mine, add five points to the score, as there is some complexity here. 2019-2030. **86.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Sonoma Coast”- Kutch Vineyards (Sonoma)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Sonoma Coast” bottling from Jamie Kutch comes in at a cool and vibrant 12.5 percent octane and included one hundred percent whole clusters this year. The grapes were foot-trodden in this vintage and the wine spent eleven months in cask, with none of the barrels being new. The bouquet offers up a beautifully expressive and red fruity blend of red and black cherries, strawberries, beetroot, lovely Sonoma herb tones, incipient notes of cola, a fine base of soil and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still youthfully structured, with a superb core, tangy acids, excellent grip and fine soil signature on the long, moderately tannic and nascently complex finish. This is certainly approachable out of the blocks, but is really built for the cellar and deserves at least a handful of years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to emerge. Fine juice. 2022-2050. **92.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Bohan Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The Bohan Vineyard lies three miles in from the ocean and was planted in 1972, making these some of the oldest pinot vines in California. Jamie Kutch’s 2017 version is a lovely middleweight in the making, tipping the scales at an even twelve percent and seeing no new oak during its year of *elevage*. It is one hundred percent whole clusters this year. The wine offers up a lovely, red fruity nose of cherries, beetroot, blood orange, a fine base of soil, a dollop of fresh thyme and a lovely mix of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and beautifully balanced, with a good core, excellent transparency, a bit of ripe tannin and a long, nascently complex and focused finish. This is more closed down on the palate than the detailed nose suggests, so give the wine a bit of time in the cellar to blossom properly. It is going to be outstanding. 2024-2055+. **93+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Bohan Vineyard” Graveyard Block- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The Graveyard Block in Bohan Vineyard is the stoniest section of the vineyard and Jamie Kutch decided to bottle this section on its own in 2017. Given the structural chassis from the stony soils, this is the only 2017 Kutch pinot that was destemmed; it comes in at 12.9 percent octane, so a touch riper than the straight Bohan bottling. The Graveyard Block offers up a more black fruity blend than its vineyard contemporary, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of pomegranate, *pigeon*, complex soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh nutmeg, a hint of the cola to come and a very discreet dollop of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and nicely structured, with a full-bodied format, a superb

core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and very well-balanced finish. A superb wine, but give it some bottle age to blossom. 2025-2055+. **94+**.



2017 Pinot Noir “Falstaff Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

Jamie Kutch’s 2017 Falstaff Vineyard bottling of pinot noir is a gorgeous wine in the making and easily the most black fruity of his outstanding lineup of 2017s. The wine was made with one hundred percent whole clusters, foot-trodden and raised exclusively in older barrels, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a superb nose of black cherries, plums, bitter chocolate, gamebird, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a lovely touch of sweet stems. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and seamlessly structured, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, fine-grained tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. Like the MacDougall Ranch bottling, this is structurally a bit more accessible out of the blocks than the slightly lower octane Bohan and Signal Ridge bottlings, but it too is really crafted for a long life in bottle and it will be borderline criminal to open a bottle of this beautiful wine until it is at least seven or eight years old. It will be a lot better at age twenty! 2024-2055+. **94**.

2017 Pinot Noir “MacDougall Ranch”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

I really like the 2017 MacDougall Ranch from Kutch Wines, and of these excellent single vineyard bottlings, this is likely to offer the most early appeal, though it is really built for the cellar. It is a touch riper than the Bohan or Signal Ridge bottlings, coming in at thirteen percent

octane, but still beautifully precise and structured with a sophisticated chassis of tannin and acidity. The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of gamebird, lovely soil elements, woodsmoke, a hint of mustard seed and blossoming spice tones from the one hundred percent whole clusters. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovely mineral drive, ripe, fine-grained tannins, good acids and truly exceptional length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This reminds me a bit of the old Hirsch Vineyard bottlings from Burt and Ed at Williams-Selyem back in their early days. Fine, fine juice. 2023- 2055+. **94.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Signal Ridge Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Mendocino Ridge)

The 2017 Signal Ridge Vineyard pinot noir from Jamie Kutch is a lovely wine in the making. It is entirely whole clusters this year and comes in at a svelte twelve percent octane; it was raised entirely in older casks. The bouquet is bright and youthfully complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, red plums, a touch of Mendocino herb tones (as well as a touch of Chambolle-like mustard seed), lovely, sweet stem elements, dark soil tones and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, intensely flavored and youthfully tight-knit, with a sappy core, a bit of adolescent pepperiness, moderate tannins and a very long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This is tightly-wrapped in its structural elements right now and will demand a bit of bottle age to blossom, but it will be outstanding in the fullness of time. Tackling the wine right now catches it with the whole clusters in ascendancy and leaving a youthful weediness that will deter some tasters, but this characteristic is going to turn to cinnamon-like spice tones with proper bottle age and a bit of patience will be richly rewarded. 2025-2065+. **92+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Dundee Hills”- Arterberry Maresh (Dundee Hills)

The 2016 “Dundee Hills” bottling of pinot noir from Jim Maresh is a lovely wine, as he picked early in the heat of 2016 and managed to craft a wine at a lovely 12.8 percent octane. This is a blend of fruit from the Weber, Maresh, Anderson Family and Dux Vineyards. The wine offers up a lovely nose of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, incipient cola, a touch of cedary oak and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a good, youthful structure, fine depth at the core and a long, ripely tannic and still fairly primary finish. This needs at least five to six years in the cellar to soften up and start to blossom, but it is going to be a very good bottle in due course, and at \$28 a bottle, it is a terrific value! 2024-2055. **90.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Maresh Vineyard”- Arterberry Maresh (Dundee Hills)

The 2016 “Maresh Vineyard” bottling of pinot noir from Arterberry Maresh comes in at a lovely 12.8 percent octane. The wine is a touch tightly-knit when first poured, but with a bit of time in the decanter it blossoms nicely to offer up a black fruity nose of dark black cherries, pomegranate, bitter chocolate, a complex base of dark soil, woodsmoke and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with fine soil signature, excellent focus and balance, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthful and very promising finish. This is going to be excellent and will only need a couple of years in the cellar to start to blossom properly. 2022-2050. **92.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Old Vines”- Arterberry Maresh (Dundee Hills)

The “Old Vines” bottling from Jim Maresh hails from Weber and Maresh Vineyards’ fruit, with the latter having been planted in 1970 and the former having gone into the ground in 1974, so these are venerable vines for Oregon. The wine is aged in eight percent new oak and the

2016 version again comes in at a very civilized 12.8 percent octane. The wine delivers an excellent bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, a hint of licorice, gamebird, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids, excellent soil signature and a long, tangy and youthfully complex finish. This is first class pinot in the making. 2024-2065. **92+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Anderson Valley”- Bravium Wines (Mendocino County)

The 2016 Anderson Valley bottling of pinot noir from Bravium has opened up beautifully since I last tasted it in the early summer of 2018. The wine is bright, vibrant and complex on the nose, jumping from the glass in a precise blend of cherries, beetroot, a touch of red plum, a fine base of soil, gentle cola notes, sweet herb tones and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and bouncy, with a lovely touch of sappiness at the core, impressive soil signature, fine focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic and wide open finish of complexity and grace. A classic Mendocino pinot noir that comes in at a very civilized 12.9 percent octane and really delivers. This is a terrific value! 2019-2040. **91**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Momtazi Vineyard”- Day Wines (McMinnville)

Brianne Day’s 2016 Pinot Noir from the Momtazi Vineyard is a fine young wine in the making. The wine is still quite young and structured, but has lovely depth and ripeness to burst out in due course. The nose offers up a promising blend of black cherries, dark berries, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a bit of gamebird, fresh thyme, a discreet base of vanillin oak and a hint of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and sports excellent mid-palate depth, with lovely soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, primary and vibrant finish. This is nicely structured and still a puppy and needs to be tucked away in the cellar for a handful of years, but there is excellent potential here and patience will be richly rewarded. 2025-2055+. **92+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Armstrong Vineyard” Cinq- Division Wine Co. (Ribbon Ridge)

Division Wine Company’s 2016 Pinot Noir “Armstrong Vineyard” is another outstanding example of the vintage. The wine offers up a beautifully precise bouquet of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, gamebird, complex soil tones, a touch of both fresh thyme and clove, woodsmoke, a dollop of anise and a lovely framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very refined in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, fine transparency, suave tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it is already very easy to drink, but it is really a young wine and deserves some time in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Fine juice. 2023-2055. **93**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Temperance Hill Vineyard” Trois- Division Wine Co. (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2016 Temperance Hill Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Division Wine Company is a fine bottle in the making, but it is presently a bit reduced and one needs to decant it for half an hour if intending to drink it now. With air, the wine blossoms very nicely to offer up a pure and black fruity nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, incipient notes of cola, a fine base of soil, a very discreet base of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and beautifully balanced, with a good foundation of ripe, well-integrated tannins, fine depth at the core and a long, complex and soil-driven finish. This is going to be excellent! 2024-2055. **92**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Bloom’s Field”- Domaine de la Côte (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2016 Bloom’s Field single vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Domaine de la Côte is an excellent wine, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of red and black cherries, lavender, woodsmoke, gamebird, a complex base of soil tones and a deft touch of smoky new oak. On the

palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex finish. This is a superb bottle that is approachable today, but truly deserves some extended cellaring. 2023-2055+. **93.**



2016 Pinot Noir “la Côte”- Domaine de la Côte (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2016 Pinot Noir “la Côte” bottling from Domaine de la Côte is flat out gorgeous on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is pure, nascently complex and beautifully precise, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, red plums, a touch of beetroot, cocoa powder, a lovely base of soil, sweet stems, a dollop of cedary new oak and a delicate topnote of fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is elegant, refined and full-bodied, with lovely nascent complexity, a good, sappy core, excellent transparency, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and youthful finish. This is impeccably balanced and very easy to drink in its primary state, but there is so much more complexity to come here with bottle age that it is crazy not to leave it alone in the cellar for at least a half dozen years and let the magic fully emerge. 2025-2055+. **94.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Memorious”- Domaine de la Côte (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2016 Memorious pinot noir is the most youthful of these three bottlings from Domaine de la Côte, with the wine more black fruity on the nose than the la Côte or Bloom’s Field cuvées. The bouquet holds out plenty of promise in its blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, bonfire, hung game, lavender, a lovely touch of cola, gentle new oak and a beautiful topnote of lavender. This wine gets some lovely red fruity elements as well on the nose as it

blossoms with air. On the palate the wine is deep, focused and very pure in personality, with a sappy core of black fruit, stellar soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a very, very long, nascently complex and refined finish. Like the 2016 la Côte bottling, this is so well balanced that it is very, very easy to drink today, but this is a puppy and should be cellared for many years, to let its full potential arrive and dazzle! 2025-2055+. **94+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Maresh Vineyard”- Kelley Fox Wines (Dundee Hills)

Kelley Fox’s 2016 Maresh Vineyard bottling of pinot comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and is a beautifully refined and nascently complex wine in the making. The bouquet offers up an elegant aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of lavender, gently savory elements, green tea, a superb base of soil, raw cocoa and a deft touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, excellent balance and grip, suave, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and vibrant finish. This is an absolutely beautiful wine in the making, and though it is very easy to drink today, it will be borderline criminal to start drinking this before it has had at least five to six years in the cellar. 2025-2060. **93+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Maresh Vyd” Star-of-Bethlehem Flower Block- Kelley Fox (Dundee Hills)

The Star-of-Bethlehem Flower Block was my favorite bottling of Kelley Fox’s beautiful lineup of 2015s, though I would not say that it is inherently better than any of her other bottlings, it just hits every sweet note in what I love stylistically. As readers may recall, this parcel was planted in 1991 on *Francs de Pieds* roots and is still personally farmed by Jim Maresh Sr. The 2016 version is a beautiful young wine, but a bit more reserved than the Red Barn Blocks. The bouquet offers up a complex constellation that still shows plenty of whole cluster influence in its blend of dark berries, cassis, a gorgeous base of soil, gamebird, sweet stem tones, raw cocoa, fresh marjoram, a hint of curry and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and full-bodied, with suave, seamless tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, poised, complex and utterly refined finish. A beautiful bottle. 2024-2060. **94**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Maresh Vineyard” Red Barn Blocks- Kelley Fox Wines (Dundee Hills)

The 2016 Red Barn Blocks bottling from the Maresh Vineyard is simply a beautiful young wine, coming in at an even thirteen percent octane, made entirely from whole clusters and raised without seeing any new wood. The wine offers up a beautifully refined bouquet of red and black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, beautiful Vosne-like spice tones, woodsmoke, gamebird and a great base of dark soil elements. On the palate the wine is pure, velvety and full-bodied, with absolutely stellar balance and grip, fine-grained tannins and a very long, very elegant and complex finish. This is a young wine, but it is already tempting to drink now, as it is seamless and flat out delicious! That said, it is still a puppy and should be tucked away in the cellar for at least seven to ten years and let it really reach its apogee, which is going to be stunning. 2026-2060. **94**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Momtazi Vineyard”- Kelley Fox Wines (McMinnville)

Kelley Fox’s 2016 vintage of pinot noir from the Momtazi Vineyard is a brilliant young bottle of wine. The wine delivers a very refined and promising aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, black plums, raw cocoa, a bit of bonfire, a gorgeous base of soil tones, a touch of roasted gamebird, lovely, ethereal spice elements, just a whisper of new oak and a bit of sweet stem influence in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured for the long haul, with a great core of black fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is a beautiful young wine that emphatically needs to be tucked away in the cellar for at least seven to ten years to allow it

to blossom properly, as it is a fairly powerful vintage and the wine will need time to hit its stride. But, once it does, it is going to be stunning! 2026-2060+. **93.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Momtazi Vineyard” Tir- Kelley Fox Wines (McMinnville)

The Tir bottling from the Momtazi Vineyard is a small parcel in the larger vineyard that was planted on *selection massale*, rather than the Dijon clones used in the rest of the vineyard, and Kelley first started bottling these vines on their own in the 2015 vintage. The 2016 version of Tir is a lovely young bottle, offering up a pure, sappy and quite black fruity nose of black raspberries, dark berries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of black tea, lovely herb tones (mostly lavender and thyme) and a touch of dried eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and a bit more structurally suave than the regular bottling from Momtazi this year, with a sappy core of black fruit, lovely focus and balance, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and classy finish. This is an excellent bottle in the making. 2025-2060+. **93+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Eola-Amity Hills”- Franchere (Willamette Valley)

The 2016 Eola-Amity Hills bottling of pinot noir from Mike Franchere comes in at 13.8 percent octane, as the 2016 *fin de saison* was very warm in Oregon and sugars climbed pretty briskly leading into harvest. The wine this year has a tiny bit of whole clusters (three percent), was fermented with indigenous yeasts and was raised for ten months in old casks. The wine is quite black fruity in personality on the nose, offering up a youthful blend of dark berries, black cherries, bitter chocolate, bonfire, dark soil tones, a nice hint of spice, balsam boughs and a discreet touch of cedar from the older casks. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the soil-driven and nascently complex finish. This takes a while in decanter to blossom, so be patient with it if you are inclined to drink it on the young side, but it is really built for the cellar and should be allowed to slumber for at least four or five years before drinking. Good juice. 2023-2050. **89.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Havlin Vineyard”- Franchere (Willamette Valley)

The Havlin Vineyard lies two miles west of Johan Vineyards in the Van Duzer Corridor, and may well be labeled as such, once the new AVA for the Van Duzer is approved this month. So, the label may change just a bit to reflect the new AVA in the next few months. This is right in the path of the cool ocean air that descends through the Van Duzer corridor, and temps here routinely drop ten degrees Fahrenheit each afternoon during the growing season. The 2016 from Mike Franchere includes ten percent whole clusters, was fermented solely with indigenous yeasts and raised for ten months, all in older French oak casks before bottling without fining or filtration. The wine offers up a fine and complex bouquet of red and black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, bonfire, dark soil tones, a nice touch of roasted meats, a hint of cedary wood and a lovely spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured out of the blocks, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, focused and gently chewy finish. Like all of Mike’s young wines, you have to give this some air to really see what it is about, but there is depth and promise here. Just let it hibernate for a few years! 2023-2050+. **90+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Armstrong Vineyard”- Franny Beck Wines (Ribbon Ridge)

Even though the Armstrong Vineyard is located in the slightly warmer microclimate of Ribbon Ridge, this is his lowest octane pinot noir in 2016, as it comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol. The wine is beautifully light in color and offers up a very pretty, red fruity nose of cherries, strawberries, allspice, woodsmoke, gamebird, a complex base of soil and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and full, with a gorgeous portrait

of its underlying soil, nicely integrated tannins, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long, complex and youthful finish. This is a superb bottle that is very easy to drink today, particularly with thirty minutes in decanter, but it will be even better with some cellar time. 2019-2055. **92.**

2016 Pinot Noir “la Chênaie Vineyard”- Franny Beck Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2016 la Chênaie Vineyard bottling from Michael Sterling is a touch riper than the Armstrong, coming in at 13.6 percent octane, but sharing the same precision and purity on the nose and palate. The bouquet is a bit more black fruity than the above, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebird, raw cocoa, a touch of fresh thyme, dark soil tones and a whisper of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature and a long, moderately tannic and vibrant finish. This is still marked a bit by its whole clusters on the youthful backend and will need some bottle age, for those who do not like the youthful flavor of stems, but structurally, it is accessible already and if whole clusters do not bother you, it is already quite tasty. That said, its best days are still ahead of it and I would choose to bury it in the cellar for five to seven years (even though I like whole clusters), as it is going to age beautifully. 2025-2055+. **92+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Johan Vineyards”- Franny Beck Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2016 Johan Vineyards pinot from Franny Beck is one of the ripest wines I have yet seen from this cool vineyard, as it comes in at 13.7 percent octane, but the summer of 2016 was a scorcher in Oregon. The wine is absolutely stunning on the nose, soaring from the glass in a very complex blend of red and black plums, cherries, cocoa powder, a gorgeous base of soil, a touch of sweet stems, gamebird, cloves, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with great transparency, a lovely core of sappy fruit, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a great bottle in the making. 2025-0255+. **94.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Franny Beck Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

As I mentioned after my visit to Michael Sterling’s Franny Beck Vineyards back in the summer of 2017, his Willamette Valley bottling is not his entry level wine, but is a blend of his three single vineyard wines, merged to make a different interpretation of the vintage. The 2016 version is outstanding, offering up a pure and complex nose of red plums, black cherries, spice tones redolent of clove and nutmeg, a lovely base of soil, a bit of smoked meats, incipient notes of cola and a very discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is very transparent, focused and full-bodied, with a fine core, stellar soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, youthful and tangy finish. This is a superb bottle of pinot noir in the making, but it is a puppy and needs four to six years in the cellar to start to blossom. It is going to be lovely in the fullness of time. 2025-2050. **91+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Estate” Mercedes Riverblock Vineyard- Gracianna (Russian River)

Gracianna’s 2016 “Estate” pinot noir from Mercedes Riverblock Vineyard is happily the coolest of their pinots that I sampled for this article, as this wine comes in at a pretty civilized 13.5 percent octane. The bouquet is bright and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a nicely red fruity blend of strawberries, cherries, a touch of beetroot, Sonoma herb tones, a fine base of alluvial soil tones, a touch of cinnamon, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and nicely light on its feet, with good depth at the core, fine complexity and grip and a long, moderately tannic and well-balanced finish. This is not quite as precisely focused as top Russian River pinots from neighbors like Rod Berglund at Joseph Swan Vineyards, but there is certainly depth and complexity here and the wine should age quite nicely. 2022-2050. **88.**



The beautiful Momtazi Vineyard- recently in the news for trying to stop a marijuana farmer next door.

2016 Pinot Noir “Bearwallow Vineyard”- Halcón Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

Bearwallow Vineyard is the property that was brought to fame by Kevin Harvey and his team at Rhys Vineyards, and the 2016 version from Halcón Vineyards is very much worthy of this fine *terroir*. The wine comes in at a cool 12.7 percent octane, was fermented with thirty-five percent whole clusters and raised in twenty percent new oak. The bouquet here is excellent, offering up a youthful and beautifully transparent blend of cherries, red berries, incipient notes of *sous bois*, a touch of cinnamon, fresh thyme, complex soil tones and a gentle base of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins, excellent acids and lovely balance and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. The intensity of flavor here is simply outstanding. If you can imagine Domaine Dujac making wine from Anderson Valley fruit and using only twenty percent new oak, it might well taste like this superb bottle! 2022-2055+. **92+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Oppenlander Vineyard”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

Flowering was difficult in the Oppenlander Vineyard in 2016, so this wine was made from very low yields. It included thirty-five percent whole clusters, was fermented with native yeasts and raised in twenty percent new wood in this vintage. The wine is deep and beautifully sappy on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, a touch of lavender, lovely Mendocino herb tones, dark soil and a deft framing of cedary

oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully concentrated in the mid-palate, with ripe, seamless tannins, good acids and impressive length and grip on the complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is still a youthful wine and could do with a couple more years in the cellar to fully soak up its new wood and allow its complexity to blossom more completely, but in a pinch, it is already very easy to drink. Impressive juice. 2021-2050. **91+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Résonance (Louis Jadot)

The 2016 “Willamette Valley” of pinot noir from Louis Jadot’s Résonance project is made from a blend of estate grown fruit from the estate’s two vineyards, Découverte and Résonance Vineyards, as well as purchased fruit. The wine is aged in twenty percent new oak for thirteen months prior to bottling and the 2016 comes in at 13.5 percent octane. The wine offers up a fine nose of black cherries, black plums, raw cocoa, a fine base of soil, incipient notes of cola, woodsmoke and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with a good core of fruit, fine transparency, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and very well-balanced finish. This needs a bit of bottle age to properly blossom (it is a Jacques Lardière wine after all!), but will be excellent when it is ready to drink. 2023-2050. **91+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Santa Rita Hills”- Sandhi (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2016 Sandhi “Santa Rita Hills” pinot noir is pretty ripe for this winery, coming in at 13.5 percent octane, but still offering beautiful purity and vibrancy on both the nose and palate. The fruit for this bottling is predominantly from the Domaine de la Côte vineyard, augmented by a bit of tonnage from the Sanford and Benedict vineyard, so there is plenty of pedigree here. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a sophisticated blend of red and black cherries, red plums, raw cocoa, a beautifully complex base of soil, a touch of sweet herb tones, woodsmoke, discreet cedar and a bit of incipient cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, velvety on the attack and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy finish. This is still a young wine and shows a bit of youthful stems on the backend today, but those will turn to spice elements as the years roll by. Fine, fine juice. 2023-2055+. **92+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Sonoma Coast”- Tongue Dancer Wines (Sonoma Coast)

Tongue Dancer is made by James MacPhail, who started the small brand in the 2012 vintage. His Sonoma Coast bottling of pinot noir hails from a blend of three vineyards and comes in at a pretty generous 14.7 percent octane in this vintage. Thirty percent new oak is used for this bottling. The grapes are completely destemmed and the wine undergoes a five day “cold soak”, but still is nicely light in color and offers up an impressively pure nose of cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, a good base of soil, lovely spice tones, a touch of mustard seed, woodsmoke and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core of fruit, fine transparency and a bit of backend heat poking out on the long, complex and modestly tannic finish. I like everything about this wine but its alcohol level, which robs the wine of a bit of freshness and shows uncovered on the finish. But, even at 14.7 percent it is no bad and knock it down a point in octane and it would be excellent! 2019-2035. **87** (and add five points if this octane in pinot does not daunt you).

2016 Pinot Noir “Pinot de Ville”- Tongue Dancer Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The 2016 Pinot de Ville bottling from James MacPhail is a single vineyard wine from the Putnam Vineyard, located six miles in from the Pacific. The grapes are completely destemmed for this cuvée, given a five day “cold soak” and raised in thirty-five percent new oak for seventeen months prior to bottling. The 2016 Pinot de Ville is a tad lower in octane than the

winery's Sonoma Coast bottling, coming in at 14.5 percent and offering up a ripe and very stylish nose of plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, cola, gentle smokiness and a well done framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and gently hot on the backend, with a good core, quite lovely soil signature and a long, complex and modestly tannic finish. This carries its alcohol a bit better than the Sonoma Coast bottling and shows a fine touch with the winemaking, but it really needs to be a bit lower in octane to realize its full potential (which is substantial). Not bad at all for its ripeness, but this is pretty heady pinot. 2019-2035. **88.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Manchester Ridge Vineyard”- Trail Marker Wine Co. (Mendocino)

The 2016 Pinot Noir “Manchester Ridge Vineyard” from Trail Marker Wine Company is a decidedly low octane bottle, coming in at a cool 12.4 percent octane. The wine is nicely light in color and offers up a very pretty and red fruity nose of strawberries, cherries, cinnamon, vinesmoke, soil and fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and intensely flavored, with surprisingly good depth at the core, a bit of backend tannin and a long, tangy, gently weedy and promising finish. With its lower alcohol, this wine is only moderately ripe and will need a bit of bottle age to blossom completely, but I like its constituent components and think it will be quite tasty once the tannins have softened up a bit more. I do not usually say this, but just a tad more ripeness here would have worked even better for my palate! 2022-2045+. **89.**

2015 Pinot Noir- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

Domaine Drouhin's 2015 Pinot Noir is nicely measured in ripeness, particularly for the very warm summer of 2015, as it comes in at 14.1 percent and is quite pure on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy mix of cherries, red plums, pomegranate, beautiful soil tones, a hint of mustard seed, violets and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, lovely transparency and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and tangy finish. This is a top flight vintage of this bottling from Domaine Drouhin, and though it is approachable today, it will be so much better if given some time in the cellar to really blossom. 2023-2060. **92.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Laurène”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2015 Cuvée Laurène from Véronique Drouhin and the talented team at DDO is outstanding, offering up a better structural chassis for aging than the estate bottling. Readers will recall that the Cuvée Laurène is a barrel selection made in the cellars, with casks that seem particularly well built for long-term aging comprising this bottling. The 2015 version offers up a beautifully precise and nascently complex bouquet of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh thyme and a lovely framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with excellent soil signature, a fine core of fruit, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a very long, youthfully complex and promising finish. Whereas the 2015 estate bottling of pinot is approachable out of the blocks (though still destined for better things with bottle age), the 2015 Cuvée Laurène needs to be allowed a cool corner of the cellar for hibernation over the next decade before it is broached. To open bottles before then is simply to waste the outstanding potential of this excellent wine! 2025-2065+. **94.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Rutherford”- El Molino Winery (St. Helena)

The 2015 Pinot Noir “Rutherford” from El Molino is a fairly ripe wine, coming in listed at 14.4 percent octane, but the wine carries its alcohol just beautifully on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is complex and wide open today, jumping from the glass in an exotic blend of cherries, plums, cola, a touch of beetroot, fresh nutmeg, woodsmoke, pretty soil tones, a hint

of sandalwood and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent in personality, with a lovely core, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and lovely length and grip on the ripe, but complex finish. There is just a touch of backend heat here, but it is very discreet and the wine is really quite stylish and lovely. Perhaps at this octane level, I would regret drinking a whole bottle by myself in the morning, but there would be no regrets the night before, as it is delicious. Yes, I would like it a bit lower in octane, but (don't ask me how!) the wine works most impressively at this level. 2019-2040. **91+**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Bacigalupi Vineyard”- Gracianna (Russian River Valley)

The 2015 Pinot Noir “Bacigalupi Vineyard” from Gracianna is another quite ripe example of this varietal, coming in listed at 14.8 percent alcohol on the label. At five plus years of age, it is starting to get a touch stewy on both the nose and palate, but does carry its octane pretty well and is not overtly hot on the finish. The nose is complex, but not particularly fresh, as it offers up scents of black cherries, bonfire, damp herbs, hung game, cola and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and reasonably complex, with a surprisingly assertive slice of soil, a good core and fine length and grip on the ripe and gently tannic finish. As with all of the Gracianna wines that I tasted for this report, there is an admirable effort to keep the soil element involved in the wine and this is not a fruit bomb in style, but it is just too ripe for its own good. With lower octane, these could be really good pinots! 2019-2030. **87**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Estate”- Johan Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2015 Estate Vineyard pinot noir from Johan Vineyards comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane, was fermented with a bit more than forty percent whole clusters and was raised in thirty percent new oak in this vintage. The wine offers up a beautifully youthful bouquet of cherries, red berries, beet root, a fair bit of youthful sweet stem tones, a complex base of soil, a touch of mustard seed and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, tangy and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, moderate tannins and a very long, complex and youthful finish. This needs four or five years of bottle age to allow its stems to morph into the spice spectrum (unless one is not deterred by the more savory side of whole clusters), but it is going to be flat out stunning when it really starts to settle into its plateau of maturity. 2024-2055+. **93+**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Découverte Vineyard”- Résonance (Louis Jadot) Dundee Hills

The 2015 Pinot Noir “Découverte Vineyard” cuvée from Résonance is a pretty ripe wine, tipping the scales at a full fourteen percent alcohol, but this is from the warmer Dundee Hills. This is an estate vineyard, which is now farmed organically by Jacques Lardière and his team. The 2015 version was raised in fifty percent new wood and offers up a nascently complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a bit of gamebird, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a bit of fresh thyme and a refined base of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite promising, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and discreetly warm finish. I would love to see the octane level here just a touch lower, but this is the ripe 2015 vintage and the vineyard is in the warm section of the Dundee Hills, so one has to expect this personality in this vintage. The balance here is just fine for long-term aging and I do not think the octane will play a detrimental factor in this wine's evolution, but it would be nice to have seen this under fourteen percent. 2025-2055. **91**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Résonance Vineyard”- Résonance (Louis Jadot) Yamhill-Carlton

The thirteen *hectare* Résonance Vineyard was the first vines to be purchased by Louis Jadot when they conceived of this project. The pinot noir vines here were planted in 1981 on *franc de pied* rootstock and comprise eight *hectares* of the vineyard. I assume that this too was

raised in fifty percent new oak and the wine comes in a tad lower in octane than the Découverte Vineyard pinot in this vintage, as this tips the scales at 13.5 percent. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of red and black cherries, dark berries, lovely spice tones, raw cocoa, an excellent base of soil, gamebird, a hint of fresh nutmeg and a refined base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and tightly-knit, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent transparency, tangy acids and superb focus and grip on the long, impeccably balanced and complex finish. This is going to be outstanding. 2025-2060. **93.**



2015 Pinot Noir- Roserock (Eola-Amity Hills)

The Drouhin family's relatively Roserock vineyard, which is located in the cooler Van Duzer Corridor, has been exciting since the very first vintage, which was only the 2014. The follow-up 2015 "regular" bottling is another outstanding wine, as it offers up a classy nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, a touch of gamebird, dark soil tones, fresh thyme and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and excellent focus and grip on the ripe and very well-balanced finish. This comes in at the same 14.1 percent octane as the 2015 DDO Pinot, but is more black fruity in personality from the greater diurnal temperature swings here in the Van Duzer Corridor. This is going to be superb. 2024-2065. **92+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Zéphérine”- Roserock (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2015 Cuvée Zéphérine pinot noir from Roserock is outstanding, with its strength found in its stunning elegance and precision on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is youthful and still quite primary, but with a bit of coaxing, offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, raw cocoa, beautiful herb tones redolent of thyme and mustard seed, roasted *pigeon*, a great base of dark soil elements, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, transparent, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a lovely core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, ripe, seamless tannins, excellent mineral drive and a long, complex and vibrant finish. I love the intensity of flavor here, with such a lightness of step on the palate. This is going to be terrific! 2025-2065+. **94.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Rutherford”- El Molino Winery (St. Helena)

The 2014 vintage of pinot noir from El Molino is just a touch less ripe than its 2015 counterpart, as this wine comes in at 14.2 percent octane. The wine is a touch more black fruity than its follow-up vintage, as it offers up a lovely bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cola, woodsmoke, a bit of tea-smoked duck, lovely spice tones, a bit of soil and a gentle base of cedar. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven (particularly for its octane), with good intensity of flavor, impressive lightness of step, modest tannins and a long, balanced and tangy finish. This is good juice, though again, just a touch warm on the backend. 20102-2040+. **92.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Three Barrel”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

The 2014 “Three Barrel” pinot noir from Johan Vineyards is a beautiful wine in the making, offering up supreme early elegance in its 12.8 percent octane and soil-driven format. The refined nose gently wafts from the glass in a blend of strawberries, cherries, cocoa powder, complex soil tones, fresh thyme, cardamom, gamebird. woodsmoke and a touch of beetroot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with tangy acids, modest tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. The acids here are a touch volatile when first opened, but give it a quarter hour in the decanter and everything settles in seamlessly and the wine drinks with distinction. Fine juice. 2019-2045+. **92.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Nils Reserve”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

Johan Vineyards’ 2014 Nils Reserve bottling of pinot noir is flat out beautiful on the nose, which soars from the glass in a refined blend of plums, black cherries, cocoa powder, woodsmoke, gamebird, complex soil tones, cinnamon, cloves and a touch of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, soil-driven and full, with a beautiful core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, seamless tannins and a very long, complex, elegant and tangy finish. This is an Oregon pinot noir for lovers of Chambolle-Musigny! It is approachable today (and all too easy to drink!), but there are additional layers of complexity here waiting to emerge with bottle age, so do your best to tuck it away for five to seven years in the cellar and really let the magic unfold. Great juice. 2024-2055. **93+.**

2014 Pinot Noir- Roserock (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2014 Pinot Noir from the Drouhin family’s new Roserock estate is a lovely wine in the making, but it is still on the young side and needs at least four or five more years in the cellar to start to blossom properly. The nose is pure and classy, wafting from the glass in a youthful mix of red berries, cherries, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke, a touch of chocolate and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite primary in profile, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful focus and balance, ripe tannins and a long, vibrant and

nascently complex finish. This will be excellent in a few more years, but it is still really a bit too young for primetime drinking. 2022-2055+. **92+**.

2013 Pinot Noir “Rutherford”- El Molino Winery (St. Helena)

El Molino’s 2013 vintage of pinot noir is again pretty ripe, coming in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol, but the wine is cool and precise on the nose, which offers up a fine constellation of black cherries, bonfire, a fine dollop of soil, coriander seed, allspice, black tea, cola and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively soil-driven, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, modest tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the complex and gently warm finish. This is very, very good Rutherford pinot noir! 2019-2040+. **92**.

2000 Pinot Noir “Cuvée DD”- Kalin Cellars (Sonoma County)

My goodness, where has the time gone? Here is a pinot noir from Frances and Terry Leighton that actually has its roots in the twenty-first century! It happens to be from the Demostene Ranch, home to Kalin’s finest pinot bottlings since at least the 1978 vintage (please see below) and it is flat out stunning. The deep, pure and beautifully developed bouquet offers up a complex constellation of red and black cherries, roasted gamebird, forest floor, beautiful spice tones (cinnamon, cardamom and cloves), woodsmoke, an exotic hint of eucalyptus and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is focused, complex and beautifully wide open and refined on the attack, with an excellent core of fruit, superb soil signature, still excellent, tangy acids, ripe tannins and a long, perfectly balanced and complex finish. This is still a relatively young wine on the palate (even at age nineteen!) and could do with a bit more time to relax in the cellar, but with decanting, it is awfully easy to drink today. But, witness the 1978 version listed below, it is still early days for this stunning bottle of pinot. This is one of the best vintages of the Cuvée DD I have ever tasted! 2019-2055+. **95+**.

1978 Pinot Noir “Sonoma”- Kalin Cellars (Sonoma County)

As I have mentioned in the past, the 1978 Kalin Cellars pinot noir is from the vineyard source, the Demostene Ranch, that eventually would be listed on the labels as the Cuvée DD. I had tasted this wine only once before, when I was working on my second part of my Kalin Cellars historical features, and the wine was every bit as fine today as it was those years ago. I had not noticed previously that this is a pretty ripe vintage for this bottling, as the 1978 came in at fully 13.9 percent alcohol, though the wine remains fresh and pure on both the nose and palate and shows no signs of its higher octane level. The bouquet is refined and lovely, offering up a vibrant blend of plums, black cherries, a touch of chocolate, gamebird, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a whisper of dried eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely tangy, with lovely focus and grip, a good core of fruit, excellent balance and a long, fairly complex and still energetic finish. The palate is not quite as complex as the nose today, which is my only quibble with this wine, which is still very enjoyable to drink and has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2019-2040. **92**.

1978 Pinot Noir “Estate”- Mount Eden Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

I had never before had the pleasure to taste the 1978 vintage of pinot noir from Mount Eden Vineyards, and this wine is a glorious example of the synthesis of a great vintage and a superb *terroir*. This was still produced from the old vines of pinot noir that Martin Ray had originally planted when he first cleared the ridge and started putting in vines in 1943, and which

would eventually have to be replanted in the mid-1980s. The wine is quite low octane for this vintage, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol, but is full, deep and vibrant and has everything one could ever ask for in a mature California pinot! At forty-one years of age, the wine is at its absolute zenith of peak maturity, soaring from the glass in a beautifully complex and exotic blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, smoked meats, hazelnuts, a beautifully complex base of minerality, a touch of black tea and a smoky topnote. Several of the tasters whom I shared this bottle with (double blind) thought that the wine was an old Côte-Rôtie, and the similarities really were striking. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully transparent, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, melted tannins and a long, refined and vibrant finish. This wine is impeccably balanced and still has decades of life ahead of it, but it is at its apogee and I cannot imagine it drinking better than it does today. A brilliant wine at the peak of its powers! 2019-2040. 95.



Merlot

1978 Merlot- Matanzas Creek Winery (Sonoma County)

Matanzas Creek was founded in 1977 by Bill and Sandra McIver, so this 1978 merlot was one of their very first wines. It has aged magnificently well and underscores just how good this estate's wines were from their very earliest days. The bouquet today is wide open, complex and beautifully complex, offering up scents of plums, black cherries, cigar smoke, a nice touch of spice, dried eucalyptus and a hint of petroleum jelly in the upper register. On the palate the wine

is deep, full-bodied and velvety, with a lovely core of fruit, fine complexity, melted tannins and fine focus and grip on the still vibrant, beautifully balanced finish. Other than Kalin Cellars' legendary 1981 Merlot Reserve, I have never tasted a better example of this varietal in California than this outstanding 1978 from Matanzas Creek! 2018-2035. **94.**

Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux Blends

2015 Cabernet Sauvignon- Ex Libris (Columbia Valley)

The 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon from Ex Libris is a good, ripe and well-balanced bottle of young cabernet. The wine comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a nicely old school nose of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a touch of spice elements (mostly cardamom), good soil signature and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and beautifully balanced, with fine depth at the core, lovely focus and grip and a long, poised and ripely tannic finish. This is fine cabernet for the cellar and it should prove to be an excellent drink with a decade's worth of bottle age. Fine juice. 2028-2060. **92.**

2015 Cabernet Sauvignon "Kronos Vineyard"- Corison Winery (St. Helena)

The new release of Cathy Corison's Kronos Vineyard cabernet sauvignon is always one of the great harbingers of spring, and the new 2015 vintage of this outstanding bottling is exceptional in quality. The wine is nicely cool in 2015, coming in at a refined 13.2 percent octane and the wine offers up its customary precision and youthful aromatic beauty in its constellation of black cherries, sweet cassis, cigar wrapper, Rutherford Dust, incipient notes of allspice, a superb base of soil and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and seamlessly balanced, with its full-bodied format harboring ripe tannins, a great mid-palate core, lovely mineral drive and a very long, poised and focused finish. There is nothing flashy here, but this is emphatically a great, great bottle of cabernet in the making that is built for the long haul and it will be criminal to open it before it has had a minimum of a decade of hibernation in the cellar. In the fullness of time, this seems likely to be one of Cathy's greatest vintages of Kronos! 2030-2080+. **95+.**

1985 Cabernet Sauvignon "Estate Bottled"- Caymus Vineyards (Napa Valley)

1985 was the penultimate vintage at Caymus before the wholesale shift in priorities at this Napa winery in 1987, when making money seemed to take over precedence from making great wines. For those who are too young to remember the changes, starting in 1984, the Wagner family had begun producing a third Caymus bottling of cabernet sauvignon, which they dubbed "Napa Cuvée" and which was produced exclusively from purchased grapes. It was not in the same league as their Estate bottling or the Special Selection made from the family's own vineyards, but it was a pretty good bottle for the \$12 it sold for and was fairly popular in the vintages from '84 through '86, when it was produced. However, in 1987, the winery decided to nix the Napa Cuvée label and started blending it in with forty percent of their Estate bottling (and selling the blend for the same price as the Estate), while taking sixty percent of the Estate vineyards and "kicking them upstairs" to dramatically increase the quantity of Special Selection cabernet that they produced. Everything suffered in quality from 1987 onwards, though critics at the time did not seem to notice, and the caricature of cabernet at Caymus began and which still plagues us today. But, back in 1985, Caymus was still rightly considered one of the very best producers of this varietal in all of California and this recent bottle of the '85 Estate cabernet was excellent. The bouquet is blossoming very well, though still a few years away from its true peak, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet cassis, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, a touch of mint

and a discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin remaining to soften up and a long, complex and classy finish. The world has not crumbled and the sun still sets in the west, but it was a better time when this Napa cabernet specialist, founded in 1972, was still making classically-inspired wines. 2021-2050. **92+**.

1981 Cabernet Sauvignon “Eisele Vineyard” Joseph Phelps Vineyards (Napa Valley)

The 1981 Eisele Vineyard cabernet from Joseph Phelps is a very fine bottle that is just starting to drink well today and was probably a bit lean and tannic for the first couple of decades it was in bottle. Today, the wine is blossoming beautifully and offers up a complex bouquet of cassis, sweet dark berries, a touch of mint, bitter chocolate, cigar wrapper, vanillin oak and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, still a bit of remaining backend tannin and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. I did not drink this wine in its youth, but have to imagine that it was very tightly-knit early on, as there is not the same depth of fruit at the core here as would be available to buffer the tannins in a top vintage like 1984 or 1985, but the 1981 Eisele has aged beautifully and is now drinking very well indeed. 209-2040+. **93**.



The fabled Martha’s Vineyard- one of Napa’s true First Growth quality vineyards.

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon- Matanzas Creek Winery (Sonoma County)

I had a superb bottle of the 1978 Matanzas Creek cabernet back in late 2015, but this particularly bottle was not quite on form and therefore, not at the same level. This was still very tasty, but seemed to lack some vibrancy and a bit of the complexity of the previous bottle I had drunk, so I have to assume that perhaps this wine was not stored quite as coolly as the previous example. In any case, this bottle was still tasty, offering up a wide open bouquet of black cherries, cassis, menthol, just a whisper of remaining Sonoma herb tones, dark soil and a touch of bitter chocolate in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and long, with a very good core, still a touch of backend tannin and fine length and grip. The last bottle was more complex and vibrant, but this was not a bad drink, even if it was probably in the ninety percentile range of a pristine example. 2019-2040. **88.**

1974 Cabernet Sauvignon- Mayacamas Vineyards (Mount Veeder)

It had been many years since I last had the pleasure to drink a bottle of the 1974 Mayacamas cabernet sauvignon and the wine continues to cruise along beautifully and act as if time will never touch it! The bouquet is deep, ripe and complex, wafting from the glass in a marvelous blend of cassis, black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, mint, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, still a bit of youthful bell pepper and incipient notes of petroleum jelly in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and absolutely rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, lovely complexity and still a bit of backend tannin perking up the very, very long, utterly complete finish. It is hard to believe, but this wine is still not completely resolved at age forty-four and still could do with another six or seven years in the cellar to allow the tannins to completely resolve! A great, great wine that is properly considered one of California's greatest cabernet icons. 2024-2075+. **96.**

1970 Cabernet Sauvignon- Mayacamas Vineyards (Mount Veeder)

As was the case with the 1974 Mayacamas cabernet, I had not tasted a bottle of the 1970 vintage from Bob Travers in a long, long time, and was absolutely thrilled to find it paired up with the 1974 at this particular dinner. The 1970 vintage has long been my absolute favorite from Mayacamas in the first decade of the Travers' era here (which hit the ground running with the outstanding 1968!), though perhaps one day the 1978 will be able to catch up with this celestial wine. Today, the 1970 Mayacamas cabernet is at its absolute zenith and drinking with stunning complexity, offering up a pure and precise bouquet of black cherries, cassis, petroleum jelly, Cuban cigar wrapper, a touch of eucalyptus, complex soil tones and a topnote of chipotle peppers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with great depth of fruit at the core, superb soil signature, lovely acids and grip and just a whisper of remaining tannin on the very, very long, suave and *à point* finish. While this wine is at its apogee today, it is still perfectly balanced and structured and has many decades still ahead of it. This is a legend at the peak of its powers; drinking it now is kind of like watching Babe Ruth hit his sixtieth homerun from the front row. 2018-2060+. **98.**

And A Few Other Noteworthy New World Wines

2012 Gillman Vineyards "Matakana" (New Zealand)

The Gillman Vineyards 2012 bottling of Matakana is outstanding, as has been the case with every single vintage of this Cheval Blanc-like Bordeaux blend that I have tasted from the estate. The wine comes in at a nice ripeness of 13.5 percent and offers up lovely purity in its

complex bouquet of black cherries, black plums, a touch of menthol, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a nice touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a nicely creamy core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, well-measured tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is excellent wine in the making, but tuck it away in the cellar for four or five more years and really let it come into its own. It is a bit more structured in personality than the 2011 version. 2023-2050. **92+**.

2011 Gillman Vineyards “Matakana” (New Zealand)

Toby Gillman’s 2011 vintage of Matakana is starting to drink beautifully and is quite open now on the nose and quite approachable on the palate, albeit, still with some suave tannin and the potential to continue to grow with further bottle age. The bouquet is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, menthol, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovey, sappy core of black fruit, very good soil signature, suave tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is really, really good wine! 2019-2040+. **93**.

2001 Penfolds Grange Hermitage (Australia)

The 2001 Penfolds Grange is a bigger and riper wine than those from the 1970s, with probably at least a half point higher alcohol, but it is still a very good wine and shows its familial ties to the great old vintages below. The bouquet offers up a ripe and sappy blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, chocolate, a touch of meatiness and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful, with a rock solid core of fruit, still quite firm tannins and a long, complex and slightly hot finish. This is a very good vintage of Grange, but the extra bit of alcohol hardly adds anything positive to the equation. 2018-2040. **92+**.

1982 Penfolds Grange Hermitage (Australia)

The 1982 Penfolds Grange Hermitage has always been an impressive bottle, and since its debut in the second half of the 1980s, this has been a head-turner of a vintage for this great wine. Despite its fairly early appeal (where there was more than enough beautiful fruit that one had no trouble drinking it with great pleasure and just ignoring its fair chassis of tannin), this was always a wine meant to age gracefully and it has done so in no uncertain terms. Today, the bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a moderately jammy blend of cassis, black raspberries, coffee, meaty tones, menthol, dried berries, a touch of leather, new oak and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with fine focus and grip, a plush core of fruit and impressive length and grip on the meltingly tannic and well-balanced finish. This is a classic vintage of Grange and has decades of life still ahead of it, but is fully into its apogee. 2017-2050. **95**.

1976 Penfolds Grange Hermitage (Australia)

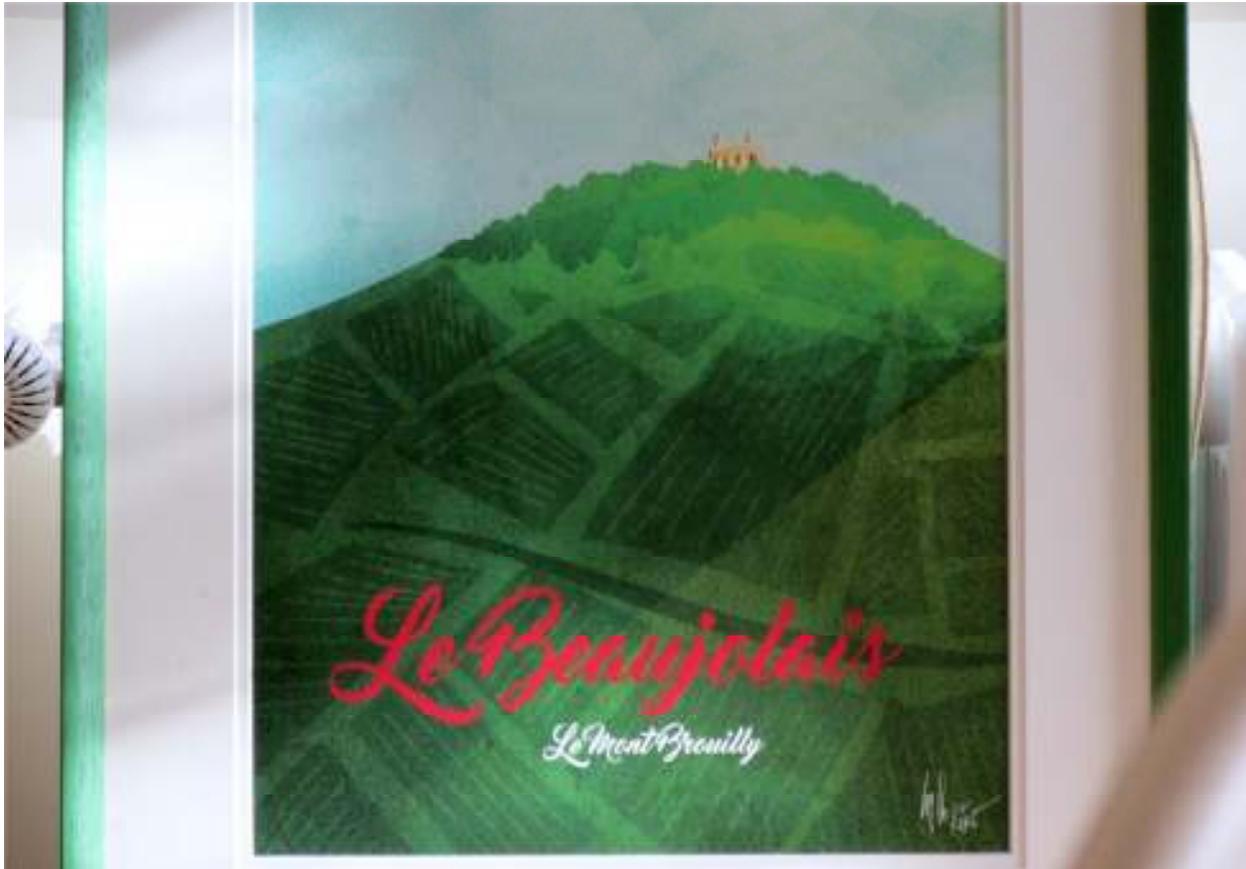
I used to drink a fair bit of Grange in the vintages of the 1970s and early 1980s and do miss those days, as this wine used to hit the shelves in the US for around \$40 per bottle and it was possible for a junior member of the wine trade to splurge on a bottle every now and then. But, it had been a long, long time between bottles of the 1976 Grange, so I was delighted to see it in a fine tasting lineup this past October and the wine showed very well indeed. The bouquet is deep and wide open, offering up a superb blend of black raspberries, chocolate, eucalyptus, dark soil tones, dried berries, new oak and a touch of raisin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with an excellent core of fruit, still some moderate backend tannin and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced finish. There is

superb depth and volume here, but this is not the most complex vintage of Grange from this era and its score reflects its relative lack of complexity. 2018-2050. **91.**

1971 Penfolds Grange Hermitage (Australia)

The 1971 and 1981 vintages of Grange Hermitage have long been my favorites that I have been fortunate enough to taste of this iconic wine, and this most recent showing of the 1971 was everything one could hope for from a legendary year of this fine wine. This was paired up with the 1976 Grange and danced circles around it, offering up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, sultana raisin, chocolate, a bit of meatiness, menthol, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a bottomless core of fruit, superb focus and grip, noteworthy complexity, melted tannins and a very long, poised and classy finish. This has the power that Grange is famous for, but coupled to impeccable balance and quite a bit more complexity than the 1976. 2018-2040. **95.**

**THE FIRST OF THE 2017 BEAUJOLAIS VINTAGE
AND MORE LOVELY 2016S AND OLDER WINES**



The last couple of vintages of 2016 and 2017 have produced some absolutely superb bottles of Beaujolais, despite there being plenty of challenges from hail and other growing season deprecations in both vintages. As readers may recall, the beautifully deep and classic crop of 2016 Beaujolais was not homogenous from commune to commune, as brutal hail ravaged many of the best cru vineyards in the villages of Chiroubles, Morgon and Fleurie in 2016. As I mentioned in my initial report on the 2016 vintage in Beaujolais, *vignerons* here had to contend with frost damage in many vineyards at the very outset of May, which led to expectations of shortened crops right from the spring wherever the freeze took root. Worse was to come for producers in the aforementioned communes of Chiroubles, Morgon and Fleurie a bit later in the month, as the first of two severe hailstorms wreaked havoc in the affected vineyards, with vines in Chiroubles particularly hard hit by this first round of hail damage. Mother nature did not relent after this first storm of late May, as more hail returned on June 24th and clobbered Fleurie for a second time and also struck some parts of Moulin-à-Vent on this passage, as well as Morgon and Chiroubles again. The weather after the second hailstorm was also far from ideal, with the heavy rains of that storm followed by hot and humid weather that gave rise to a severe powdery mildew threat that had to be addressed vigilantly for the coming weeks, as it seemed every time a *vigneron* had finished up a treatment against the mildew, more rain would arrive and wash it away and spraying was once again necessary to protect what was left of the crop. Fortunately,

the weather wars of 2016 in Beaujolais were over by the end of July and the months of August and September were just beautiful and allowed the crop that was still out on the vines to ripen up perfectly under lovely Indian Summer conditions.

So, the 2016 vintage in Beaujolais is quite heterogeneous from the hail and frost damage and the threat of mildew. In the Cru communes that were spared from the hail (and where battling against potential mildew was carried to victorious results), such as Saint Amour and Juliéna north of the hail district, or in the Côte de Brouilly and Brouilly to the south, the crop was reasonable in size and just beautiful in quality. It was also a simply brilliant year for the wines from the southern half of the region, where Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages bottlings are the appellations in question, as there was no hail to be found in this half of the region. In the communes that were hit by hail, the quality can still be very good, albeit, often with a bit of a chewier, hard edge to the tannins, as physiological ripeness was a big challenge for the grapes remaining on the bunches in the villages where the hail damage was extensive, as the plants used much of their energy in the wake of the hail to try and repair damage to the wood and foliage, prior to ripening up bunches that were still out there. So, while these wines are not tainted by the hail with any “off” flavors or aromatics, as the affected berries fell to the ground in mid-summer, they can often be a touch green and dry-edged from tannins that did not quite ripen completely over the rest of the summer. Hence the variations in both style and quality between the hailed on communes (and not every vineyard in each commune was hit- other than in Chiroubles, which was pretty much flattened) and those that were spared in 2016, with the unaffected villages producing their finest wines since the great vintage of 2011.

Unfortunately, hail again played a role in the shaping of the style of certain communes’ wines in 2017, as the area centered on Fleurie was once again hit by a summer storm and the damage was nearly as bad as the year before. Moulin-à-Vent was also hailed on in 2017- even worse than the year before, and some of the finest vineyards in Morgon were hit by the hail once again in 2017. Clearly, summer storms are cropping up with more frequency and ferocity than was the case in the region a generation ago, and sadly, the path of the hail in 2017 was almost the same as the year before, so the same domaines were pummeled two years in a row. The growing season had not gotten out of the blocks particularly well in 2017, as the weather was unseasonably hot during the *floraison*, which adversely affected the potential size of the crop and which was hardly welcomed by the *vignerons* who had been so badly hit by either frost or hail in 2016. And then, the hail hit (again), this time on the evening of July 10th, with a ferocity that was further whipped up by very strong winds, so that the small hailstones were whipped sideways through the air and again ravaged the vines. The epicenter of 2017’s hail was Fleurie, but the damage was even more widespread than in the previous year, with the surrounding crus of Morgon, Moulin-à-Vent, and Chiroubles hit hard for a second year in a row, and damage also quite extensive in the northern half of Régnié and in Chénas as well. One *vigneron* described the wind as being so strong during the storm that it was like “hail tornado”. The one silver lining is that Morgon was not quite as badly affected as the year before, as the severe hail damage was primarily confined to the two vineyards of la Corcelette and Charmes, and the Côte du Py and other vineyards in the commune were largely spared this year.

To add insult to injury, the Beaujolais region, alongside of the Côte d’Or and Chablis, had invested in “cloud seeding” technology to try and prevent hail from forming, but it was not

fully effective in July of 2017. The regional associations have pursued the technology and situated one hundred and twenty-five generators in the vineyards of the greater Burgundy region that inject silver iodide into the clouds above to help prevent the formation of hailstones, and there is thought that the small size of the hail on July 10th was at least a partial success for the technology. The generators heat up the silver iodide particles and then shoot them high into the atmosphere to try and prevent the hail from forming in the clouds above, with the generators doing so every time the threat of hail in the forecast reaches a certain tipping point (usually a probability of forty percent). Many speculated that if the wind had not been so ferocious with this storm mid-July storm, the damage would have been far less than in the preceding year. I tried to find out a bit more about this technology prior to going to print with this report, as I wondered about whether the high winds could have been tied in some way to the injection of the heated silver iodide into the storm, as well as whether or not the silver iodide, which one assumes must descend again to earth with the rains of the storm, could adversely affect the *terroir* in the vineyards over an extended period of time. But, I was not able to find out a whole lot about this new technology and its adaption and will start asking around more when I am next in Burgundy.

With all of the weather challenges of 2017, it is hard to believe that once again, this is an outstanding vintage in terms of quality, and the biggest issue for many producers is the tiny size of the crop- particularly in the communes that were hailed on again for the second year in a row. The wines of 2017 have generally turned out to be ripe, beautifully structured and quite deep at the core, with some of the plushness of the 2015s (though not as roasted or high in octane), coupled to the more soil-driven style that is prevalent in the most successful 2016s, so the combination is really quite exciting and my early dip into the vintage has found dozens and dozens of truly outstanding 2017 Beaujolais. As was the case in 2016, the southern half of the region, which is home to Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages level bottlings, is once again more consistent than up in the north where the Crus are located, as again the south was spared from any hail damage in 2017. When I was in the region last spring, the *vignerons* that I spoke with were very, very excited about the potential quality of their 2017s (even if the quantity is going to be scant from domaines with holdings in the most hail-damaged Crus), and most producers rank this vintage ahead of both 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016, so you can see that there is a lot of respect for the quality and style of the 2017 vintage in Beaujolais. Last spring, Jean-Étienne Chermette commented that “the 2017s look like a cross right now between the 2015s and 2016s, with more sappy, dense fruit tones than the 2016s, but also far more classical personalities and better *terroir* than the very powerful 2015s.” So, we have another excellent quality vintage in the region in 2017, with the caveat that it is again a bit heterogeneous in the communes that were badly hailed on again this year.

In the last couple of vintages, it has been useful to leave behind one’s traditional impression of the relative merits of the various communes in the constellation of the Cru Beaujolais, and also to pay more attention to the best Beaujolais bottlings from the south as well. The reason for this is the mid-summer hail in both vintages, which hit the heart and soul of the Crus in each vintage. The hail did not leave its mark as “hail taint” *per se*, as can be found in many 1983 red Burgundies for instance, but rather in less than perfect ripening of the grapes in the vineyards most severely affected by the storms. In the 2017 vintage, the hail damage on July 10th was sufficiently early that the berries most scarred by the hail simply dried up and fell off of

the vines long before harvest, so there is no dry edge from hail damage in any of the wines that I have tasted from even the most hard hit vineyard parcels. Rather, the impact of the hail was more prominent in slowing the ripening process of the remaining berries in these vineyards, as the vines spent some of their July and August energy reserves rebuilding (or trying to do so) their vegetation, rather than all of the energy going into the ripening of the bunches. The result is often wines that are a bit more chewy from tannins that ended up lagging just a bit behind optimal, due to this lag caused by the plants trying to repair their leaves in the immediate wake of the hail. Consequently, the wines that show the most perfect ripening and exemplify the very finest potential of the vintage of 2017 are to be found in the communes and regions unaffected by the hail in July, and this includes the best bottlings from the south. It is particularly evident when one tastes the Beaujolais bottlings from Jean- Étienne Chermette, such as his Origine and Coeur de Vendanges, old vine cuvées, as in the southern half of Beaujolais, the growing season of 2017 could not have unfolded any better in this less tony sector of the appellation!

So this excellent Beaujolais vintage is not particularly homogenous in style, and there are distinct variations to be found from commune to commune and vineyard to vineyard. The variations also have to do with the stylistic predilections of the particular *vigneron*, as some winemakers just like riper, more powerful wines. Where there was no hail issue and lags in maturation, there can still be issues with relative ripeness, as there are a percentage of the 2017s out there that are buxom, powerful and harken back a bit stylistically to the powerful and sometimes borderline overripe 2015s. Others are extremely pure, refined and offer up measured, memorable ripeness coupled to great soil signatures. And yet other examples of the 2017s, often from the hail, are a bit chewier out of the blocks and not as concentrated at the core, as they did not ripen up as well as the examples from the vineyards unaffected by the hail of July. But, despite some of the variations to be found from cellar to cellar and Cru to Cru, the best 2017s are truly exceptional and will be cellar treasures for many, many years to come. My favorite wines of the vintage thus far (and please keep in mind that this is only the first toe being dipped into the deep waters of the 2017 Beaujolais vintage) remind me of a cross between the 2016 and 2011 vintages in the region, with great purity of fruit, excellent transparency down to their *terroirs* and lovely structures for long-term aging. They are not generally as tannic as the stunning 2011s, but they are still noticeably structured for Beaujolais and many will want a year or three in the cellar to soften up and really start to drink well. But, the best 2017s are truly beautiful wines and loaded with promise!

As I am now covering an awful lot of top producers in Beaujolais each year, and given the continuing renaissance in this southern part of Burgundy, the number of domaines I will write about and taste is likely to grow, rather than diminish, in the years to come, so I am trying to break up the coverage into a couple of reports each year, just to keep the volume of wines that need to be tasted down to a human scale. So, if you do not see notes on the 2017s from some of my favorite estates in the pages that follow, it just means that they are being reserved for review in the next round of coverage, which will be in one or two issues. The benefit of not trying to cover too much ground at one time is I get a chance to see any domaines that importers are content to send my way when I start sending out requests for samples, and sometimes this allows me to be introduced to new estates (at least to me) whose wines I was not previously familiar. This was the case with this report, where I hit the jackpot, as the New York importer of Mee Godard's beautiful wines sent me a fine range of samples. I probably should have already heard

about Mee's wines, as her story is heartwarming and is apparently quite well known in the region, but somehow I had not had a chance to learn of her history and so, discovered this while sampling one of her beautiful Morgons during my tastings for this article. In short, Mee Godard is of Korean heritage and was adopted by French parents when she was still a small child, so she grew up in France. Deciding that she wished to study winemaking, she enrolled at Oregon State University here in the US and I believe studied three years in Corvallis. She eventually returned to France, completed her Oenology degree at the University of Montpellier and then worked in both the Côte d'Or and Champagne for a few years, before falling in love with Cru Beaujolais and eventually purchasing her small, five hectare estate in Morgon in February of 2013. She is fortunate to have bought a domaine with holdings of old vines in some of Morgon's finest vineyards: Côte du Py, Corcelette and Grand Cras, and she is making simply brilliant wines here, with her first vintage being the 2013. Starting in 2017 (if the hail left her any grapes), she will also be producing a Moulin-à-Vent bottling, as she has been able to buy a one hectare parcel here in the *climat* of Les Michelons. Her wines are stunning across the board and I cannot recommend them highly enough!



Beaujolais Blanc

2017 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaine Chermette

The 2017 Beaujolais Blanc from Domaine Chermette is a fine example of the vintage, with a pretty and expressive bouquet of crab apple, quince, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and

a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and soil-driven, with good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, chalky finish. This is nicely ripe at 13.5 percent octane, which gives the wine a succulence in the mid-palate that is pretty rare for this appellation. Good juice. 2019-2024. **89**.

Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages

2017 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine Chapel

The 2017 Beaujolais-Villages from Domaine Chapel is a fine example of this vintage, beautifully coupling the ripe fruit of '17 with a refined base of soil. The nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of dark berries, bonfire, a bit of oak leaf, lovely spice tones (mostly turmeric and thyme) and a complex foundation of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a fine core, very good focus and grip, a touch of tannin and a long, complex and serious finish. Lovely juice. 2019-2030. **90**.

2017 Beaujolais “Griottes”- Pierre-Marie Chermette

I last tasted the 2017 Beaujolais “Griottes” from Jean- Étienne Chermette during my visit to the estate last March, when the wine had only been in bottle for one month. I was very happy to see another bottle gracing my box of samples from this superb estate, as it was not the best time to taste it last spring. Today the wine is absolutely singing and it is quite clear that my score had been a bit conservative. The bouquet is bright, pure and jumps from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, violets, a touch of gamebird, beautiful soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with beautiful transparency and bounce, a touch of backend tannin and impeccable focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is stellar Beaujolais! 2019-2030+. **92**.

2017 Beaujolais “Origine” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Chermette

Jean- Étienne Chermette’s 2017 version of Origine is notably dark in color this year, reflecting the perfect growing conditions in the southern half of Beaujolais in this vintage. The bouquet here is precise and gorgeous, offering up a refined constellation of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, gamebird, granitic soil tones, just a whisper of fresh thyme and a pinot noir-like touch of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite 2011 vintage in profile, with an excellent, Cru-like structure, a sappy core, stunning transparency and nascent complexity and a very long, suavely-tannic and vibrant finish. This is brilliant juice in the making! It is approachable today, but still emphatically a puppy and it would really be a crime to start opening bottles before at least 2022. Take the world of someone who drank way too much Domaine Chermette Beaujolais “Vieilles Vignes” before its time back in my thirsty youth! This wine will age even better than the 1989 version, and that wine is still great today. 2022-2050. **93+**.

2017 Beaujolais “Coeur de Vendanges” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Chermette

Jean-Étienne Chermette’s 2017 Coeur de Vendanges cuvée (from more than one hundred year-old vines) is a beautiful bottle in the making, offering up a great synthesis of old vine sappiness, superb soil signature and the well-measured ripeness of the 2017 vintage (in the regions unaffected by all the hail). The bouquet is deep, complex and beautifully precise, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, a touch of dark berry, woodsmoke, a very compelling base of soil, fresh thyme, roses and roasted gamebird. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and intensely flavored, with a fine core of fruit, outstanding transparency, modest tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This is aromatically so expressive already, but on the palate, the very old vines have provided some structure that deserves to be

waited out before starting to drink the wine in earnest, as there is so much more coming than is currently available on the palate. So, treat it like a Cru and tuck it away in the cellar for at least a few years and let it really come into its prime! 2022-2045. **94.**

2017 Beaujolais-Villages- Château de Lavernette (Xavier, Kerrie et Anke de Boissieu)

The 2017 Beaujolais-Villages from the de Boissieu family's Château de Lavernette is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up the ripe and precise fruit tones of this fine year in its aromatic constellation of cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely transparent, with some lovely mid-palate stuffing (particularly for its level), fine focus and grip and even a bit of backend tannin on the long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is serious Beaujolais-Villages! 2019-2030+. **91.**

2016 Beaujolais “Les Grands Eparcieux”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The Les Grands Eparcieux bottling of Beaujolais hails from the oldest vines that the Chasselays own in this appellation, and their 2016 is a lovely middleweight, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a brightly red fruity nose of cranberries, cherries, vinesmoke, a touch of pepper, fresh thyme and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy and fullish, with a good core, fine soil signature and a bit of tannin perking up the long and tangy finish. This is a lovely bottle of old school Beaujolais that is drinking nicely, but will also keep well for at least the next half dozen years or so. Good juice. 2019-2025+. **89.**

2015 Beaujolais “Quatre Saisons”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The Quatre Saisons bottling is the Chasselay family's regular bottling of Beaujolais and the 2015 version is nicely ripe in the style of this robust vintage in the region. The color is quite a bit darker than the 2016 Les Grands Eparcieux and the bouquet delivers excellent depth and complexity in its mix of black cherries, roasted *pigeon*, bitter chocolate, a fine base of dark soil tones, bonfires, fresh thyme and a touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, a bit of backend tannin and a long, well-balanced finish. This is fairly robust for a Beaujolais bottling (rather than a Cru), but it avoids any of the potential pitfalls of the vintage and really is a tasty bottle. 2019-2030. **89+**.

Saint-Amour

2017 Saint-Amour “Esprit la Séduction”- Pascal Berthier

The “Esprit la Séduction” bottling from Pascal Berthier is produced from a parcel of fifty year-old vines in the famous *climat* of Clos des Billards in Saint-Amour. The 2017 “Esprit la Séduction” from Monsieur Berthier is excellent, offering up a deep and nicely black fruity nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, *pigeon*, a complex base of soil tones, espresso and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, good balance and a long, vibrant and sappy finish. This is very good Saint-Amour. 2019-2030. **91+**.

2017 Saint-Amour “à la Folie”- Domaine Chardigny

The Saint-Amour “à la Folie” bottling from Domaine Chardigny is produced from fifty-five year-old vines. The 2017 version is deep in color and nicely sappy on the nose, offering up a fine bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, gamebird, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite solid

at the core, with a touch of backend tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. The depth of the 2017 vintage is very nicely displayed here and this wine will age quite well, though it is already very easy to drink. Good juice. 2019-2030+. **90.**



2017 Saint-Amour “les Champs Grillé”- Domaine Chermette

I loved this new bottling of Saint-Amour “les Champs Grillé” from Jean-Étienne Chermette when I visited the domaine last spring, and a year in the bottle has done nothing to dissuade me from the impression that this is now one of the family’s finest bottlings right out of the blocks. The wine is nicely ripe at 13.5 percent, but precise and mineral at the same time, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, a hint of fresh thyme, espresso, *pigeon* and a refined base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is ripe, pure and full, with excellent transparency and focus, just a wisp of tannin and a long, tangy and beautifully-balanced finish. This is an outstanding Saint-Amour and a welcome new addition to the very best bottlings from this excellent Cru. 2019-2040. **94.**

2017 Saint-Amour- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2017 Saint-Amour from Joseph Drouhin is a fine example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, sappy and bright, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of sweet cranberry, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh thyme, gamebird, dark chocolate and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely plump at the core, with a touch of

backend tannin on the long, complex and tangy finish. This is a high class version of Saint-Amour. 2019-2035. **92.**

Juliéna

2017 Juliéna “Côte de Bessay”- Domaine Chapel

The 2017 Juliéna “Côte de Bessay” from David and Michele Chapel is a very good and quite typical expression of this vintage, coming in at fourteen percent octane, but offering impressive refinement and bounce in its broad-shouldered style. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of baked cherries and plums, forest floor, gamebird, lovely spice elements, a touch of acorn, gentle notes of chocolate and a bit of nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, good acids and lovely length and grip on the ripe and classy finish. Good juice. 2018-2035+. **92.**

2017 Juliéna “les Cerisiers”- Pascal Aufranc

The 2017 Juliéna “les Cerisiers” from Pascal Aufranc comes in nicely cool in this warm vintage, tipping the scales at a very civilized 12.5 percent alcohol. Readers may recall that these vines are over sixty-five years of age now and have delivered a deep and lovely bouquet of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, *pigeon*, fresh thyme, a whisper of pepper, excellent soil tones and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and nicely structured, with a full-bodied format, a very solid core and excellent length and grip on the modestly tannic and nascently complex finish. Structurally, this reminds me quite a bit of a 2011 Cru Beaujolais and it will be even better with a touch of bottle age. A very impressive Juliéna. 2020-2040. **91.**

Chéna

2017 Chéna “en Rémont” Vignes de 1939- Domaine Pascal Aufranc

I hope these old vines of Monsieur Aufranc’s were not too severely damaged by the hail of 2017, but the resulting wine seems to have escaped any real evidence of the hail and perhaps they were not hit by the storm. The wine is ripe and nicely black fruity on the nose this year, offering up a bright and complex blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of venison, a lovely base of granitic soil tones, bonfire, lovely spice elements and an exotic hint of pinot noir-like cola tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with good transparency, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish of lovely balance and grip. This is very good Chéna! 2019-2035. **91+.**

2013 Chéna “la Carrière”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2013 Chéna “la Carrière” from Domaine Chasselay is now nicely into its apogee of maturity and is drinking with beautiful complexity and soil signature. This was a very classic vintage in Beaujolais, without the same inner concentration of vintages like 2011 and 2015, but with great precision in the best examples, which this Chéna certainly delivers. The bouquet is starting to show some fine secondary elements in its complex blend of cherries, blood orange, cinnamon, cloves, gently autumnal soil tones (with the first touch of oak leaves), woodsmoke and gamebird. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and beautifully balanced, with a good core, superb transparency, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This still has terrific acidity and the wine is excellent today at the table. An excellent bargain and still available in the New York market! 2019-2025+. **92.**



The church in Fleurie overlooking the surrounding vineyards.

Fleurie

2017 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine Chermette

I tasted the 2017 Poncié bottling from the Chermette family during my visit last spring (only two weeks after it had been bottled), and was happy to see that it is blossoming nicely with a year in bottle. The bouquet is pure and nicely black fruity in its constellation of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, a fine base of dark soil tones, a hint of meatiness and a hint of pinot noir-like cola tones starting to develop in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with lovely focus and grip, a good core, a touch of backend tannin and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. Like many of the top 2017 Crus, this is approachable now, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age to allow its tannins to soften up completely. It should prove to be nicely long-lived. 2020-2040+. **92+**.

2017 Fleurie “les Garants”- Domaine Chermette

I did not know until last year (or had known and forgotten) that the *climat* of les Garants is down in the valley near Moulin-à-Vent and Clos de la Roilette and used to be sold as Moulin-à-Vent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The wine is deeper and even more black fruity in personality than the Poncié in 2017, offering up a pure and sappy nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, dark soil tones, roasted *pigeon*, a touch of coffee bean and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and complex, with a full-bodied format, an excellent core of

ripe fruit, lovely soil signature, a touch of backend tannin and a long, vibrant and very promising finish. This is outstanding. 2020-2040+. **93.**

2017 Fleurie- Lafarge-Vial

The Lafarge family's two parcels of Bel Air and la Joie du Palais were both badly hailed upon in 2017, so the couple decided to just blend the small remaining production from both *climats* and make a straight Fleurie bottling in this vintage. The wine is not too bad, given how hard they were hit, but a bit delicate in style and lacking the customary mid-palate depth of the family's bottlings of Fleurie. The bouquet is a red fruity mix of strawberries, cranberries, a touch of orange peel, a hint of pepper, good minerality and a touch of white pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, transparent and bright, with good length and complexity, modest depth and sneaky length on the bouncy finish. This has turned out pretty well, considering the challenges, but the scars of the growing season are also evident (though no signs of overt hail taint). 2019-2023. **88.**

2017 Fleurie "Clos Vernay"- Lafarge-Vial

Luckily for Chantal and Frédéric Lafarge, one of their three parcels of vines in Fleurie was spared from the hail in 2017, so that they were able to produce their bottling of Clos Vernay this year and the wine is an absolute beauty. The bouquet is deep, bright and classic, jumping from the glass in a mix of black and red cherries, gamebird, dark soil tones, granite, woodsmoke and espresso. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, a touch of tannin and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is fine juice. 2019-2040. **93.**

2017 Fleurie "Poncié"- Domaine Patrick Tranchand

The 2017 Fleurie "Poncié" from Patrick Tranchand is good, solid example of the vintage. Monsieur Tranchand has sixty-five year-old vines in this fine *climat* and they have delivered a fine bottle in 2017, with the bouquet offering up scents of cherries, sweet cranberries, a fine base of granitic soil tones, gamebird and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, a nice touch of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Good juice that will age quite nicely. 2019-2035. **89.**

Moulin-à-Vent

2017 Moulin-à-Vent "les Trois Roches"- Domaine Chermette

The 2017 bottling of les Trois Roches from Domaine Chermette is a touch lower in octane than the Saint-Amour from the estate, coming in at an even thirteen percent, and I assume this is a reflection of the vines lagging a bit ripening the bunches in an effort to repair their vegetation in the wake of the July hail. The wine is quite pure and shows no signs of hail, other than a touch less plushness than many 2017s, as it offers up a pure and black fruity bouquet of cassis, sweet dark berries, a touch of chicory, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs, gamebird and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and nicely balanced, with a good core, lovely mineral drive, moderate tannins and a long, complex and promising finish. This is approachable, but I would not touch a bottle for another four or five years and really let it start to blossom properly. 2023-2055. **92.**

2017 Moulin-à-Vent- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Joseph Drouhin's 2017 Moulin-à-Vent is a good solid wine, but it shows some idiosyncratic elements (particularly in the context of the vintage) as a result of the hail in the appellation. The nose is a bit weedy out of the blocks, but freshens up very nicely with ten

minutes of air to offer up a youthfully reserved nose cassis, fresh herb tones, a bit of chicory, dark soil tones, smoke and bitter chocolate. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely balanced, with quite a bit of backend tannin, perfectly respectable depth at the core and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a bit less ripe than most 2017s, probably due to slowed maturation after the hail, and so needs some time in the cellar to blossom completely, and will end up a complex middleweight, rather than a typically sappy 2017 Cru. 2022-2045. **88.**

2017 Moulin-à-Vent “les Michelons”- Yohan Lardy

The vines in Yohan Lardy’s parcel in “les Michelons”, which is the highest plot in the appellation of Moulin-à-Vent, were planted in two *stages*, with the smaller one planted in 1950 and the larger section dating all the way back to 1911! The wine is fermented in cement vats and then aged in older Burgundy barrels prior to bottling after ten months of *elevage*. The 2017 version is a fine bottle, with a nicely structured and gently chewy personality, and a superb nose of cassis, black cherries, espresso, granitic soil tones, woodsmoke and roasted venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with firm, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and youthful finish. This will demand some cellaring to soften up, but should prove to be a fine example when it is ready to drink. 2023-2050. **90+.**

2017 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine Richard Rottiers

The 2017 Moulin-à-Vent from Richard Rottiers is a superb example of this year, as the ripeness of the fruit is beautifully measured and really gives the wine depth on both the nose and palate, while still remaining fresh and vibrant. The black fruity nose jumps from the glass in a blend of sweet cassis, black raspberries, woodsmoke, spit-roasted gamebird, gorgeous dark soil tones, violets, a touch of fresh herb tones and a topnote chicory. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with excellent focus and balance, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a nicely structured young Moulin- à-Vent that is approachable out of the blocks, but like a 2011 example, has a bit of backend tannin that will soften nicely with a few years of bottle age. First class juice. 2023-2050+. **92.**

2006 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Moriers

The 2006 Moulin-à-Vent from François de Nicolay’s Domaine des Moriers is really drinking at its apogee at age thirteen, offering up a complex and nicely tertiary bouquet of cassis, black cherries, chicory, smoked duck, a complex base of dark soil tones, a touch of celery seed, lovely spice tones, black licorice and the first hints of oak leaves in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fully mature, with a fine core, excellent, autumnal soil elements, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is showing more *sous bois* elements on the palate than the nose at the present time, but the wine remains bright, complex and at its peak. I should note that the cork here crumbled a bit as I took it out, and perhaps the more autumnal shadings this wine shows today (in comparison to my last bottle out of this case, back in 2016) could be partially attributable to the cork? In any case, this bottle was at its peak and drinking very well indeed. 2019-2035. **93.**

Chiroubles

2017 Chiroubles “Chatenay”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2017 Chiroubles “Chatenay” from the very talented Daniel Bouland comes in at a ripe 13.2 percent and is beautifully expressive out of the blocks on both the nose and palate,

albeit, with a great structure to age as well. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of sappy black cherries, pomegranate, vinesmoke, just a bit of pepper, gorgeous dark soil tones, a touch of espresso and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent, with a superb core of fruit, ripe tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, youthful and very, very promising finish. This is so precise on the palate that it is easy to drink already, but it is really structured like a 2011 Beaujolais and deserves some bottle age to blossom fully. I am sure the hail in July has contributed to the structured profile of this wine, but it has not taken any of its purity or precision. 2022-2045. **92.**

2017 Chiroubles “les Gattes”- Château de Javernand

The 2017 Chiroubles “les Gattes” from Château de Javernand is done with partial carbonic maceration and offers up a bright and inviting bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of pepper, a good base of dark soil tones, fresh thyme and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chewy on the backend, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature and a long, youthful and tasty finish. This is probably a bit more structured than in most vintages, due to the couple years of hail in the vineyards, but it is approachable today and will be even better with a year to soften up its bit of backend tannin. 2019-2030. **88+.**

2017 Chiroubles- Lafarge-Vial

Chantal and Frédéric Lafarge were once again hit by hail in their parcel in Chiroubles in 2017 (after being pummeled here the year before as well) and were only able to produce eight hectoliters per hectare from this cru in 2017. However, as Frédéric Lafarge commented, “we were very, very careful with selection for this wine this year, using a sorting table to make sure no sub-par berries were included, and I am quite happy with how the wine has turned out, considering the hail damage.” The wine had been bottled on ten days prior to my visit to the family domaine in Volnay in November, so was still recovering, but was clearly quite successful. The nose offers up a lovely and classically red fruity blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, gamebird and a fine base of minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, round on the attack and beautifully balanced, with a suave personality, solid depth, no tannin and a long, tangy finish that closes with good grip and lift. Lovely wine. 2019-2035. **91+.**

Morgon

2017 Morgon- Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

The 2017 Morgon, Hospices de Belleville bottling, from Maison Joseph Drouhin is really lovely, offering up impressive complexity on both the nose and palate, while still retaining a nice sense of reserve. The bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, dark berry, espresso, dark soil tones, a touch of cola, gamebird and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully structured, with a sappy core of fruit nicely wrapped up in moderate tannins, good acids and outstanding backend mineral drive. This is superb Morgon for the cellar and will probably last a good thirty to forty years! *Chapeau!* 2020-2050+. **93.**

2017 Morgon “Bellevue”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2017 Bellevue bottling of Morgon from Monsieur Bouland is nicely ripe, coming in at 13.4 percent octane, so I assume that this parcel was spared from the hail damage in July. The wine is bright, sappy and vibrant on the nose, jumping from the glass in a blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, violets, a lovely base of soil, gamebird and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a lovely core of red fruit, excellent soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy finish. This is excellent juice. 2019-2045+. **92.**



2017 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Daniel Bouland

Daniel Bouland’s 2017 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes bottling is fairly ripe, coming in at 13.6 percent, but it is very pure and transparent in profile on both the nose and palate. The nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, vinesmoke, lovely granitic minerality, gamebird, a touch of orange peel and a topnote of sweet herb tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, moderate tannins, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the youthful and complex finish. This is a chewy young Morgon and needs some time alone in the cellar to start to blossom. It will be a long distance runner. 2025-2075. **92.**

2017 Morgon “Delys” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Daniel Bouland

Monsieur Bouland’s vines in the *climat* of Delys celebrated their ninetieth-first birthday in 2017, as they were planted in 1926. Happily, this vineyard avoided hail damage in 2017 and the wine is pure and utterly classic in profile, jumping from the glass in a youthfully complex nose of black cherries, dark berries, a hint of cranberry, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, fresh thyme and a bit of roasted *pigeon*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, great soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and very, very promising finish. This is my favorite of the three Morgons I tasted this year from Monsieur Bouland. 2024-2075. **94.**

2017 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2017 *négociant* bottling of Morgon from the Drouhin family is very classic in style and a bit more forward out of the blocks than the Hospices de Belleville version, but it too has a fine structural chassis and will age long and gracefully. The bright and classy nose wafts from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, a good base of granitic minerality and a whisper of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nicely sappy on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, tangy and complex finish. Fine juice. 2019-2045. **92.**

2017 Morgon “Grand Cras” Vieilles Vignes- Laurent Gauthier

The 2017 Morgon “Grand Cras” Vieilles Vignes bottling from Laurent Gauthier hails from a parcel of seventy year-old vines in this fine *climat*. The wine is raised in traditional Beaujolais *foudres* and the 2017 offers up a superb nose of black cherries, pomegranate, a bit of dark chocolate, superb soil tones, a bit of *pigeon*, fresh thyme, woodsmoke and a whisper of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with plenty of depth and stuffing and a long, moderately tannic finish, but not quite the precision on the palate that the nose suggests. This is a good, solid bottle of Morgon, but it is a bit jammy and unstructured in the mouth, despite the nose being so good that I was really expecting a bit more on the palate. 2019-2027. **87.**

2017 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Lucien Lardy

Lucien Lardy has fifty year-old vines in his parcel in the Côte du Py. He raises the wine eighty-five percent in *foudres* and fifteen percent in Burgundy casks and his 2017 shows a touch of new oak influence in its fine aromatic constellation of black cherries, cassis, gamebird, a good base of granitic soil tones, bonfire and a bit of spicy new oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and moderately tannic, with good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. This is certainly tasty today, but I would be inclined to give it at least a year or two in the cellar, to completely integrate its touch of new oak, as the wine will really be hitting on all cylinders once that has happened. 2020-2040. **89.**

2016 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Château Grange Cochard

Château Grange Cochard’s 2016 Morgon Vieilles Vignes has blossomed beautifully since I last tasted it during my visit to the estate last March. The wine is pure and nicely sappy in its sophisticated bouquet of black cherries, blackberries, a fine base of soil elements, bitter chocolate, that same touch of juniper berry I found last year and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is pure, focused, full-bodied and sports excellent mid-palate depth, with still a bit of backend tannin (this is a proper Morgon for aging after all!), good acids and excellent balance and grip on the long and complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2040. **92+.**

2016 Morgon “les Charmes”- Château Grange Cochard

The Wilding family’s 2016 bottling of les Charmes has not missed a beat since I last tasted the wine a year ago. As readers may recall, these vines are one hundred years of age and planted on pink granite schist. The bouquet here is deep and beautifully sappy in personality, jumping from the glass in a superb blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gamebird, a complex base of granitic soil tones, woodsmoke, just a whisper of oak and a lovely topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full and nicely sappy at the core, with refined, seamless tannins, lovely focus and balance and a long, nascently complex and very elegant finish. This is going to be a flat out great bottle of Morgon with some bottle age, and though it is already quite

tasty, it is still a puppy and should be left alone in the cellar for a minimum of another couple of years to allow the wine's secondary layers of complexity to start to really emerge. An outstanding Morgon! 2021-2060. **94.**

2016 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard

The Château Grange Cochard 2016 Côte du Py is also an outstanding wine and the year in the bottle since I last tasted it has done nothing to dissuade me from the supposition that this is one of the wines of the vintage! The bouquet is pure and classy, offering up scents of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, emerging notes of gamebird, fine mineral undertow, gentle floral tones and still that touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, suave tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. Great juice from a great *terroir* in a superb vintage- what is not to like! 2022-2060. **94+.**

2016 Morgon “Corcelette”- Domaine Mee Godard

The 2016 Corcelette bottling from Mee Godard is a very young wine and needs a bit of time in decanter to start to stir, but once it awakes, it is clearly a great wine in the making. With air, the wine offers up a brilliant bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, *pigeon*, dark soil tones, a touch of marjoram, raw cocoa and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bottomless at the core, with great mineral drive, ripe, well-integrated tannins and stunning length and grip on the focused, perfectly balanced and oh, so promising finish. This is magical Morgon in the making, but patience will be required, as this is a properly structured young wine that embodies all of the greatness of the finest wines of the 2016 vintage in Beaujolais! 2026-2075. **94+.**

2016 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Mee Godard

The 2016 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Mee Godard is a beautiful example of both the vintage and this outstanding vineyard. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of sweet stems, dark soil tones, a bit of raw cocoa, gentle herb tones, woodsmoke and a lovely floral topnote redolent of violets. This is at least fifty percent whole clusters and the stems will bring a lovely note of cinnamon-like spice tones with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a classic example of Côte du Py for the cellar. 2022-2055. **92.**

2016 Morgon “Grand Cras”- Domaine Mee Godard

Mee Godard's 2016 Morgon “Grand Cras” is a beautiful wine that belies the hail issues that plagued the commune, but perhaps the vineyard of Grand Cras was partially spared? In any event, this is a beautifully transparent, red fruit and classic bottle of young Morgon, offering up a lovely nose of red cherries, pomegranate, a touch of blood orange, gamebird, gentle smokiness, roses and a beautiful base of complex, stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is a beautiful Morgon *vin de garde* that will age as long on its excellent acidity as it will on its fine-grained tannins, and I would not be surprised to see my kids drinking bottles of this wine at fifty years of age! 2023-2065+. **93.**

2016 Morgon “Passerelle 577”- Domaine Mee Godard

The Mee Godard's Morgon “Passerelle 577” hails from a unique parcel within her larger plot in the Côte du Py. Her 2016 version of Passerelle 577 is precise and beautifully deep on the nose, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of cranberry, fresh thyme, beautiful granitic minerality, a hint of celery seed, violets, woodsmoke and just a whisper of the

stems in the upper register that will soon be lovely spice elements. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegantly structured, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, youthful and tangy finish that promises great things with some extended time in the cellar. I really like the potential of this wine, but it is a proper *vin de garde* and needs to be tucked away for a handful of years and allowed to blossom properly. This is going to be outstanding, just be patient. 2024-2060. **93+**.



2015 Morgon “Passerelle 577”- Domaine Mee Godard

The 2015 Morgon “Passerelle 577” from Domaine Mee Godard is, not surprisingly, quite a bit riper than the svelte and tightly-knit 2016 version, as this wine comes in tipping the scales at 14.5 percent octane. It is quite a bit darker in color than the 2016 and offers up a deep and sappy nose of black cherries, sweet cassis, dark chocolate, a dollop of red curry, gamebird, a good base of soil, peonies and still a nice touch of sweet stem spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and impressively pure for its octane, with a fine core of fruit, impressive mineral drive, moderately firm, chewy tannins and a long, sappy and nascently complex finish. This is remarkably precise and cool in the mouth for 14.5 percent alcohol, as well as a properly structured young Morgon, and it needs time in the cellar to soften up on the backend. I do not think I will ever have the same affection for it as the lovey 2016 version, but this is a very strong example from a difficult and buxom vintage. 2025-2055. **91**.

2014 Morgon “Passerelle 577”- Domaine Mee Godard

Mee Godard’s 2014 Morgon “Passerelle 577” is utterly classical in style and structural profile, as this comes in at an even thirteen percent and is pure, precise and beautifully mineral in personality. The bouquet is flat out stunning, offering up a very complex blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, a lovely layer of savory elements, great minerality, violets, peonies, gentle smokiness, incipient gamebird and a touch of red curry in the upper register again. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. This has every hair in place and is going to be a ravishing beauty in the fullness of time, but it deserves some bottle age to properly blossom. 2022-2060. **93+**.

2013 Morgon “Passerelle 577”- Domaine Mee Godard

The 2013 vintage of Passerelle 577 from Mee Godard is blossoming beautifully as it enters its sixth year out from the vintage, offering up a refined and complex bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, dark soil elements, bonfire, spit-roasted *pigeon*, cola and a beautiful array of spice tones from the whole clusters in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, soil-driven and beautifully sappy at the core, with still a fair bit of seamless tannins, good acids and stunning grip and length on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is brilliant Morgon! It is very easy to drink today, but is still clearly climbing and will be even better five to ten years down the road. 2019-2055. **93+**.

Brouilly

2017 Brouilly “Pierreux”- Domaine Chermette

The 2017 Brouilly “Pierreux” from Domaine Chermette is one of the completely unaffected Crus of the vintage and it is flat out stunning on both the nose and palate. The refined and beautifully transparent bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, vinesmoke, gamebird, granitic soil tones, dark chocolate and a whisper of whole cluster sweet herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, great focus and grip, impeccable balance and a long, primary and very, very promising finish. This is very similar in style to the 2011 vintage. 2021-2050. **94**.

2017 Brouilly- Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

The 2017 Brouilly- Hospices de Belleville is plump and impressive, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet cranberries, fresh thyme, vinesmoke, dark soil tones, smoke and gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, sappy and complex, with suave tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and bouncy finish. This is really, really good Brouilly. 2019-2030+. **92**.

2017 Brouilly “l’Enfer des Balloquets”- Robert Perroud

The 2017 Brouilly “l’Enfer de Balloquets” from Robert Perroud is a ripe and quite nicely black fruity example of this commune, offering up a sappy nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, a bit of gamebird, bonfire, a dollop of peppercorn, balsam bough, fresh thyme and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with fine focus and grip and a long, gently tannic and fairly robust finish (particularly for Brouilly). This is good bottle, but cut more in the style of a Morgon in this vintage than a typical Brouilly. 2019-2030. **89**.



Looking south from the Côte de Brouilly towards the vineyards of the Brouilly appellation.

Côte de Brouilly

2017 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2017 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie” from Daniel Bouland is quite a bit riper than his Morgon bottlings in this vintage, as this wine comes in at a robust 14.5 percent octane, but still shows admirable freshness on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is quite black fruity, offering up scents of sweet dark berries, black cherries, roasted *pigeon*, dark chocolate, vinesmoke and a bit of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chewy in structural profile, with a great core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, lovely balance and a long, moderately tannic and focused finish. This is a powerful version of Côte de Brouilly, but the wine is not blowsy like a 2009 and is rock solid structurally and impressive pure in its expression of black fruit. Give this four to five years in the cellar and let the fun begin! 2024-2060. 93.

2017 Côte de Brouilly “les Cailloux”- Nadège et Emmanuel Fellot

The 2017 Côte de Brouilly “les Cailloux” from Emmanuel Fellot is produced from a parcel of seventy year-old vines and is raised in Burgundy barrels. The wine offers up a deep and sappy nose of black cherries, dark berries, roasted gamebird, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a good chassis of ripe, well-integrated tannins, a fine core and good length and grip on the

nascently complex finish. This could use a couple of years in the cellar to really start to blossom. Good juice. 2021-2035. **89+**.

2017 Côte de Brouilly- Lafarge-Vial

The second vintage of Côte de Brouilly from Lafarge-Vial is absolutely outstanding and every bit as fine as the inaugural release from 2016. In 2017, the Lafarges used twenty-five percent whole clusters for this bottling, which offers up a superb nose of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, stony soil tones, gamebird, woodsmoke and a nice touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full, complex and nicely sappy at the core, with fine focus and complexity, impressive soil signature and just a touch of fine-grained tannins perking up the long and beautifully balanced finish. This is lovely! 2019-2045. **93+**.

2016 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2016 Côte de Brouilly from Claire and Fabien Chasselay is very promising example of this outstanding appellation, offering up a deep and precise bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, fresh thyme, a touch of pinot-like cola elements, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a bit of youthful pepperiness, excellent depth at the core, good backend mineral drive and a long, moderately tannic and very nicely balanced, albeit still fairly primary finish. This is a properly structured young bottle of Côte de Brouilly and needs a few years in the cellar to blossom from its peppery adolescence, but there is fine mid-palate stuffing and soil signature here, and a bit of patience will be rewarded nicely. 2021-2045. **91**.

2014 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

The 2014 Côte de Brouilly from Madame Chanrion is opening up nicely and is starting to drink at its apogee. This is a lovely middleweight vintage for this wine, offering up a bright and quite black fruity nose of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil tones and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is full, tangy and wide open structurally, with respectable depth at the core, lovely complexity and grip and a long, vibrant finish. This is only a moderately ripe vintage for Madame Chanrion's wine (though still more complete than the 2012, for instance) and will probably not make particularly old bones by the standards of her estate, but it does offer plenty of enjoyment for the next half dozen years or so. 2019-2025+. **90**.

REVISITING THE SATYR PICKS' PORTFOLIO



A few years ago I ran a feature on Satyr Picks, a small, Greenwich Village-based importer, whose eclectic lineup of excellent estates deserves more recognition. However, as the two principals in this import company, Giovanni Bertagnoli and David Williams, specialize in regions that fall a bit outside of my normal purview of coverage, I do not get to taste or write about their fine producers with anywhere near the regularity as I would like. So, as I did back at the end of 2012, I thought it would make sense to run a short feature on their estates all grouped together, rather than splitting them up between larger features on various regions, so that these small estates can shine a bit on their own. Their lineup has changed a bit since I last wrote a feature on Satyr Picks, with the company giving up one of their best-known Burgundy estates, Domaine Felettig in Chambolle-Musigny, but finding several outstanding new producers in Italy to fill in the gap a bit. One of these is the husband and wife team of Carolina Roggero and Luca Faccenda, who are making some absolutely stunning, ageworthy Nebbiolo in the Roero region, as well as the finest examples of Arneis I have yet tasted. This couple's wines may well be the perfect solution to the huge price increases that the top classicists in Barolo and Barbaresco have witnessed in recent times, not to mention even the very best producers from less well-known regions like Ar. Pe. Pe in Valtellina. Carolina's and Luca's bottlings of Roero are truly exceptional, with great purity, mineral signature and native complexity, coupled to lovely

structural chassis for mid to longer-term cellaring. They are a great bargain and well worth a search of the marketplace to find.

Italy

Valfaccenda- Luca Faccenda and Carolina Roggero (Roero)

Luca Faccenda and Carolina Roggero make wines together, with their superb nebbiolo bottlings appearing under a couple of different labels, depending on the vineyard source and, perhaps, which of the two has played the more important role in crafting that particular cuvée. All of the wines seem to appear under their Valfaccenda label, but their Riserva bottling of “Vigna Valmaggione” credits Carolina as the producer in the fine print. From what I could glean while working through some lovely examples, the winemaking under both labels seems to be the same and is very classically-oriented and produces excellently structured, pure and soil-driven examples of nebbiolo that demand a bit of time in the cellar, but which will blossom into outstanding bottles and represent truly exceptional values in this crazy day and age of overheated Piedmontese pricing (at least for the great classic wines we all want to drink). Beyond the couple’s excellent nebbiolo bottlings, they also produce several different examples of Arneis, as they seem to have higher goals for this varietal than almost anyone whom I have tasted the wine from in Italy. Luca and Carolina are approaching their white wines in a variety of manners, with one bottling of Arneis done fairly traditionally in stainless steel, but produced from quite low yields to add depth and personality to the wine. There are also a couple of variations done with some skin contact, with one bottling, called “Arzigh” given seven days of skin contact prior to pressing and fermenting, and another called “Lila’ Banch” which is a fifty-fifty blend of wine that is given seven days’ worth of skin contact and wine given thirty days’ worth- it is exotic and outstanding and beyond anything I have ever tried made from Arneis!

Valfaccenda Nebbiolo

2016 Roero- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

Luca Faccenda’s 2016 Roero is an excellent bottle of nebbiolo. The wine is properly ripe at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a deep and complex bouquet of cherries, anise, road tar, a touch of fresh oregano, an excellent base of soil tones and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and impressively transparent, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the long, beautifully balanced and very promising finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to allow its tannins to soften properly, but it should age very gracefully for fifteen to twenty years and is an excellent value. 2022-2040. **90.**

2015 Roero- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

The 2015 bottling of Roera from Valfaccenda is also excellent and is the same octane level as the impressive 2016 version. The bouquet is a touch deeper in profile, delivering a combination of red and black cherries, road tar, a bit of gamebird, Piedmontese herb tones, bonfire, a touch of licorice and superb soil signature. On the palate the wine is fresh, full-bodied and nicely structured, with fine mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and focused finish. The 2016 version is a bit more high-toned in personality, with the 2015 hitting more bass notes, but equally impressive. 2021-2040. **90.**

2014 Roero “Vigna Valmaggione” Riserva- Valfaccenda (Carolina Roggero)

The 2014 Roero “Vigna Valmaggione” Riserva from Carolina Roggero’s label is an excellent wine, but this is a bit more chewy than the two *normale* bottlings and will benefit from some cellar time. The bouquet is precise and quite attractive, wafting from the glass in a mix of

red and black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh oregano, roasted *pigeon*, gentle tariness and a fine base of soil that will get nicely autumnal with some bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite chewy, with a rock solid core, excellent transparency, good balance and grip and a long, complex and youthful finish. Give this some time to blossom, as it will reward the patience! 2023-2040+. **92.**

2013 Roero “Vigna Valmaggione” Riserva- Valfaccenda (Carolina Roggero)

The 2013 Roero “Riserva” from Carolina Roggero is really starting to blossom beautifully on the nose, but the palate still has a bit of moderate tannin that will resolve nicely with just a bit more patience. The bouquet today is outstanding, offering up a fine blend of cherries, a touch of blood orange, complex soil tones, rose petals, a nice touch of tariness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, fine-grained and complex finish. Baby Barolo at its finest- just give it another year or two in the cellar to blossom completely on the backend. 2020-2040. **92.**

2012 Roero- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

At age seven, the 2012 Roero from Luca Faccenda is really starting to come into its peak of maturity and offers up beautiful, classic nebbiolo complexity on both the nose and palate. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a sophisticated blend of cherries, rose petals, smoked meats, anise, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of celery seed and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a fine core of fruit, tangy acids, still a bit of tannin and a long, gently tarry and complex finish. This has aged beautifully and still has plenty of years ahead of it. Impressive juice and a superb bargain. 2019-2030+. **90+.**

2011 Roero- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

The 2011 vintage of Roero from *Signor* Faccenda is a bit more black fruity than the lovely, high-toned, floral and red fruity 2012 version (more Barolo-like if you will allow me the indulgence), offering up a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, licorice, gamebird, superb soil tones, a touch of road tar, cigar smoke, fresh oregano and a bit of celery seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with excellent mid-palate depth, lovely focus and grip, melting tannins and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. This is baby Barolo in the best sense of the term and really underscores how well Luca’s wines will age and blossom for those with patience! 2019-2035. **92.**

Valfaccenda Arneis

2017 Roero Arneis- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

The 2017 Roero Arneis from Luca Faccenda is an excellent wine, with more depth than most examples of this varietal, but still done in a quite traditional methodology. The nose wafts from the glass in a bright bouquet of lemon, tangerine, complex soil tones, dried flowers and a bit of gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with zesty acids, fine cut and grip and a long, classy finish. This is very good, straightforward Arneis. 2019-2024. **91.**

2017 Roero Arneis “Loreta”- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

The Loreta bottling of Arneis from Luca and Carolina is an old vine cuvée which is done with a fairly straightforward cellar regimen, in contrast to the extended skin contact cuvées listed below. This is an excellent bottle, offering just a bit more depth and native complexity than the *normale*, wafting from the glass in a mix of lovely floral tones, lemon, orange zest, salty minerality and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex

and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, good mineral drive and a long, snappy and nicely precise finish. First class Arneis! 2019-2025. **92.**



2016 Roero Arneis- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

The 2016 version of Luca’s “regular” Arneis is evolving nicely, but the acids are already starting to back off a bit and the wine is getting just a touch softer on the backend as a result. The bouquet has also developed in a very nice direction, offering up scents of tangerine, white cherries, salty minerality, smoky elements and a hint of clover in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and wide open structurally, with still good framing acids and fine focus and grip on the complex finish. I do not know the relative merits of the two vintages in Roero, but my gut feeling is that this bottling is probably most interesting in its snappy youth, though the 2016 shows that the wine can age in an interesting direction. 2019-2021. **88.**

2016 Arneis “Arzigh”- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

The Arzigh bottling sees seven days of skin contact prior to pressing and is an utterly unique rendition of Arneis (at least in my experience). The wine has a gentle orange tint to it from its skin contact and offers up a deep and complex nose of fresh apricot, white cherries, orange peel, spices meats, good mineral undertow and an exotic topnote of butterscotch with a bit of aeration. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core

of fruit, zesty acids and a long, poised and vibrant finish. I really like this wine, which would work beautifully with some of the classic veal preparations of Italian cuisine. 2019-2025+. **93.**

2015 Roero Arneis- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

The 2015 Roero Arneis from *Signor Faccenda* is aging very nicely and is now drinking at its apogee. The bouquet is starting to show a touch of nuttiness in its mix of bread fruit, lemongrass, stony minerality and walnut. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and still very nicely balanced, with a good chassis of acidity, a fine core and good length and grip on the bright and zesty finish. This has not really developed a lot more complexity with bottle age, but it is still vibrant and has plenty of life in it. 2019-2024. **88.**

2015 Arneis “Lila’ Banch”- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

The “Lila’ Banch” bottling of Arneis from Lucca and Carolina is the cuvée that is a combination of seven and thirty day skin contact for the two components of the wine, and it is a bit darker orange than the Arzigh. The wine is also excellent, delivering a fine aromatic constellation of orange, white cherry, exotic spices tones of clove and cinnamon, a touch of browned butter and good minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with fine cut and grip, a lovely core, good soil signature and a long, well-balanced finish that almost shows a touch of backend tannin. This too is a fascinating approach to Arneis! 2019-2025+. **93.**

2013 Roero Arneis- Valfaccenda (Luca Faccenda)

Luca Faccenda’s 2013 Arneis is fresh as a daisy and quite a bit more floral in personality than the 2015 version. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined mix of pear, bread fruit, spring flowers, a touch of raw almond, a touch of straw and a fine base of white soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, focused and still has a good core, with fine length and grip. This is getting towards the end of its plateau, but continues to drink nicely and is a good bottle. Not bad for a varietal that is generally recognized as not ageworthy at all! 2019-2021. **88.**

Do.t.e- Filippo Calabresi (Tuscany)

Do.t.e is a fairly young winery in Tuscany run by Filippo Calabresi, who is seeking to craft wines in a natural manner without the use of artificial products. Filippo farms his two hectares of syrah, which were planted in 2002, organically, and the wines are fermented with indigenous yeasts and without the addition of SO₂. His various bottlings are crafted through a myriad of different techniques, with some red wines raised in cement and bottled after eighteen months, while others see a two year *elevage* in combinations of old oak casks and amphora. He also makes sparkling wines of the “Pet Nat” genre. His chosen grape variety is syrah for his red wines and rosatos, and he also farms some viognier, but I have not yet had a chance to taste any of his white wines. Filippo certainly marches to the beat of a different drummer, as one of his red that I tasted, called Dueinuno was a blend of the 2013 and 2014 vintages of his syrah, which he thought worked better as a blend than on their own.

2017 Better Now Vino Rosso- Do.t.e (Filippo Calabresi)

The 2017 “Better Now” Vino Rosso from Filippo Calabresi is made entirely of syrah and comes in at a properly ripe octane of thirteen percent. The wine delivers a fine and sappy nose of cassis, black raspberries, a nice touch of black olive, Tuscan herbs, bitter chocolate and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is sappy, full-bodied and modestly tannic, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, bouncy and slightly spritz finish. This was bottled with a trace of

CO2 in it and it is best now if decanted for twenty minutes or so prior to serving. Good juice. 2019-2030. **90.**

2016 Bertolt Vino Rosso- Do.t.e (Filippo Calabresi)

The 2016 Bertolt Vino Rosso from Do.t.e is also composed entirely of syrah. The cuvée is built for the cellar and shows lovely promise, offering up a youthfully complex bouquet of cassis, pepper, roasted meats, dark soil tones, bonfire and a fairly generous serving of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a good core and fine focus, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, primary and well-balanced finish. This is still a very young wine and has not yet fully integrated its new oak component, so there remains a bit of uncovered oak tannin on the backend, but there is plenty of depth of fruit to eventually absorb the wood with bottle age. This should age into a good bottle, but patience will be required. 2026-2050. **88+.**

2015 Alta Fedeltá- Do.t.e (Filippo Calabresi)

The 2015 Alta Fedeltá from Filippo Calabresi is composed entirely of syrah, with this bottling raised in a combination of cement tanks and old oak barrels for two years prior to bottling. It comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a youthful and classy nose of cassis, pepper, smoked meats, Tuscan herbs a bit of road tar and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and nicely built for the cellar, with a fine core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. This will be a tasty bottle of syrah with some bottle age. 2023-2045. **89.**

Dueinuno- Do.t.e (Filippo Calabresi)

Dueinuno (two in one) bottling is the blend of 2013 and 2014 syrah from Filippo Calabresi and it is a touch riper than the 2015 syrah bottling, coming in at a ripe, but proper fourteen percent alcohol. The bouquet is quite wide open today and offers up a lovely blend of black raspberries, cassis, smoked meats, forest floor, pepper, chocolate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature and a long, blossoming finish that still features a bit of backend tannin. Good juice. 2019-2040. **90.**

Per G (Sparkling Rosato)- Do.t.e (Filippo Calabresi)

The Per G is a Pet Nat sparkling wine made entirely from syrah. The wine is fairly pale in color for a rosé made from syrah and offers up a pretty nose of orange, spice tones, dried flowers, gentle smokiness and a good base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and zesty, with just a touch of natural wine “wildness” perking up the long finish. The bubbles are frothy and nicely integrated and this is a tasty example. 2019-2023. **88.**

Antico Podere Le Miccine (Tuscany)

The Le Miccine estate, which is now directed by Paula Papini Cook, is comprised of seven hectares of vineyards, which are planted predominantly to sangiovese, with small amounts of colorino, malvasia nero and merlot also planted here to add to the complexity of the blends—though the merlot is used exclusively for the domaine’s Super Tuscan wine. There are a couple of small parcels of Vermentino planted here as well to craft the Le Miccine white wine bottling. The vineyards are farmed organically these days, and there are olive trees planted here as well, from which the estate makes a superb olive oil. The two Chianti Classico bottlings here are raised in a combination of *botti* and French barrels, with some of the *barriques* new. The *Riserva* and *Gran Selezione* bottlings are made entirely from sangiovese and spend two and a half years in cask prior to bottling. The latter is a single vineyard cuvée.



2017 “Fosso di Conce” Bianco di Toscano (Vermentino)- Le Miccine

The Fosso di Conce is the sole white wine from Le Miccine, this is a very tasty bottle of Vermentino. The wine shows a nice touch of skin contact in its bouquet of bread fruit, orange peel, salty soil tones and a touch of rosemary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and wide open, with gentle framing acids, a good core and sneaky length and grip on the complex finish. This is pretty low acid and will want drinking over the near-term, but it is quite tasty today. 2019-2020. **87.**

2016 Chianti Classico- Le Miccine

The 2016 Chianti Classico from Le Miccine is built for the cellar and needs a few years to properly blossom, but it will be lovely with a bit of bottle age. If one is inclined to drink it early on, give it some time in decanter to open up, as it blossoms pretty nicely with twenty or thirty minutes of aeration, eventually offering up a classic nose of cherries, a touch of orange peel, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil tones, Tuscan herbs and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, youthfully complex and promising finish. 2021-2040. **89.**

2015 Chianti Classico- Le Miccine

The 2015 vintage from Le Miccine is a tad riper than the 2016 version (fourteen percent versus thirteen) and is a bit more black fruity in personality as a result. The bouquet is still young, but starting to stir nicely, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, plums, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil, roasted gamebird, a touch of cedar and a gentle topnote of oregano.

On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, tang and complex finish. This carries its ripeness beautifully, without ever losing precision or showing any signs of jamminess. A very impressive bottle. 2019-2040. **91.**

2014 Chianti Classico “Riserva”- Le Miccine

The 2014 Chianti “Riserva” from Le Miccine is a fine bottle in the making, though still a little young and structured on the palate for primetime drinking. The bouquet is deep and precise, offering up scents of black cherries, cigar wrapper, lovely spice tones, a touch of oregano, a fine base of soil and a bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and tangy, with good mid-palate depth, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and youthful finish. Give this a few years to blossom. 2021-2040+. **90.**

2014 Chianti Classico “Gran Selezione”- Le Miccine

The 2014 Gran Selezione Chianti from Le Miccine is a touch riper than the Riserva bottling, coming in at an even fourteen percent octane (versus 13.5 percent for the Riserva). The wine offers a deep and youthfully promising bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil, just a whisper of Tuscan herb tones and a bit of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full, with a rock solid core, chewy tannins, good, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long and still quite primary finish. This needs some time in the cellar, but it is going to be a very good bottle once the tannins have a chance to soften up. 2024-2050. **92.**

Austria

Weingut Werlitsch (Steirerland)

Weingut Werlitsch is a biodynamic domaine based in southern Styria and the brainchild of Ewald Tscheppe, a young and totally committed naturalist wine grower who is crafting some stunning wines from his small estate. Ewald took over the direction of the family estate from his father in 2004 and immediately moved the estate’s eight hectares of vineyards to organic viticulture and eventually biodynamism. As a certified biodynamic domaine, Weingut Werlitsch produces superb wines solely from indigenous yeasts, with as little manipulation as possible in the cellar, hand-harvesting and a completely natural approach to viticulture. The vineyards here are very steep slopes, planted on clay-limestone soils in southern Styria. This is really a “micro-domaine” and Ewald only produces about four thousand bottles per year of all of its different cuvées. No new oak is used here, with most of the wines fermented in a combination of stainless steel or older oak fermenting vats and then aged in three and four year-old oak barrels and *fuders* of a wide variety of sizes. The Morillon bottling is made from one hundred percent chardonnay, where the various Ex Vero “Legoth” bottling is produced from a unique blend that include sauvignon blanc, chardonnay, muskateller, pinot blanc and several other grapes. The other two Ex Vero bottlings (numbered as II and III respectively) are blends of chardonnay and sauvignon blanc, from different vineyard sources. These are wines of great character and individuality, with superb balance and a youthful vibrancy (despite a bit of bottle age) that makes them very, very exciting.

For this report, we revisited a vertical of the domaine’s Morillon bottling of chardonnay (Morillon is the Styrian name for the varietal) from the most recent vintage release all the way back to the first I had the pleasure to taste, which was the 2008. Additionally, we tasted Ewald Tscheppe’s top bottlings of white wine, which he classes as his” Ex Vero” series- there are three

different iterations of this level and which are crafted for long-term cellaring possibilities. Giovanni and David were also kind enough to leave me with a few vintages of the estate's very small production bottling made in amphora, called Amphorenwein, which is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and sauvignon blanc. There are also several other bottlings produced here, including a tasty Welschriesling and an excellent Sauvignon Blanc, which I did not taste in my last report on Ewald Tscheppe's lovely wines. I should mention that Ewald has started bottling without added SO₂ since the 2014 vintage, and based on what I tasted from more recent vintages, I would suspect that current releases are not going to last quite as long in bottle as wines from vintages like 2009 and 2008 here. A bit of background on each cuvée appears below, prior to the notes on the wines.

Morillon "Vom Opok"

The Morillon "Vom Opok" bottling had aged beautifully, but had not developed dramatically different personalities with cellaring, so I have just listed below the most recent couple of releases and a couple of my favorites of the older vintages, as I am loathe to repeat last issue's 275 pages again! But, each and every vintage was cruising along beautifully and still had a fine chassis of acidity to continue to age for many more years to come. The cuvée has been bottled without any added SO₂ since 2014, so I do not know if these most recent vintages will age as long as the 2008 and 2010 version have done.

2016 Morillon "Vom Opok"- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2016 Morillon "Vom Opok" from Weingut Werlitsch is a fine middleweight in the making, offering up a youthful nose of tart pear, tangerine, fresh almond, salty soil tones and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and zesty, with a good core, fine focus and grip and just a touch of natural wine "wildness" perking up on the long finish. Good juice, but this does not seem likely to quite reach the heights of the 2015 version. 2019-2025. **88.**

2015 Morillon "Vom Opok"- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2015 Morillon reminds me quite a bit of the young 2008 I was first served by the estate's importers, though it is a touch riper in personality. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, peach, a touch of nutskin, orange peel, salty minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and complex, with lovey focus and grip, good backend lift and a long, nascently complex finish. I do not know the differences of vintage character between 2016 and 2015 in Styria, but the 2015 Morillon seems more structured out of the blocks and will age longer. 2019-2030+. **90.**

2010 Morillon "Vom Opok"- Weingut Werlitsch

The estate's 2010 Morillon is drinking beautifully at nine years of age and shows just how well this bottling can age. The wine delivers excellent aromatic complexity in its mélange of almond, peach, tangerine, salty soil tones, citrus peel, gentle nuttiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced today, with a good core and fine focus, length and grip. This is aging beautifully. 2019-2028+. **91.**

2008 Morillon "Vom Opok"- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2008 Morillon Vom Opok bottling from Weingut Werlitsch was one of the first wines I ever tasted from the domaine and at age eleven, it is drinking beautifully today. The bouquet offers up an elegant and mature blend of hazelnuts, pineapple. Tangerine, citrus peel, a lovely base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, crisp and fullish, with

lovely complexity and focus, a good core and fine cut and grip on the long and zesty finish. This is only 11.5 percent octane, but has plenty of palate authority and is quite delicious to drink today. 2019-2030. **91**.



Sauvignon Blanc

2016 Sauvignon Blanc- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2016 Sauvignon Blanc from Weingut Werlitsch is an excellent wine, offering up a pure and vibrant bouquet of tart orange, fresh lime, chalky minerality, a bit of gentle grassiness, white flowers, citrus peel and a touch of anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, soil-driven and zesty, with good, but not great depth at the core, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and bouncy finish. This really works well at the table now, but it may broaden a bit as it has a chance to age. 2019-2025+. **89**.

2015 Sauvignon Blanc- Weingut Werlitsch

Ewald Tscheppe has fashioned a lovely bottle of sauvignon blanc in the 2015 vintage. The bouquet offers up a bright and varietally correct blend of lime, sweet grapefruit, gentle botanicals, chalky minerality, a bit of fresh tarragon, incipient notes of candied citrus peel and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and a bit more generous in the mid-palate than the youthful 2016 version, with bright acids, fine complexity and a long, zesty finish. As this was bottled without added SO₂, I would expect it to age a bit more briskly

than Ewald's wines from the last decade, but it will deliver plenty of pleasure over the next few years. 2019-2024. **90.**

2014 Sauvignon Blanc- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc from Weingut Werlitsch is a touch lower in octane than the 2016 and 2015 versions, coming in at an even twelve percent, versus 12.5 percent for the other two vintages. This is a more grassy vintage for this wine, but I really like its precision, purity and impressive complexity on both the nose and palate and will happily trade a bit more cut grass elements for these characteristics. The bouquet offers up scents of fresh-cut grass, lime, green apple, a touch of petrol, pepper, chalky minerality, beeswax, wild fennel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and zesty, with fine focus and grip, a good core, a lovely girde of acidity and a long, mineraly and complex finish. This was the first vintage Ewald did not add SO₂ at bottling and I wish he had, as this has the structure of a less ripe vintage of Cotat Sancerre, and these wines are often the most interesting with long-term bottle age. However, I get the sense that this wine is not going to make particularly old bones by the standards of Weingut Werlitsch, given its low SO₂ and it will probably need to be drunk up over the next five years. 2019-2024. **90.**

Welschriesling

2016 Welschriesling- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2016 Welschriesling from Weingut Werlitsch comes in at a cool eleven percent alcohol and offers up a bright and youthful bouquet of lime, gooseberry, salty minerality, dried flowers, a touch of rosemary and a hint of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a lovely core, fine mineral drive and a long, vibrant and youthfully complex finish. I really like this wine's precision and backend lift. 2019-2025+. **89.**

2013 Welschriesling- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2013 vintage of Welschriesling from Ewald Tscheppe is a touch riper than the 2016 version, coming in at 11.5 percent octane and delivering a fine and still fairly youthful aromatic blend of lime, grapefruit, menthol, gently resinous botanicals, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, lovey transparency and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This wine is aging quite gracefully and has plenty of life still ahead of it, but it does not seem to really be developing the same complexity on the palate that it shows on the nose. That said, it is bright and very tasty at age six and will continue to be so for several years to come. 2019-2030. **89.**

Ex Vero Legoth

The Ex Vero Legoth bottling from Weingut Werlitsch is made up of a complex blend of twenty percent each of Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay and Muskateller, as well as fifteen percent each of Sämling and Müller Thurgau, as well as a final ten percent of Welschriesling to round out this eclectic and very satisfying blend. Ewald Tscheppe considers this one of his two finest white wine and feels it is meant to age long and gracefully.

2008 Ex Vero Legoth- Weingut Werlitsch

Like the 2008 Morillon, this too is a very understated 11.5 percent alcohol. This is a totally unique wine (at least to me) on both the nose and palate and really lovely, wafting from the glass in a very complex mélange of grapefruit, a touch of blood orange, gentle resinous tones,

a lovely base of soil, notes of spiced meats and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and still quite snappy, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and a very long, complex and soil-driven finish. I really like the personality of this wine. 2012-2018. **90.**

Ex Vero I, II and III

The Ex Vero I, II and III bottlings are composed of a much more traditional Styrian blend from Ewald Tscheppe of two-thirds sauvignon blanc and one third chardonnay and these are his very top bottlings for the cellar. The differences in the three bottlings are from where on the hillside vineyard he takes the grapes from for each cuve, with the Ex Vero I bottling made from younger vines in the lower section of the slope, the Ex Vero II made from forty year-old parcels found mid-slope and his Ex Vero III coming from the oldest vines at the summit of the hillside. The examples that I had the pleasure to taste had aged beautifully, though I should mention that these are all being bottled now without added SO2 since the 2014 vintage, so it will be interesting to see if the most recent vintages will show the same longevity as those from the 2010 and 2008 vintages.

2015 Ex Vero I- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2015 Ex Vero I from Ewald Tscheppe is bottled without any added SO2 and has a touch of the wild side about it on both the nose and palate. The wine is a bit riper than earlier vintages, but still quite cool, coming in at 12.5 percent octane in 2015. The complex bouquet offers up scents of orange peel, grapefruit, a touch of balsam bough, fine soil tones, gentle smokiness and a bit of fern in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, zesty and complex finish. Good juice, but it does not seem likely to age quite as long with the lower sulfur levels than previous vintages. 2019-2025+. **89.**

2010 Ex Vero III- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2010 Ex Vero III bottling from Weingut Werlitsch is aging beautifully and is really drinking with distinction at age nine. The wine offers up a superb and nicely mature nose of fresh apricot, tangerine, hazelnuts, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable balance and a long, focused and zesty finish. This still has plenty of life ahead of it, but is drinking very well indeed at the present time. 2019-2030. **93.**

2009 Ex Vero II- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2009 Ex Vero II from Weingut Werlitsch is a lovely wine that offers up impressive depth and flavor authority on the palate for its moderate twelve percent alcohol level. The nose is deep and shows lovely elements of maturity in its mélange of orange, grapefruit, citrus peel, a hint of beeswax, fresh rosemary and a lovely base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and wide open in personality, with fine focus and grip, still bright acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This is not quite as precise as the 2008 version, but it too has aged very nicely and is drinking at its apogee today. 2019-2025. **90.**

2009 Ex Vero III- Weingut Werlitsch

The warmer 2009 vintage of Ex Vero III is also well into its apogee, but it does not quite possess the same precision on the nose and palate as either the 2010 or 2008 versions. The properly tertiary bouquet offers up scents of peach, orange, a touch of browned butter, hazelnuts and a good base of salty soil elements. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, snappy acids and very good length and grip on the slightly broad-shouldered

finish. This is good juice as well and will continue to drink for several more years, but I like the slightly more refined vintages of this bottling on either side of the 2009. 2019-2030. **91.**

2008 Ex Vero II- Weingut Werlitsch

This is truly and exceptional wine that borrows nicely from both its varietal constituents, offering up a deep and classy bouquet of green apple, pink grapefruit, a touch of fresh lime, beautifully complex, resinous botanical tones, a great base of soil, citrus oils and a nice touch of fresh rosemary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with great balance and focus, crisp acids and outstanding grip on the zesty and very, very long finish. High class juice indeed! 2012-2020. **93.**

2008 Ex Vero III- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2008 vintage of Ex Vero III from Ewald Tscheppe is excellent and is cruising along beautifully at eleven years of age. The bouquet is bright and classy, wafting from the glass in a mix of fresh apricot, orange peel, toasted almond, salty minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and suave and refined on the attack, with good mid-palate depth, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the complex finish. This is really classy juice. 2019-2035. **93+.**

Amphorenwein

Ewald Tscheppe only makes a very, very tiny quantity of his Amphorenwein, which he started doing mainly out of curiosity. The wine is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and sauvignon blanc, which is buried on the skins in beeswax-lined, hand-made, ceramic amphora for eight months in the yard outside of the winery and then aged for another two years in old oak barrels. The grapes for these bottlings hail from the same old vine parcels at the very top of his hillside vineyard where he also produces the Ex Vero III cuvée.

2015 Amphorenwein “Freude”- Weingut Werlitsch

The 2015 Amphorenwein “Freude” from Ewald Tscheppe is a really good wine, and this style of wine does not usually float my boat. The bouquet is a little wild, but settles in to offer up a vibrant and complex blend of tangerine, fresh apricot, wild flowers, passion fruit, a good base of soil tones and a bit of fresh rosemary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip and even a touch of tannin perking up the long finish. Completely unique and completely compelling wine! 2019-2025. **92.**

2009 Amphorenwein- Weingut Werlitsch

This quite a light golden color for an amphora wine (you can see its color in the decanter in the photo above) and is really best if it is given some decanting time to fully blossom. The nose is a complex and quite fresh blend of grapefruit, herb tones, a fine base of soil, rosemary and a touch of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and complex, with a good core, lovely balance and a long, quite vibrant finish. Lovely wine. 2012-2020. **92+.**

Beaujolais

Claire and Fabien Chasselay

The Chasselay family have been *vignerons* in the village of Châtillon d’Azergues in the southern region of Beaujolais for centuries, with the most recent generation of the Chasselay family, Claire and her brother Fabien joining their parents, Jean-Gilles and Christiane Chasselay in running the family domaine in 2006. Jean-Gilles Chasselay had already been farming in an

organic manner for many years, having taken over the estate from his parents all the way back in 1981, and the arrival of Claire and Fabien full-time to the domaine caused the family to be certified by Ecocert. They are really making excellent wines these days (perhaps this has been the case for a generation, as I have only had the pleasure to taste their wines starting with the 2011 vintage), with several different bottlings of Beaujolais Villages and a nice selection of Crus as well.



2016 Beaujolais “Les Grands Eparcieux”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The Les Grands Eparcieux bottling of Beaujolais hails from the oldest vines that the Chasselays own in this appellation, and their 2016 is a lovely middleweight, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a brightly red fruity nose of cranberries, cherries, vinesmoke, a touch of pepper, fresh thyme and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy and fullish, with a good core, fine soil signature and a bit of tannin perking up the long and tangy finish. This is a lovely bottle of old school Beaujolais that is drinking nicely, but will also keep well for at least the next half dozen years or so. Good juice. 2019-2025+. **89.**

2015 Beaujolais “Quatre Saisons”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The Quatre Saisons bottling is the Chasselay family’s regular bottling of Beaujolais and the 2015 version is nicely ripe in the style of this robust vintage in the region. The color is quite a bit darker than the 2016 Les Grands Eparcieux and the bouquet delivers excellent depth and complexity in its mix of black cherries, roasted *pigeon*, bitter chocolate, a fine base of dark soil

tones, bonfires, fresh thyme and a touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, a bit of backend tannin and a long, well-balanced finish. This is fairly robust for a Beaujolais bottling (rather than a Cru), but it avoids any of the potential pitfalls of the vintage and really is a tasty bottle. 2019-2030. **89+**.

Cru Bottlings

2016 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2016 Côte de Brouilly from Claire and Fabien Chasselay is very promising example of this outstanding appellation, offering up a deep and precise bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, fresh thyme, a touch of pinot-like cola elements, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a bit of youthful pepperiness, excellent depth at the core, good backend mineral drive and a long, moderately tannic and very nicely balanced, albeit still fairly primary finish. This is a properly structured young bottle of Côte de Brouilly and needs a few years in the cellar to blossom from its peppery adolescence, but there is fine mid-palate stuffing and soil signature here, and a bit of patience will be rewarded nicely. 2021-2045. **91**.

2013 Chénas “la Carrière”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2013 Chénas “la Carrière” from Domaine Chasselay is now nicely into its apogee of maturity and is drinking with beautiful complexity and soil signature. This was a very classic vintage in Beaujolais, without the same inner concentration of vintages like 2011 and 2015, but with great precision in the best examples, which this Chénas certainly delivers. The bouquet is starting to show some fine secondary elements in its complex blend of cherries, blood orange, cinnamon, cloves, gently autumnal soil tones (with the first touch of oak leaves), woodsmoke and gamebird. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and beautifully balanced, with a good core, superb transparency, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This still has terrific acidity and the wine is excellent today at the table. An excellent bargain! 2019-2025+. **92**.

Burgundy

Domaine Derey Frères (Couchey)

I have only tasted a couple of wines from the Derey brothers, whose small domaine lies in the village of Couchey, between Marsannay and Fixin. The entire lineup of red wines includes a very fine Gevrey-Chambertin villages bottling, Fixin premier cru Les Hervelets, Fixin AC and a handful of Marsannay *lieux à dits* bottlings, including the fine Champs Perdrix vineyard. There is also a fine Marsannay rosé bottling in the domaine’s portfolio, and I seem to recall tasting a Marsannay Blanc as well back in 2012, but did not see any examples in this current round of samples. The Derey brothers use a small percentage of new oak for their red wines, with no cuvée raised in more than fifteen percent new oak and the wines were really showing well from the selections I tried from 2016, 2015 and 2015. The 2015 Marsannay “Champs Perdrix” was particularly noteworthy for its elegance and well-measured ripeness in this torrid summer. I really liked the entire range of red wines here and found each one true to its vintage character and underlying *terroir* and they offer excellent values and should age very nicely indeed.

2017 Marsannay Rosé- Domaine Derey Frères

The color of the 2017 Marsannay Rosé from Domaine Derey Frères is exactly what one would expect, as this is a normal crop level, rather than the decidedly deeper hue of the 2016 version from the frost-shortened crop of the previous year. The 2017 version is very pretty, wafting from the glass in a mix of white cherries, a touch of melon, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full, bright and bouncy, with a good core, lovely acids and good length and grip on the vibrant finish. A classic Marsannay Rosé. 2019-2022. **89.**

2016 Marsannay Rosé- Domaine Derey Frères

The 2016 Marsannay Rosé from the Derey brothers is quite a bit deeper in color and more concentrated and vinous in style than the 2017 version, as the village of Marsannay was one of the most severely frost-damaged in all of the Côte d'Or in 2016 and this wine had to be made from miniscule yields. The nose is superb, jumping from the glass in a mix of pomegranate, cherries, a hint of cinnamon, violets and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and long, without quite the same girdle of acidity as the 2017 version, but a lovely core and a long, complex finish. The 2017 is fine for an aperitif, but this low-yield 2016 version is really made for the table. Good juice. 2019-2022. **89.**



2016 Marsannay “Champs Perdrix”- Domaine Derey Frères

The 2016 Marsannay “Champs Perdrix” from Domaine Derey Frères is a really lovely example of the vintage, with plenty of concentration from the severely short crop due to the

frosts in this commune in 2016. The bouquet is deep, complex and classy, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, a touch of fresh nutmeg, excellent soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird and a whisper of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely chewy, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to blossom properly, but it will be an excellent bottle of Marsannay in the fullness of time. 2022-2045. **89.**

2016 Fixin “Hervelets” 1er Cru- Domaine Derey Frères

There was no frost at all in Fixin in 2016 and the les Hervelets from the Derey brothers is absolutely classical in style as a result. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, a nice touch of plumminess, raw cocoa, *pigeon*, lovely soil tones and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive transparency, suave tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is all too easy to drink today, but it will be even better if given a bit of time in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. An excellent Fixin! 2021-2050. **91.**

2015 Marsannay “Champs Perdrix”- Domaine Derey Frères

The 2015 Champs Perdrix from Domaine Derey Frères is nicely cool for the vintage, offering up a pure and sappy nose of plums, black cherries, Swiss milk chocolate, gamebird, lovely soil tones, mustard seed and a gentle framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and more structured than the wide open nose suggests, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and youthful finish. This needs a few years to uncoil on the palate, but it is going to be excellent once the palate catches up with the expressive and very elegant nose! 2023-2045. **90.**

2014 Fixin “Hervelets” 1er Cru- Domaine Derey Frères

The 2014 les Hervelets from Domaine Derey Frères is a touch reductive when first opened and needs a bit of time in decanter to blossom, but it does so nicely with fifteen minutes’ worth of air. Once it opens up, the wine delivers a fine and quite elegant aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, grilled meats, mustard seed, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively transparent, with a fine core of black fruit, suave tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is very good juice, with a touch of noble rusticity to its personality, but impressive depth and complexity! 2020-2050. **91.**