

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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**MIKE CHELINI OF STONY HILL VINEYARDS
CELEBRATES HIS FORTIETH HARVEST**



Mike Chelini, the long-time winemaker at Stony Hill Vineyards celebrated his fortieth harvest at the winery in 2012. To mark the his fortieth anniversary with the fabled Napa Valley estate on Spring Mountain, one of the winery's most passionate and faithful clients, Dr. Ron Harrell, organized a two day Stony Hill *fête* in the spring in New Orleans to celebrate many of the greatest vintages of Mike's long career at the domaine, as well as some of the great wines from Stony Hill's founder and first winemaker, Fred McCrea. Fred and his wife Eleanor founded the winery in 1943, buying an old goat farm on the flanks of Spring Mountain and clearing land and planting vines. I was extremely honored to be invited by Ron and Nancy Harrell to New Orleans in April to help celebrate Mike's anniversary at the estate with a dazzling array of mature (but, by no means old!) vintages of Stony Hill. The two Stony Hill dinners that we shared were clearly two of the most magical wine tastings I have ever attended and we were equally dazzled by the cuisine of one of New Orleans finest chefs, Alex Harrell, who just happens to be the son of Ron and Nancy, as well as the Executive Chef of Sylvain in the crescent city. It was two great nights of brilliant food, stunning, mature wines and true *bonhomie* and it served admirably as a reward at the end of a very long spring trip through Europe, as I had only been back in New York a few days when I packed my bags and headed south to New Orleans.

Readers will recall that I wrote a full-scale feature on Stony Hill Vineyards and their great, long-lived and classic wines back in Issue 29 in October of 2010, and as I tried to thoroughly cover the historic background of the estate in that piece, I see no reason to provide more than a thumbnail sketch of the history in this article that led Mike to become Stony Hill's winemaker. Since Fred and Eleanor McCrea had started the winery in 1943, Fred had handled all of the winemaking duties until he was starting to feel that he was getting a bit older and could use some assistance in the cellar. This was in the late 1960s. he had already been hiring a few interns from UC-Davis to help out in the cellar- most notably Ric Forman and Jed Steele, and in 1969, he had hired his first full-time winemaking assistant in Bruce Rogers, who was with him until 1972. At around this same time, Fred McCrea had hired as Vineyard Manager a young friend of Ric Forman's, Mike Chelini, who had previously been working with Ric over at Sterling Vineyards and had rented, with his wife Kathy, the second house on the Stony Hill property. When Bruce Rogers left the winery after the 1972 harvest, Fred McCrea felt that he needed to hire a full-time winemaker for Stony Hill to prepare for his eventual retirement from winemaking duties, and at the suggestion of Ric Forman, Mike Chelini added the responsibilities of winemaker to those of overseeing the estate's viticulture. So Mike's first vintage here at Stony Hill as head winemaker was the 1973. Fred McCrea of course was looking over Mike's shoulder a bit in those early days, to ensure that the style of the estate's wines remained constant, but with Mike having already lived on the property since 1970 and been in charge of the vineyards for a few years, he was already quite steeped in the Stony Hill ethos and it was a fairly seamless transition from Fred to Mike as winemaker at the winery.

I should take a moment to relate how the spring and summer of 1973 unfolded at Stony Hill, as from the moment Fred McCrea handed the head winemaking position to Mike Chelini, Mike spent all of his time out in the vineyards, babying the vines that summer to have the most pristine fruit possible with which to produce his first vintage at Stony Hill. The vines obviously responded to Mike's TLC that year, as when it was time to pick, the crop load was quite larger than customary at the winery, and when all was said and done, the vineyards had produced a crop of nearly four tons per acre- which was nearly double what the last decades'-worth of vintages had averaged for yields! Needless to say, Mike was a bit nervous making the wines that first year, as he was concerned that the higher yields would rob the Stony Hill wines of their inner concentration which had already made the winery's long-lived chardonnays legendary in the realm of California wine. But when Fred McCrea tasted the young 1973 chardonnay out of barrel, he turned to Mike and said "son, you've really got the touch, this is terrific." Mike will still often tell the story that he was not really sure if Fred was on the money in his evaluation of the young 1973 chardonnay, for "to me, the 1973 tasted rather tight and steely, and I thought it might have been a bit dilute from the larger yields than had been the case with the earlier vintages here- but I was wrong and Fred, who had the experience with these wines, was right- and today the 1973 Chardonnay is still a really stunning bottle of wine and clearly one of the best I ever made at Stony Hill!" Happily, we were able to confirm this fact at our celebration in New Orleans, as Ron Harrell had the 1973 queued up for our first evening's tasting and the wine at age forty was absolutely breathtaking in its vibrancy, complexity and exceptional quality.

When tasting some of these early vintages of chardonnay and other white wines that Mike Chelini made at Stony Hill from 1973 forwards, one has to keep in mind that he had never really made much white wine at all prior to taking over the winemaking at California's

preeminent white wine estate in 1973! Mike had made some red wines on his own from purchased grapes- primarily zinfandel- as well as assisting Ric Forman in the cellars at Sterling during his time there, but 1973 was his first full vintage where he was going to be in charge of producing primarily white wines. When one tastes his magical '73 chardonnay, or the lovely riesling or late harvest sémillon that he also produced in his inaugural vintage at the reins of Stony Hill, one has to really be impressed not only with the superb quality of those wines, but how they have managed to age as long and gracefully as any vintage made previously by Fred McCreas or subsequently by Mike himself, once he had his feet fully under him as a white wine winemaker. It is pretty easy to concur with Fred McCreas's very early assessment that "the kid had the touch" with white wines! Of course, Mike has always known how to make red wines as well, and as he starts his fifth decade as Stony Hill's winemaker (now, does that make you feel old Mike?) it is important to remember that this estate has just recently begun producing an utterly stunning, old school-styled cabernet sauvignon that should be on the radar of every lover of traditional California wine as well. Stony Hill Vineyards has long been one of the true grand cru California producers of white wine, but this new cabernet sauvignon bottling belongs right up there with the very best being made in the state these days and really should be sought out as well. Perhaps, by the time we are celebrating Mike's fiftieth harvest at Stony Hill, some of these new cabernets will be starting to blossom and can be included in the festivities!

One of the things that I kept thinking about over the course of these two great tastings, and which always brought a smile to my face, was that Fred and Eleanor McCreas had been very strongly cautioned by the folks at UC-Davis against planting chardonnay on their property back when they originally cleared the land and began to lay out their vineyards in the second half of the 1940s, for the grape was seen by the folks at Davis at the time as very difficult to work with and not having a future in Napa Valley! French Colombard at this time was seen as a far more logical white wine variety to plant, and the folks at Davis prevailed upon the McCreas to plant also riesling and pinot blanc here- once it was clear that the McCreas were going to plant chardonnay and French Colombard was going to be rejected! Fred McCreas absolutely loved white Burgundies and his plan all along had been to rely primarily on chardonnay for the Stony Hill lineup of wines, so the planting of chardonnay vines began in 1947 and the first Stony Hill Vineyards chardonnay was released in the 1952 vintage. Thank goodness that Fred and Eleanor trusted their gut instincts, rather than toeing the line of their UC-Davis advisors on this particular point! There was very, very little chardonnay planted in the state of California in the late 1940s, so it is easy to underestimate what a leap of faith it was at that time for the McCreas to hitch the Stony Hill wagon to this grape variety, and it is easy to imagine that the future of California viticulture might have been very different if the McCreas had not gone ahead with their planting of chardonnay. Of course, it did help that they had happened upon a superb microclimate and *terroir* for this grape, and, as they say, the rest is history!

While I have long been a believer in the ability of Stony Hill chardonnays to age for extremely long periods of time, I was still not really prepared for just how stunning these two tastings organized by Ron Harrell were going to prove to be in mid-April. I was expecting some stunning high water marks from some of the vintages, but never in my wildest dreams really thought that we would experience such a sustained level of brilliance from nearly every wine that Ron pulled from his deep collection of Stony Hill! Other than a bottle of the 1961 chardonnay- where half of the cork had fallen off and was floating in the bottle- and an off bottle of the 1969

chardonnay, we had an amazing lineup of truly remarkable wines at their pinnacles of peak maturity. Our bottle of the 1974 was a tad on the advanced side (perhaps a bit of warm storage somewhere along the way before Ron Harrell purchased it?) and was not as vibrant as the last bottle I tasted, but still eminently drinkable and classy. A great many of these were also wines that showed no signs of slowing down any time soon and had decades of life still ahead of them, which was truly remarkable. There were, of course, iterations depending on the outright quality of the vintage in question, but there was not a single wine here that I would not absolutely cherish the opportunity to drink again and serve it as the focal point of an evening, as the overall quality level of these mature chardonnays was truly exceptional. The first evening's tastings focused on the wines from Mike Chelini's era at Stony Hill, so we only went back to the 1971 vintage (when he was already the vineyard manager at the estate), while the second evening was primarily reserved for wines from the era when Fred McCrea was handling all the winemaking duties at this iconic winery.

Of the notes that follow, all these wines were served during the two brilliant evenings hosted by Ron and Nancy Harrell in New Orleans in mid-April (with the exception of the 1974). Ron chose to serve the chardonnays in flights of three over the course of the two tastings, with the vintages not necessarily served chronologically, but rather grouped together by similarities of the style of the respective vintages within a fairly narrow range of age. Given that all of these wines were now at their peaks of maturity, a few years difference in absolute age was really quite immaterial to the relative evolutions of the wines we tasted, and the groupings worked seamlessly. However, I have chosen to shuffle the deck a bit away from the order that we tasted them and just present the notes in straight chronological order, as this seems the most useful grouping for the wines when folks are going to check back in with this article in the future to look at notes on individual wines. I should mention that all of these wines really improved with aeration, and time in the glass really allowed them to blossom fully and show all of their remarkable character. Prior to this wonderful weekend, the oldest Stony Hill chardonnay that I had tasted was the brilliant 1974, so I was a bit out of my element with the older vintages and was truly amazed by how stunning and youthful these wines from the era of the 1960s remained—after nearly five decades in the bottle! As the tastings were held in the heart of the French Quarter, I could not help thinking as I walked along Bourbon Street on my way to the second evening's tasting that as much fun as the folks were having up and down the quarter on that early Friday evening, I was on my way to the most exciting locale in all of New Orleans on that particular night. I am forever indebted to Ron and Nancy Harrell for so graciously including me on this historical occasion, and to Mike (and of course, his wife Kathy) for having stayed on at Stony Hill over the course of these past forty-plus years and ushering in so many utterly magical wines. I cannot wait to see what the next forty years of Mike's tenure will bring!

Riesling

A completely overlooked varietal at Stony Hill, this may well be the best Riesling in all of California, and certainly the most age-worthy. The vines here are quite mature, with some still dating back to the late 1940s, and the wine is beautifully made, with the classic Stony Hill backbone of acidity and potential for a long and classy evolution in bottle. The wine continues to be fermented as it has always been, with half of the cuvee produced in stainless steel and the other in the four hundred liter, old oak, "Stuttgart Barrels". It is generally aged six to seven months prior to bottling. While the Stony Hill Riesling is certainly approachable right out of the

blocks, it really hits its apogee with six or seven years of bottle age and cruises along beautifully in bottle for at least twenty-five to thirty years. We only had one vintage of the riesling on this memorable weekend, but fittingly, it was Mike's first vintage.

1973 White Riesling- Stony Hill Vineyards

The 1973 riesling was served as an aperitif to get us rolling on the first evening (and to serve as a 1973 bookend, as we finished up our chardonnays that night with Mike's '73 chardonnay as well). This was the first Stony Hill riesling that did not fully ferment out to complete dryness, as the wine stopped its fermentation with a bit of unfermented sugar still in the juice, but as Mike and Fred really liked the balance of the wine at this point, they decided to just leave the wine as it was. Subsequently, there have been a few other vintages that have also been a tad off-dry in style, as the philosophy at the winery has always been pretty *laissez-faire* with this wine. The bouquet at age forty is really quite lovely, offering up scents of peach, orange peel, a touch of new leather and a fine base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and quite suave on the attack, with fine focus, lovely vibrancy and very good length and grip on the bouncy and still quite vigorous finish. This fine bottle still has plenty of life ahead of it and was a great harbinger of what was to unfold over the course of the next two evenings! 2013-2025+. **90.**

Chardonnay

While I did not want to repeat much of what appeared in the previous feature on the estate back in 2010, I did want to at least reprint here the observation that I made at that time about the great terroir that underlies these great chardonnays, as it really addresses the fact that my relative lack of experience with these wines (in comparison to the older white Burgundies on which I cut my teeth) tends to do a bit of injustice to the descriptions of the soil elements that blossoms over time in these wines, and this was most readily apparent with the stunning array of great old vintages we tackled in New Orleans! So here is the caveat from the last piece on Stony Hill:

I should take a moment to discuss the very serious signature of terroir to be found in the Chardonnays at Stony Hill- particularly the estate bottling. Having really cut my teeth on white Burgundies with a bit of bottle age, I have quite a bit more experience describing the various terroirs to be found in the mature wines of the Côte d'Or and Chablis and have had a bit of a hard time coming up with accurate descriptors to try and represent the beautiful base of soil tones that ground every bottle of Stony Hill Chardonnay. While the signature of terroir is more profound in the estate bottlings, rather than the SHV (quite logical, given that the SHV bottling was designed to be a vehicle for the younger vines at Stony Hill), it is found in every Stony Hill Chardonnay. It is a terroir that starts out life in the young wines quite minerally and stony in quality, but this characteristic ameliorates over time and the soil components blossom as the wines move on past their tenth birthdays and really begin to show the layers of complexity that lie relatively hidden behind their structural elements when the wines are younger. I have described this change in the expression of terroir here as moving from the rather monolithic minerality of youth to a more "dusty" soil component, but this really does not do justice to the beautiful complexity of soil that emerges in these wines over time. Certainly the minerality does become more "dusty" as the wines really blossom, but this is really more a softening of the minerality and a broadening of its aromatic contribution to the wine, with the dustiness redolent

of the chalky elements to be found in the tufa and the decomposing volcanic soils of Stony Hill. While my vocabulary does not do justice to the beautiful complexity of the soil tones in mature Stony Hill Chardonnays, the signature of terroir here is every bit as strong as that found in the best vineyards in Burgundy and tends to serve both to ground the wine and give it mineral drive on the backend and also lift the fruit tones, as they play off of the terroir.



2010 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

We tasted this superb vintage of chardonnay at the end of the first evening's festivities, as Mike feels it is one of the strongest recent vintages for this bottling. As I have just reviewed it in Issue 45, I can see no need to repeat the note again here, but wanted to at least list it so that folks know that we did drink at least a little young Stony Hill chardonnay as well on this weekend!

1980 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards (served from magnum)

The 1980 chardonnay was served as our aperitif wine for the second evening's tasting, and not surprisingly- it being held in New Orleans- we had the wine with oysters in a number of guises. As I reported back in the feature on the winery, the 1980 vintage of Stony Hill chardonnay is a bit of an outlier for the winery, as some of the old barrels in the cellar had to be thrown out prior to harvest and this wine was actually raised in eight to ten percent new oak. The wine has aged very well and was really lovely out of magnum, offering up scents of apple, a touch of sweet corn, peaches, orange peel, a lovely base of soil and a dollop of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, round and beautifully balanced, with a good core of fruit,

fine focus and impressive length and grip on the wide open and still almost youthful finish. Lovely juice with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2013-2030+. **92.**

1979 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

Readers may not recall, but the only previous time I had crossed paths with the 1979 Stony Hill chardonnay was at our vertical tasting out in San Francisco back in 2010 that I used as the basis for the article on the estate, and that particular bottle was corked! I was very happy to find this one in superb shape at the Harrell's tasting, as the wine soars from the glass in an *à point* blend of pear, apple, orange zest, a dollop of sweet butter, dusty, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a nice, exotic touch of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and racy, with superb focus and grip, excellent balance and a very, very long, vibrant and complex finish. Just a beautiful vintage of Stony Hill at its zenith of peak drinkability! 2013-2030+. **93+.**

1978 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The 1978 chardonnay is another absolutely magical bottle from Mike's early days at the helm. The brilliant nose soars from the glass in a mélange of apple, pear, a touch of lemon, gentle notes of lavender, blossoming *terroir* notes of salty and stony soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a great core of still almost youthful fruit, bright acids and outstanding focus and balance on the very, very long and utterly refined finish. The last bottle of this I tried in San Francisco might have been even a shade better- or perhaps this bottle was just a tad younger and less evolved! A great year for Stony Hill chardonnay and one of the vintages that should prove to be almost timeless, as it has decades of life still ahead of it! 2013-2035+. **94.**

1977 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

1977 was the second of two very difficult drought years and the vines were really struggling in this vintage, according to Mike's recollections of the growing season that year. The wine has turned out quite well, despite the vineyards' struggles, but this is not in the same league as the great years here. The lovely bouquet offers up a complex mix of apple, orange peel, salty soil tones, a touch of butter and a topnote of corn flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and again nicely complex, with solid mid-palate depth and sneaky length and grip on the focused finish. The effect of the drought here is felt most keenly in the wine not showing the customary sense of "seamlessness" of structure as one finds in most top vintages here at Stony Hill. That said, I would be happy to drink the 1977 chardonnay on any occasion and the wine still has plenty of life in it! 2013-2025+. **89.**

1976 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The first of these two drought years clearly shows that the vines did not really start suffering until year two and this 1976 chardonnay is absolutely stellar. The wine soars from the glass in a very expressive and stunning blend of buttered pears, peaches, almonds, dusty Spring Mountain soil tones, a touch of lemon peel, dried flowers and a topnote of *fleur de sel*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly complete from start to finish, with a rock solid core, superb acids, outstanding focus and balance and a very, very long and dancing finish. This is a great vintage for this wine! 2013-2030. **94+.**

1975 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

Stylistically, the 1975 Stony Hill chardonnay is a bit of an outlier, as the wine has some aromatic elements that are almost Chablis-like in tone. The superb bouquet is a complex mix of green apple, lime, a touch of beeswax, just a whisper of leanness, dried flowers and a distinctive topnote of candied lemon (which fans of Raveneau Chablis will immediately recognize). On the

palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a superb core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, seamless balance and outstanding length on the complex and very classy finish. Just another superb vintage at its apogee. 2013-2035. **94.**

1974 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

(As our bottle of the 1974 was a touch advanced, and this is one of the best vintages of Stony Hill chardonnay I had ever tasted prior to this weekend, I have included here my note from our tasting in San Francisco in 2010, as that note more accurately reflects the quality of this superb vintage.)

As stunning as the 1978 Chardonnay was at our tasting, the 1974 was even just a hair superior! This was Mike Chelini's second vintage as winemaker at Stony Hill, and it is very clear that Fred McCrea was spot on in ascertaining that the boy really knew how to make Chardonnay from these great old vineyards! The bouquet on the 1974 is deep, fresh, pure and stunning, as it offers up a celestial blend of apple, pear, almond paste, fresh nutmeg, a lovely base of complex soil tones, citrus zest and a topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully delineated, with an even better core than the stunning 1978, bright, vibrant acidity and simply stunning length and grip on the pure and complex finish. It is hard to imagine a superior bottle of mature California Chardonnay- though I should point out that as brilliant as the 1974 showed at our vertical tasting at Spruce, Mike Chelini thought that the 1973 which he had drunk a few months back might have been even a slight step up from this great wine! Amazingly, the 1974 Stony Hill Chardonnay shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. This is unequivocally the greatest bottle of white wine from California that I have ever had the pleasure to taste! *(Up until that point in time!)* 2010-2035. **97.**

1973 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

It was a pity that we did not have the opportunity in New Orleans to taste the 1973 and the 1974 side by side, as I would have loved to have compared those two titans from pristine bottles in glasses right next to each other, but I was extremely happy that our bottle of the 1973 was absolutely in perfect condition, as I had never before tasted this legendary wine. The bouquet is absolutely stunning on the '73, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of apple, pear, citrus zest, a great, complex base of salty soil tones, a gentle touch of almond and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and gloriously complex, with a great core of fruit, a superb girdle of acidity, laser-like focus, impeccable balance and magical length and grip on the pure and utterly refined finish. Not too shabby for a first vintage of chardonnay Mr. Chelini! 2013-2030+. **97.**

1972 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The 1972 chardonnay was made by Fred McCrea and Bruce Rogers, who was Fred's Assistant Winemaker during the stretch from 1969 to 1972. As noted above, Mike Chelini contributed to this and the 1971 vintage by managing the vineyards. This was my first encounter with the superb 1972, and it is as stellar bottle of chardonnay and not far off the quality of the twin titans of 1973 and 1974. The great nose wafts from the glass in an aromatic constellation of peach, buttered pears, a dollop of almond paste, a lovely base of (again) quite salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and intensely flavored, with outstanding complexity, excellent focus and grip and superb backend minerality driving the very long and zesty finish. This wine has years and years of life still ahead of it, but has probably already delivered a couple of decades of outstanding drinking! Another outstanding vintage for Stony Hill chardonnay. 2013-2030+. **95.**

1971 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The 1971 vintage at Stony Hill was one of the ripest from this era at the winery, and Mike Chelini suspects that the wine was probably over fourteen percent alcohol- unheard of in that day and age and still extremely rare at Stony Hill in any case! The wine has aged very well, but it is decidedly more along its evolutionary arc than the 1972, as it offers up a mature blend of apple, orange peel, nutskin, brown butter, a lovely base of soil and some nice dried fruit elements (such as apricot and orange) in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and *à point*, still with fine framing acidity (this is a Stony Hill chardonnay after all!), tertiary complexity and lovely length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. The 1971 chardonnay is a very lovely wine, but not what I would consider a “typical” vintage here. 2013-2023+. **92.**

1970 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The 1970 Stony Hill chardonnay is a beautiful wine that is absolutely magical aromatically, but is just a tad angular on the palate, which keeps it from being ranked up there with the all-time greats here. The bouquet is stellar, offering up a beautiful mix of pear, tangerine, a touch of butter, salty soil tones, lemon zest and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a lovely signature of soil, excellent focus, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the still quite vibrant finish. But, the balance here is not quite as refined as many of these vintages from the decades of the 1970s and 1960s, which keeps its score down just a bit. Still a truly lovely wine and with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2013-2030. **90.**

1968 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The 1968 chardonnay has got to be one of Fred McCreas’ great vintages at Stony Hill, and at age forty-five, the wine is at its absolute apogee of peak maturity and a brilliant glass of wine. The brilliant bouquet soars from the glass in a blend of fresh pineapple, pear, butter, a dollop of toasted coconut, salty, white soil tones, corn flowers and the first incipient signs of the butterscotch to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very, very complex, with an outstanding spine of acidity, laser-like focus, a lovely core and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and seamless finish. The ’68 Stony Hill still has decades of life ahead of it. What a great, great wine! 2013-2035+. **96.**

1967 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The 1967 chardonnay is a really lovely wine that is drinking very well indeed and still has plenty of life in it- though I have no doubt that it has been at its apogee already nearly twenty-five years! The very refined and expressive nose offers up scents of pineapple, pear, a touch of sweet corn, sea salts, stony minerality and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still very bright and complex, with a lovely core and superb length and grip on the focused and very classy backend. Lovely juice. 2013-2025. **92.**

1966 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The 1966 chardonnay was one of the most mature wines we tasted during this extraordinary two days- not surprising I suppose, when considering that it will soon be closing in on its fiftieth birthday! But, given how relatively young some of these other vintages showed from the decade of the 1960s, I wonder if this bottle was not one hundred percent. In any case, the wine is deep and complex on both the nose and palate, delivering a fine, tertiary bouquet of sweet corn, butterscotch, orange peel, a touch of Chablis-like chicken broth and a lovely base of Stony Hill’s salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite reminiscent of old Chablis, with a good core, framing acids, lovely grip and just the faintest whisper of coffee-

like oxidative tones poking out on the long finish. Could there be even better bottles out there? 2013-2025. **91.**

1965 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The 1965 Stony Hill chardonnay is a glorious bottle that is very much in the profile of the great, almost timeless wines that Fred McCrea fashioned in this decade. The stunning bouquet wafts from the glass in a mélange of pear, peach, almonds, a whisper of nutskin, white soil tones, orange peel and a distinctive topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and shows off exceptional mid-palate depth, with outstanding complexity and focus, lovely grip and great elegance on the very, very long and perfectly balanced finish. A superb wine and still with tons of life in it. 2013-2030. **93+.**

1964 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

When we first got together at the start of this extraordinary two days of tastings, Ron Harrell had mischievously mentioned (with characteristic understatement I might add) that he thought I might like the 1964 chardonnay when we got around to it on night two. I'll say! This vintage has had legendary status from Stony Hill fans from the days before I was old enough to drink wine (and I most assuredly did not wait until I was twenty-one back in those more civilized days!) and the wine clearly deserves every accolade that has ever been cast its way. The utterly brilliant nose is (remarkably) still a tad on the young side and is not yet showing everything it will have to offer in due course, soaring from the glass in a brilliant blend of pear, apple, orange blossoms, stony, chalky minerality, lemon zest and a potpourri of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is simply flawless- full-bodied, pure and magically complex, with a youthful vibrancy to the fruit tones, a rock solid core, crisp acids and brilliant length and grip on the focused and completely soil-driven finish. An utterly brilliant wine, I might be strongly inclined to give this wine even a bit more bottle age (if possible), as I think the quality is still climbing! This is clearly the greatest bottle of California chardonnay I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2020-2050+. **100.**

1963 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The cork was slightly loose on the 1963 Stony Hill chardonnay, and when the wine was first poured, there was just a touch of sherry-like overtones from oxidation. However, with time in the glass, the wine freshened nicely and the touch of oxidation blew off to deliver scents of oranges, brown butter, toasted coconut, walnuts and salty white soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with very good mid-palate depth, bright acids and very good length and grip on the focused and classy finish. I have little doubt that there are better bottles out there, but this wine really rallied impressively with some aeration time in the glass! 2013-2025+. **92.**

1962 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards

The 1962 chardonnay from Fred McCrea is yet another absolutely stellar bottle at its apogee. The vibrant nose wafts from the glass in a complex mix of apple, lemon, a touch of pineapple, stony minerality, dried flowers and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex, and like the 1964, still amazingly youthful for its age (this wine is over fifty years-old!) and with room to continue to grow with further bottle age. The wine is focused, crisp and rock solid at the core, with seamless balance and outstanding length and grip on the zesty and pure finish. A superb wine, the 1962 Stony Hill is not quite in the same league as the magical 1964, but it is, nevertheless, an amazingly youthful and classy bottle that totally belies its age! 2013-2030+. **93+.**



The man behind the wines at Stony Hill Vineyards for these last forty years!

Sémillon de Soleil

As folks may recall from the feature on Stony Hill Vineyards back in 2010, the Sémillon de Soleil bottling is made from late harvest grapes (these are always the last vines to be picked each year at Stony Hill) that are then laid out on straw mats for a few weeks to shrivel up a bit in the “Passito” method prior to being crushed and fermented. The vines for this cuvée date back to 1955 and the small plot has for many years been referred to by the staff at Stony Hill as “Fred’s Folly”, as it is a very small parcel that does not make a particularly meaningful number of bottles for the winery, and yet always has to be picked after the exhausted harvest team has already been out on the rugged terrain of Stony Hill for a week or more bringing in grapes. I can fully envision the pickers out here with beers in hand and bottles of tequila at the ready once these last few grapes have been brought in and the harvest can be officially said to be completed at the estate and the celebration can begin! I had never had the pleasure to taste such old vintages as we had at our tasting in New Orleans, but the 1973 and 1972 versions clearly show that the wine has the ability to keep nicely in bottle (like all Stony Hill wines), though it does not gain a whole lot in complexity with bottle age and is really just as enjoyable at age five or six as it is at age forty!

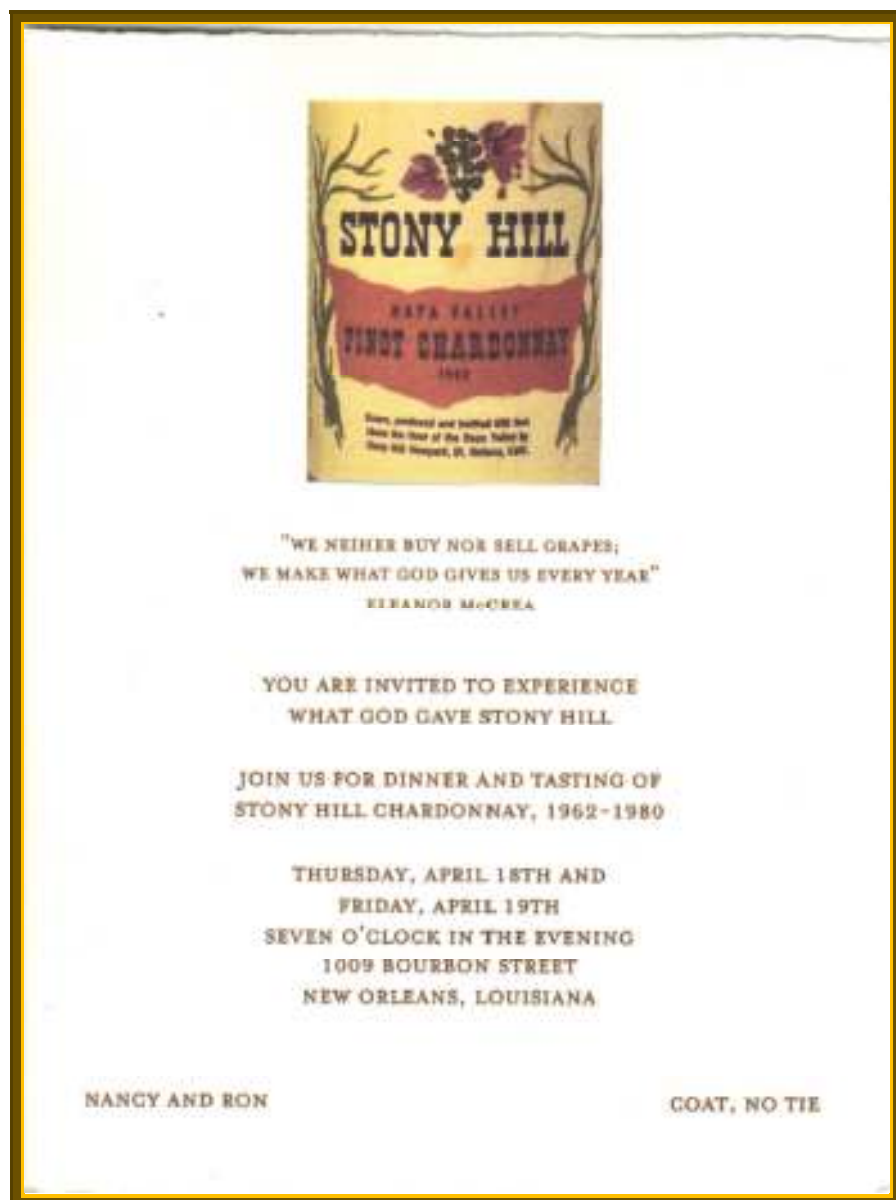
1973 Sémillon de Soleil- Stony Hill Vineyards (375 ml.)

The 1973 Sémillon de Soleil was the slightly deeper and more vibrant of these two fine dessert wines at our tastings, offering up a lovely nose of peach, apricot, a touch of honey, new leather, peach stones, orange peel and a really lovely base of the typically salty soil nuances of

Stony Hill. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, fairly complex and beautifully balanced, with fine focus and lovely length and grip on the wide open and juicy finish. A very pretty bottle. 2013-2030. **92.**

1972 Sémillon de Soleil- Stony Hill Vineyards (375 ml.)

The 1972 Sémillon de Soleil is a superb wine, but a touch more evolved than the 1973, offering up scents of fresh apricot, tangerine, beeswax, a nice dollop of salty soil, honey and dried pit fruits. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very well-balanced, with still bright acids, tertiary elements and sneaky length and grip on the mature, but still quite vibrant finish. The 1972 Sémillon de Soleil was served on night two, after all the fireworks from those chardonnays from the 1960s, and it is possible that I am underrating it a bit, as it might have shown even better if it was not in the wake of the amazing lineup of Fred McCrea's brilliantly aged chardonnays! Good juice. 2013-2020+. **90+?**



RECENTLY TASTED RHÔNE WINES REVISITING ONE OF MY FAVORITE REGIONS OF YESTERYEAR



While I do not write about wines from the Rhône Valley with any frequency these days, and have not visited the region in several years (as one of my favorite Rhône producers today, Éric Texier, conveniently has his cellars in Beaujolais), I do still drink the wines with quite some regularity and continue to have quite a few in my own personal cellar. As I have written in the past, there was a time back in the mid to late 1980s when wines from this region occupied a very significant percentage of my cellar (at least a third of my personal collection back in those days was comprised of Rhône wines), and it was only the changing of fashion here that drove me to seek other regions to devote cellar space to and eventually pruned my buying habits down to a very small handful, of old school producers who continued to make wines in the style of the Rhône found in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. These were the wines that I fell in love with back in my formidable days in the wine trade and which once inspired me to dedicate so much cellar space to these wines, and I still miss being able to cellar and drink wines in that style. But, the prevailing stylistic tastes in this region changed dramatically in the decade of the 1990s and as a result the wines became less and less interesting to my palate, climbing in alcohol, overripe flavors, new oak and price (which, of course, was an important point for *vignerons* here, who prior to the big changes stylistically in the Rhône and their being embraced by the important

wine critics of the day, had a hard time making ends meet and winemakers here certainly welcomed the spiraling upwards in prices that the journalistic affinity for the new, overripe style seemingly engendered.) Given how hard life had been for the poor producers here (only a few big name *négociants* like Guigal, Jaboulet, Vidal-Fleury and Chapoutier really made much money here prior to the era of overripe and alcoholic wines), it is far from surprising that more and more estates would throw out their traditional styles of wines and embrace the “over the top” style destined to impress those critics’ palates. Certainly, a lot of people here have made an awful lot of money with these changes, so I suppose it is all perfectly understandable on a commercial level to have arrived at the sad state of vinous affairs found in the Rhône Valley today, but to my palate, it really is one of the least interesting regions to be found in the world of wine at the present time. It would have been better if the prices here could have risen for the estates above the subsistence level of the decades prior to the 1990s and growers could have lived the comfortable life they are now accustomed to, without so many of the wines having to turn into what are to me such utterly boring, alcoholic fruit bombs in the process.

This spring, The Rare Wine Company organized a series of dinners in New York of high quality, old school producers from the northern Rhône that I was invited to participate in, but in nearly every instance, the various vertical tastings were scheduled on dates when I was to be out of the country. This killed me, as I would have loved to have participated in all of these tastings, which featured superb lineups of older wines from classic producers such as Joseph Jamet, Robert Jasmin and Noël Verset, and the following report could have been that much deeper and richer if my travel schedule had not been so insanely packed from mid-March to mid-June this year! But, at least their series reminded me that I had not devoted any space in the newsletter to wines from the Rhône since I wrote my historical piece on Château Mont-Redon (one of the very few holdouts against the “over the top” stylistic paradigm in Châteauneuf du Pape and very much deserving of championing by folks who like old school Rhône wines!) back in Issue Thirty-Two. Of course, since that time, I have been drinking plenty of wines from the Rhône Valley and figured it was high time to put together another compilation of tasting notes on the wines from this region. Happily, just as I was putting the finishing touches on this report, Mannie Berk of the Rare Wine Company dropped me a note to see if I would be able to participate in their Marius Gentaz vertical dinner in the second week of September, which I promptly said yes to and further delayed the release of the new issue accordingly to include those notes in this feature. As the notes that follow will indicate, most of what I drink from the Rhône these days are older vintages, as other than the wines from Éric Texier, Mont-Redon, Domaine Pierre Gonon and another small handful of holdouts, there is not a whole lot going on here that I find particularly interesting. I suspect that there are some producers out there whose wines I do not cross paths with these days with any regularity that are still “old school” in style, so I do not mean to make my assessment of the Rhône region in general sound so pessimistic, but there is no denying that most of the estates that I used to buy and cellar with great regularity have consciously changed their style of wines in the last couple of decades. Perhaps the tides of fashion will roll back here in the coming years (as they seem to be doing in California- witness how much superb, low octane syrah I am now drinking from the cooler sections of California these days!) and once again the Rhône Valley can become a cornerstone of my cellar.

During the course of the magical evening spent tasting the great Côte-Rôtie of Marius Gentaz on the 10th of this month, I began to reflect a bit on what “could have been” here in the

Rhône Valley if those journalistic fans of the 1990s might have championed wines such as Gentaz's as the paradigm of what could and should be made in this region, rather than embracing the high alcohol, overripe stuff that kept being turned out in more and more cellars in the Rhône from the 1990 vintage forwards. Keep in mind that some of the ripest and greatest vintages of Côte-Rôtie from Monsieur Gentaz, like the 1991 and the 1989, were all of 12.5 percent alcohol! The great service that the producers of the Rhône Valley received by wine journalists championing the turn to heady, high octane wines certainly cannot be overstated, as this enthusiasm (misplaced as it may have been in my opinion) for so many of the wines from this epoch truly helped create the very real commercial success that so many producers have realized over the past couple of decades. Probably, when people look back on the vast influence that wine critics had on the world of wine during the decades of the 1990s and 2000s, one of the most important achievements that will be laid at the journalistic doorstep is the great economic boom that the Rhône Valley *vignerons* witnessed during this era. However, this financial success certainly came at a price, as a large percentage of wine lovers who embraced the previous, classic style of wines from places like Gigondas, Châteauneuf du Pape, Hermitage or Côte-Rôtie watched their options for "old school"-styled wines constantly being whittled back, while more and more high octane jam juice emerging from producers who should have known better. That so few high quality estates- often with long and illustrious histories of great wine production- failed to dig in their heels in the sand and object to the new, high octane style is one of the strangest twists in the saga of these times in the Rhône, as for other than a few isolated producers such as Mont-Redon or the Gonon brothers, virtually every famous name here jumped on the bandwagon of overripeness and high alcohol.

I know that some folks will say that I am just citing a few extraordinary producers from the decades of the 1970s and 1980s and that people like Marius Gentaz simply were not typical of what was going on in the Rhône Valley back in those days either, and to champion their wines as paradigms for today's Rhône is simply misplaced, as they were not emblematic of the wines from this region even back in their heydays. However, as I hope the notes below will help to establish, I am not speaking through rose-colored glasses about those decades, (which I do still remember very well from drinking the wines in their youths and continue to know many from recent firsthand experience as well with bottles I continue to pull out of my own cellar or share with like-minded friends from their collections). While Marius Gentaz was one of the true greats of his era, he was not as alone back then as we might intuit today, and there were dozens and dozens of great estates in the Rhône in its golden era that turned out superb, balanced and very ageworthy wines in both the northern and southern halves of the region. Certainly, relatively higher alcohols (particularly in the southern Rhône) were always part of the equation here, but there is a dramatic difference between Châteauneuf du Pape at fourteen percent alcohol that was typical in ripe vintages in the 1980s and the 15.5 percent alcohol that is so prevalent today (and probably, in all likelihood, understated on the labels even at that level). There are a great many estates which were rightly famous back in the 1970s and 1980s and which continue on today, producing wines in this day and age that are far more heavy-handed with excessive alcohol, overripe flavors and often whacked with plenty of new oak than what they made back then, and it is hard to imagine that this new style would have ever been able to gain any meaningful traction if the most famous estates of the time had been a bit more resistant to the changes and a bit more protective of their own important vinous histories. One can argue that this is only a matter of taste, but it is not. I can still remember conversations, off the record, with American

importers of wines from the Rhône a decade or more ago, who lamented the fact that they had left behind estates making great, classically-styled wines from this region in the old school style simply because “the wines would never sell here in the states because critics would not like that style.” That was clearly their impression and it probably did not take too many American importers saying “we like your wines personally, but they simply will not sell in our markets in that style”, for producers to come to the conclusion that they too needed to ramp up the alcohol, put more heady syrah into the blends down south and buy some new oak barrels to get their wines noticed in the US market. And the result is the high alcohol minefield that is the Rhône today. Would this have been the case if the most famous proprietors of the time had stepped up and said that excessive alcohol and overripeness were a recipe for disaster, not a roadmap for the future?

Where this legacy will leave the wines of the Rhône Valley in the years to come remains to be seen. No matter what happens in the future with the over the top style here, there is little doubt, that the Rhône has lost some luster in the market in the last several years, as so many of these overripe and alcoholic wines that fully started to plague this region in the decade of the 1990s have now had plenty of bottle age. With so many having not stood the test of time with any real success, one surmises that wine consumers are going to become increasingly reluctant to purchase these wines in the future if they do not start to shift back stylistically to the more classic style of Rhône wines that once aged so long and gracefully. As one American importer stated off the record when we discussed the wines of the Rhône for this article, “the very top scoring wines still sell well for a very brief period- right after the new vintage reviews come out each year- but, for the rest of the year, the region is simply dead in the water and really does not sell particularly well anymore.” This was certainly not the case back when I was cutting my teeth as a wine merchant in the latter half of the 1980s, when Rhône wines were consistently one of the most important segments of the market, day in and day out. How the region as a whole will react to this reality in the decades to come will be very interesting to see, as it may well be that the Rhône has created an entire generation of winemakers here who do not now know how to make wines without the artifices of high alcohol, overripe fruit and plenty of new oak. If their enablers in the world of wine journalism and importing suddenly lose their taste for these overripe wines, what will the future of the Rhône look like?

The following wines have all been tasted over the last few years, with a great many tackled in the last few months. As I do not have the opportunity to write with any great frequency about this region, I have been accruing notes as I pull bottles of older wines out of my cellar (or cross paths with in the midst of my vinous travels) and holding them in readiness for when I had sufficient material for another full section on the wines of the region. At this point, it seemed like there were now enough notes for another piece on the Rhône, and then along came the Gentaz-Dervieux tasting on September 10th, which got this piece to the tipping point in terms of notes on great old Rhône wines! As readers will recall, back in 2008 I wrote a full domaine feature on the wines of Monsieur Gentaz, and this piece can certainly be found easily in the database for those who may not have seen it or who wish to refer to it for background purposes. Marius Gentaz was born in 1922 and passed away in 2011, at the ripe age of eighty-nine years of age. He left behind a glorious and rich legacy of great, traditional Côte-Rôtie vintages that continue to drink well, with the wines he produced in the last decade of his illustrious career (his last vintage was in 1993) for the most part, still young wines that are only now beginning to

really start to come into their own, so those lucky enough to still have a few bottles will be able to enjoy these great wines for many decades to come. Wines such as 1982, 1983, 1985, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993 remain still young to very young wines (depending on the structural style of the vintage) and the magic of Monsieur Gentaz will continue on in the bottle for many, many more years into the future. Marius Gentaz was always a very soft-spoken, shy and self-effacing man who would often say that he never did anything special to make his wines, other than grow good grapes from good *terroirs*, and then just make the wines very simply the way his father-in-law, Jean Dervieux, showed him back in the 1940s. Perhaps in the years to come, if the Rhône Valley in general starts to look for a new path from the one that so many *vignerons* embraced in the decades of the 1990s and 2000s, then the Gentaz recipe of good grapes, good *terroirs* and very simple winemaking techniques will help to usher in a new epoch of splendor in the Rhône- where the pipeline will be as chock full of classically-balanced and ageworthy wines as some superstars' bank accounts are full of euros these days. There is always hope...

The following notes are arranged geographically from north to south, and then chronologically within each subsection, with producers listed alphabetically within each vintage grouping.



Côte-Rôtie

2009 Côte-Rôtie “Brune et Blonde”- E. Guigal

The 2009 Côte-Rôtie “Brune et Blonde” from the Guigal family is the first recent vintage I have tasted of this bottling in a light year. The wine is very well-made, but more overtly new oaky in style than was the case back in the glory years for this cuvée in the 1980s, and perhaps the wine has sacrificed a bit of its Côte-Rôtie character to the new wood. Not that the wine is poorly made in any way, shape or form, as it offers up a deep and sculpted nose of cassis, black cherries, pepper, dark chocolate, roasted game, hickory smoke and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, fine focus and balance, firm, chewy tannins (some derived from the new wood) and a long, peppery and youthful finish. This is a good bottle, but I just find that the spicy new wood (Cadus and Taransaud?) a bit obtrusive. 2015-2030+. **89+**.

2009 Côte-Rôtie “Château d’Ampuis”- E. Guigal

The 2009 Côte-Rôtie “Château d’Ampuis” from Guigal is a touch riper than the Brune et Blonde bottling from this vintage (13.5 versus 13 percent) and probably saw a bit higher percentage of new wood as well. The constituent components here are obviously better than in the ’09 Brune et Blonde bottling, but the wood is also more intrusive at the present time, with some oak tannins sticking out on the backend that will need to be waited out. The classy bouquet delivers a new oaky blend of cassis, bacon fat, chocolate, black pepper, a nice base of soil, grilled meats and a potpourri of *pain épice* spices from the new oak. On the palate the wine is suave, full-bodied and youthful, with a lot of the tannic structure derived from the new wood. The wine has a good, solid core, a very polished palate impression, solid complexity and a long, fairly tannic and youthful finish. This is a very well-made, modern example of Côte-Rôtie that offers up no discernable flaws and should age very well, and yet, when viewed within the prism of what the Guigal family turned out in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, really just lacks a bit of soul. Good juice that could grow exponentially with more Côte-Rôtie character and less of a nod to the “*cuvée du luxe*” crowd, as the raw materials here are clearly stellar. 2016-2030+. **91**.

2007 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Jamet

The 2007 Côte-Rôtie from Domaine Jamet is one of the least interesting wines I have ever tasted from this estate, as the wine seems really to lack character and is a bit compact on both the nose and palate. This bottle was served blind to a group of tasters and none of us thought of the bottle as corked or otherwise off, but it really did not show much character and was overwhelmed by the outstanding quality of the 2006 Jamet served alongside of it. The nose on the 2007 is pretty enough in its simple way, offering up scents of cassis, white pepper, a touch of soil and espresso. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and really quite tame, with just solid and passable depth, modest tannins and a short, clipped finish. 2007 appears to not be a particularly special vintage for the Jamet family, if indeed the bottle was representative. 2012-2020+. **80+?**

2006 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Jamet

In contrast to the tepid 2007, the 2006 Côte-Rôtie from the Jamet family is absolutely classic, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, black raspberries, grilled meat, pepper, medicinal syrah tones and a fine, complex base of stony soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite youthful, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, ripe, well-measured tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthful finish. A superb bottle in the making, and very reassuring after the dismal showing of the 2007! 2015-2040. **92+**.

2001 Côte-Rôtie “Vieilles Vignes”- Éric Texier

I have always loved the low octane, transparent style of Côte-Rôtie produced by Monsieur Texier, which harkens back to an earlier age in this appellation. The source for this bottling are a few parcels of old vine syrah- all planted on steep slopes in the Côte Brune and ranging from forty to seventy years of age. The 2001 is just starting to come into its own at age twelve, offering up a deep and beautiful nose of cassis, black plums, pepper, a great, complex base of stony soil tones, a touch of gamebird, coffee and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, tangy acids and a very long, complex and transparent finish. I did not take a note on the alcohol level on this lovely wine, but I have to believe it is between twelve and twelve and a half percent in this vintage. A superb, old school bottle of Côte-Rôtie that is just starting to come into its prime. 2013-235. **94.**

1999 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Lucette et Martin Daubrée (375 ml.)

I spotted this half bottle in a friend's bin in his cellar in Munich and was surprised to see it there, as this is a producer I had never tasted or even heard of before. He graciously suggested we pop one, which we did with alacrity. The wine offers up a fine and mature nose of cassis, black cherries, smoked meat, pepper, dark soil tones, just a hint of black olive and a nice topnote of hickory smoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the focused, slightly old-fashioned finish. This is good, honest Côte-Rôtie that is just a touch rustic, but clearly from the old school. 2013-2025+. **89.**

1997 Côte-Rôtie- Henri et Philippe Gallet

I quite liked the 1997 Côte-Rôtie from Henri et Philippe Gallet, which offers up a deep and quite black fruity nose of cassis, black pepper, grilled venison, leather, medicinal syrah tones, lovely herbs and a touch of damp straw. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite plush on the attack, with fine depth, modest tannins, fine focus and good, but not great length on the finish. This is a very good bottle of Côte-Rôtie for drinking over the next dozen years or so, but it is not the most polished example of the appellation out there. 2012-2025. **91.**

1997 Côte-Rôtie “la Mouline”- Guigal

To my palate, things were already starting to slip a bit at Guigal by the 1997 vintage, with the oak getting more and more toasty and intrusive in the wines. I had not seen the 1997 la Mouline since release, but was not surprised to find that the wine had not aged particularly gracefully. The nose is deep and still quite marked by its excessive toasty new wood, offering up scents of cassis, dark plums, raw new wood, dark chocolate, pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and rather stewy with *sur maturité*, with the wood tannins not covered at all and drying out the wine on the long finish that closes with overt signs of pencil shavings. La Mouline usually is a wine with plenty of stuffing, so it really takes a ham-fisted approach to the new wood to massacre the wine in this manner! This wine is decidedly mediocre, and though not dead, will give most pleasure to termites. 2012-2030. **83.**

1993 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

1993 was the final vintage in an illustrious career for Marius Gentaz, and I had not tasted a bottle of his ultimate vintage since I wrote my feature on the domaine back in spring of 2008. The intervening five years have allowed this superb wine to really blossom completely and it is now quite clear that I underrated this beauty back in '08. As readers may recall, 1993 was a very difficult vintage in the northern Rhône, but the Gentaz-Dervieux bottling has transcended the

poor season and is a stunningly complex and pure middleweight of great transparency and perfume. The utterly classic nose soars from the glass in a vibrant blend of raspberries, spiced meats, a stunningly complex base of stony soil tones, lavender, nutskins, a touch of cocoa powder and some undefined savory elements that are emerging from the stems. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and beautifully soil-driven, with a lovely core, moderate tannins, perfect focus and balance and a very long, complex and intensely flavored finish. There is not the same mid-palate concentration here as is found in superior vintages such as 1991 or 1983, but this is an absolutely complete vintage for Monsieur Gentaz and a breathtakingly beautiful wine. 2013-2040. **93+**.

1992 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

The 1992 Côte Brune” from Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux is deeper and more youthfully reticent today than the glorious 1993 served alongside of it, but it too is a superb success for the vintage. The deep and still relatively closed nose offers up scents of dark berries, black raspberries, pepper, roasted venison, dark soil, herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, a good base of soil, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the still fairly primary and well-balanced finish. This starts to reveal more layers of complexity with extended aeration, but it really could do with at least another five years in the cellar to really blossom. It is a very fine bottle that I also seem to have underestimated five years ago. 2018-2040. **92.**

1991 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

I still have a few bottles of the 1991 Gentaz Côte Brune in my cellar and I will not be planning on opening a bottle for at least another five to ten years, as this is a remarkably young wine still at age twenty-two! The young and beautifully complex nose soars from the glass in a magical mélange of cassis, black pepper, smoked meats, stony soil tones, black raspberries and a smoky topnote redolent of bonfires. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a very stony signature of soil, firm, ripe tannins and a very, very long, poised and youthful finish that still shows just a bit of its youthful stemminess. This will ultimately be one of the greatest vintages ever produced by Monsieur Gentaz in his long career, but I would definitely keep it tucked away in the cellar for several more years to come, as there are layers and layers of complexity here still buried behind its elegant structure that will come to the fore with sufficient patience. A brilliant bottle of old school Côte-Rôtie that simply revels in its glorious *terroir*. 2021-2060. **97+**.

1991 Côte-Rôtie “la Mouline”- Guigal

Marcel Guigal’s 1991 la Mouline will certainly go down as one of the greatest wines produced during his illustrious career and at age twenty-two the wine is fully into its apogee of peak drinkability and an absolute monument to the magic of Côte-Rôtie. The deep, complex and smoky nose soars from the glass in a mélange of cassis, black cherries, coffee, black pepper, new leather, beautiful soil tones, a bit of fresh herbs and a generous base of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and opulent, with great mid-palate concentration, melting tannins, tangy acids and absolutely stunning length and grip on the perfectly balanced and utterly refined finish. This is a whole different animal from the classically styled and sturdy Gentaz 1991, with a far more luxuriant palate impression from new oak and *cuvée de luxe* sensibilities, but it is an equally magical wine and one of the great wines of Monsieur Guigal’s tenure at the head of the family’s Ampuis firm. 2013-2035. **96.**

1991 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Jamet

I once owned a case of the glorious 1991 Jamet Côte-Rôtie, but the wine drank so well in its relative youth that it was one of the shortest-lived cases of wine ever in my cellar and I probably drank up the whole dozen bottles within four or five years of buying the box! I had not seen a bottle of this wine in at least a decade's time, but when served blind by a friend recently, the wine was absolutely singing, offering up a deep, young and beautiful nose of cassis, leather, medicinal syrah tones, a beautiful base of soil, bacon fat and a nice base of pepperiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and gloriously complex, with a superb core, moderate tannins and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly focused and classic finish. There is probably just a whisper of brett here somewhere, but to my palate it is so faint that it bothers me not at all! 2012-2035. **94.**

1990 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

I seem to recall having even more suave bottles of the 1990 Gentaz in the past, but one has to recall that this is not a great vintage in Côte-Rôtie (as heat and drought caused some extended shutting down of the vines on the slopes here and ripeness was not optimal) and perhaps this wine is starting to show a bit of the strains of the growing season. The bouquet is lovely and slightly roasted in character, offering up scents of nutskin, game, a touch of cocoa powder, raspberries, cherries, smoke and a deep base of slightly “dusty” soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly chewy, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and a very long, complex and slightly angular finish. By the very high standards of Marius Gentaz, the tannins here are a touch obtrusive on the backend (probably from the uneven ripening of the vintage), and this quality seems more pronounced to me today than it did five years ago, which accounts for my dropping the score just a bit. I would still be very happy to drink this wine anytime, but my gut instinct suggests that this wine is probably best off drunk over the next decade or two, as there seems more than a fair chance that the angular nature of the wine on the finish will grow as it continues to mature and the fruit develops more tertiary characteristics and a bit less punch. There are still a fair bit of tannin here to carry the wine for many years to come, but I am just a bit less sanguine about the balance of this wine today than I was back in '08. This is a very, very good bottle of 1990 Côte-Rôtie, but a relatively minor vintage in the constellation of Marius Gentaz. 2013-2035? **90.**

1990 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Jamet

The 1990 Jamet Côte-Rôtie is more resolved than the 1991, but it is an outstanding success for this rather difficult vintage and a lovely drink today. The wine offers up a mature and complex nose of cassis, saddle leather, roasted game, coffee, a touch of shoe polish, hot stones, nutty overtones and a deft base of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex, wide open and very soil-driven, with beautiful balance and focus, impressive complexity and excellent length and grip on the mature and suave finish. Good juice at its peak, but with plenty of life ahead of it. 2009-2025. **93.**

1989 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

The 1989 Côte-Rôtie from Marius Gentaz is a brilliant wine that fully synthesizes the quality of a top-notch vintage with the magical, classic touch of a *maestro*. The beautiful, black fruity nose wafts from the glass in a complex aromatic constellation of black raspberries, black cherries, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of cardamom, espresso, still a bit of youthful, medicinal syrah tones, lavender and nutskins. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young

and stunning, with a lovely core of pure fruit, outstanding soil inflection, firm, well-measured tannins and brilliant length and grip on the focused and very refined, albeit, still chewy finish. This is early days still for this great vintage *chez* Gentaz, and I would be strongly inclined to keep it tucked away for at least another five or six years (minimum) before starting to drink it in earnest. 2019-2045+. **95.**

1989 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Jamet

The 1989 Côte-Rôtie from Domaine Jamet is a beautiful bottle of wine that is fully into its apogee and drinking splendidly. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite classy in its mélange of cassis, black olives, pepper, stony soil tones, a touch of meatiness and a decidedly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off outstanding mid-palate depth, with ripe, melting tannins, superb focus and grip on a very long, pure and soil-driven finish. This is a beautiful bottle from what was a pretty difficult, drought year in Côte-Rôtie. 2012-2030. **93.**

1988 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

I have always loved the style and quality of the 1988 vintage in Côte-Rôtie and the Gentaz-Dervieux example is absolutely stunning. The wine is really into its apogee of peak drinkability at age twenty-five and offers up a superb bouquet of red and black raspberries, cocoa powder, smoked meats, nutskins, a marvelously complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, gentle notes of pepper and a topnote of dried violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and very pure and soil-driven in personality, with a marvelous core of fruit, flawless focus and balance, moderate tannins and a very long, tangy and laser-like finish. The 1988 Gentaz shares the same transparency as the 1993, but with the depth of pure fruit and broader shoulders of a great vintage. This is another of the very finest wines crafted during the long career of Monsieur Gentaz. 2013-2040+. **96+.**

1988 Côte-Rôtie “Brune et Blonde”- E. Guigal

The 1988 Côte-Rôtie “Brune et Blonde” from Marcel Guigal has always been one of my favorites of this bottling, and I very happily drank up a case of this wine over the course of the decade of the 1990s, but I had long finished my case and was really delighted when getting together for dinner with Eric LeVine of Cellar Tracker a few years ago to see that he had brought along a bottle from his cellar. The wine continues to drink as beautifully as it did from age six or seven forwards, offering up a deep and classy nose of roasted plums, bacon fat, coffee, woodsmoke, stony soil toned and just a touch of lead pencil from the oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nicely resolved, with a good core, fairly gentle acidity these days, faded tannins and lovely length and grip on the broad and complex finish. This would probably have retained even more brightness and bounce with less new wood, but that is nit-picking at this point in time and the wine has really delivered a lot of pleasure in that more modern Guigal style over a long period of time and certainly was one of the most successful vintages for this cuvée in the history of the domaine. 2010-2020. **92.**

1988 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Jamet

The 1988 Jamet Côte-Rôtie is an absolutely beautiful bottle at its apogee and is even a hair better than the fine 1989 turned out by the domaine. The deep, mature and very complex nose offers up scents of cassis, roasted venison, coffee, fresh herb tones, pepper, hot stones, a touch of celery seed and a whiff of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a very soil-driven personality, a lovely core, fine focus and superb length and grip on the still slightly chewy finish. This wine is

drinking beautifully, but it still has a bit of tannin and will have no difficulties cruising along for decades! Great juice. 2012-2040. **94.**

1987 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

The 1987 Gentaz Côte-Rôtie is a very good example of a lesser vintage in this region, and the wine may get even more precise with further bottle age. Today, there is just a touch of inkiness to its aromatic blend of cassis, hung game, black raspberries, coffee, damp soil tones, herbs and smoky overtones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and slightly “compact” stylistically, with a good core of fruit, melted tannins and a long, focused and slightly chunky finish. This is a very good effort for the vintage, but I suspect that it might have been even more enjoyable to drink a few years back. 2013-2020+? **87.**

1986 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

Five years ago, I wrote that the 1986 Côte-Rôtie from Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux was a fully mature and pretty good example of the vintage, but do not serve it “flanked by the 1988 and the 1985” in the future (as this is how I had the wine at a Gentaz tasting in preparation for that article. So, naturally, the 1986 this time was served in a flight that included the 1985! This is a very good wine for current drinking, but it was fully mature five years ago and time has not stood still for this vintage of Gentaz and the wine probably should be drunk up in the next several years. The bouquet is beginning to show its age a bit, with a touch of fallen apple now included in its aromatic blend of cherries, cocoa powder, nut shells, pepper, dusty soil tones and a bit of *gibier*. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still quite solid at the core, with a bit less bounce than other vintages in this tasting, but good length and grip on the fairly long and fully mature finish. The tannins here are now fully melted and this wine is getting to the far side of the plateau, so I would be inclined to drink it up in regular-sized formats over the next several years. 2013-2020+? **86.**

1985 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

The 1985 Côte Brune from Marius Gentaz is a brilliant wine that is at its absolute zenith of peak drinkability today and a great joy to behold in the glass. The absolutely brilliant nose soars from the glass in a stunning combination of raspberries, cherries, pepper, gamebirds, a touch of wild fennel, a gloriously complex base of soil tones, nutskins, hickory smoke, a touch of fruit nutmeg and a lovely topnote of savory herb tones that have evolved from the stems. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely *à point*, with superb mid-palate depth, melted tannins, good acids and simply superb length and grip on the poised, flawlessly balanced and stunning finish. Five years ago, this great wine seemed in need of just a bit more bottle age, but today, this is at its summit and is an absolute gem of a Côte-Rôtie at its apogee! A magnificent vintage for Monsieur Gentaz, the 1985 has years and years of life still ahead of it, but there is absolutely no reason to defer one’s gratification if one is lucky enough to have a few bottles in the cellar. 2013-2030. **97.**

1984 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

The 1984 was the very first vintage of Monsieur Gentaz’s that I ever had the good fortune to taste, as I was allocated a case of this in my very earliest days in the wine trade and was happy to be able to offer this wine to clients. As Monsieur Gentaz routinely released his wines a bit later than most of his contemporaries, the superb 1985 vintage in Côte-Rôtie had already been on the shelves for a while, and consequently, it was nearly impossible to get anyone to buy a bottle of this fine wine. I think I ended up buying the lion’s share of the dozen bottles, one at a time, over the course of a year or so, and typically drinking them the same evening. It was a really

superb middleweight in its early days, but I never would have imagined crossing paths with it again at nearly thirty years of age and still find the wine with some interest, as this was not a vintage that looked likely to stand the test of time. Yet, the wine is still pretty good these days—though long having been in sweet decline, as it offers up a mature and quite stylish nose of dried raspberries, cardamom, nutskin, gamebird, dried flowers and a touch of chipotle pepper. On the palate the wine is medium-full and getting a bit sinewy as it fades, but with some complexity still at the core. The remaining structural elements are starting to stick out a bit on the finish these days, but it is still a reasonably interesting glass of wine, and certainly a sentimental favorite for me. 2013-2017+? **83.**



1983 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

I have been very fortunate in my life in having tasted most often the 1983, 1988, 1989 and 1991 vintages from Monsieur Gentaz, as I have crossed paths with these magical wines on many occasions over the years and if one were going to pick a handful of Gentaz-Dervieux wines to be on a familiar basis with, these four years would certainly be at the top of my list. This most recent bottle of the 1983 at the Rare Wine Company event was totally pristine, soaring from the glass in a deep, youthful and complex mélange of cassis, black cherries, pepper, new leather, a bit of red curry, hickory smoke, stony soil tones and still a reminder of its youthful stems in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still impressively structured, with a rock solid core, building complexity as the wine’s tertiary flavors start to

emerge, great purity and focus and a very, very long, perfectly balanced and still moderately tannic finish. This is a sturdier and more black fruity vintage for Monsieur Gentaz than wines such as the 1985 or the 1982 (which we did not have at the Rare Wine Company tasting, but which is clearly one of the greatest Gentaz vintages of which I am familiar), and stylistically, it bears quite a bit of resemblance to the 1991 here. It is a brilliant wine that is drinking splendidly today, but which may be even better with another five years or bottle age and shows no signs of slowing down for decades to come! 2013-2040. **95+**.

1983 Côte-Rôtie- Robert Jasmin

I love the beautifully transparent, elegant and red fruity style of Robert Jasmin's wines and wish I had bought more of them back in the decade of the 1980s, when I had good access to these wines. Sadly, I did not possess a sophisticated enough palate to recognize just how unique and classic these wines were at the time, and the ones that I did buy (which was obviously not in sufficient quantity) I drank up in their relative youth and they are now long gone. Happily, a good friend in Germany served me this bottle recently, which was showing absolutely beautifully and was in its prime, offering up a deep and complex nose of raspberries, cherries, a savory spice element related to the stems it showed in its youth- most redolent of celery seed perhaps- gentle meatiness, a lovely base of stony soil tones and a lovely topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and transparent, with a lovely core, melted tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly focused, complex and seamless finish. This is a brilliant bottle of Côte-Rôtie at its apogee and with years of life still ahead of it! Monsieur Jasmin may not have been as consistently excellent, year in and year out, as someone like Marius Gentaz, but when he hit everything right, as he did in 1983, the results were utterly classic and magical Côte-Rôtie. 2012-2025+. **95**.

1981 Côte-Rôtie "Côte Brune"- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

I have been fortunate to taste both the 1981 and the 1980 vintages of Marius Gentaz's wines on a few occasions over the last decade, and both vintages are excellent and transcend the general quality of their respective years. The 1981 is a beautiful wine at its apogee, with more than a passing resemblance stylistically to the transparent and perfumed 1993, as it offers up scents of raspberries, pepper, spiced meats, a touch of celery seed, beautifully elegant and complex soil tones, a touch of coffee and the classic Gentaz leitmotif of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully delineated, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature and excellent length and grip on the still slightly chewy finish. I suspect that this vintage will always show just a trace of its old school tannin on the backend, as it seems unlikely now at age thirty-two that these tannins are going to fully fade before other elements in the wine start to fade as well. But, this is a beautiful bottle of Gentaz for current drinking and still with plenty of life in it. 2013-2030. **92**.

1980 Côte-Rôtie "Côte Brune"- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux

Having had the 1980 Côte-Rôtie "Côte Brune" from Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux on more than a few occasions over the years, I was really delighted to find that the bottles at the Rare Wine Company celebration of Monsieur Gentaz's life were as pristine as any I had ever tasted. The gorgeous wine soars from the glass in a first class aromatic constellation of red and black raspberries, nutskins, a beautifully complex base of soil, red curry, cocoa powder, celery seed and a gentle topnote of peppercorn. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with lovely mid-palate depth, just a whisper of remaining tannin and great length and grip on the focused and perfectly balanced finish. This is the best bottle of the 1980

that I have had the pleasure to taste and this superb wine still has years and years of life still ahead of it. A marvelous wine and a real sleeper vintage of Gentaz. 2013-2030. **94.**

St. Joseph

2011 Les Iles Feray- Domaine Pierre Gonon

The Gonon brothers, Jean and Pierre, took over the administration of this small domaine from their father, also Pierre, in 1989 and are widely considered the Château d'Yquem of St. Joseph since Raymond Trolat retired in 2005. The Gonons, incidentally, purchased Monsieur Trolat's vineyards to add to their already superb holdings in the villages of Mauves and St. Joseph proper, and for some lovers of old school Rhône wines, the village of Mauves is now most famous for being the home to Domaine Gonon, rather than that of Domaine Jean-Louis Chave! The Les Iles de Feray bottling is made from ten year-old syrah vines, that actually lie within the St. Joseph appellation, but are declassified to *Vins de Pays de l'Ardèche* by the brothers. The 2011 is a stunning wine for young vines, jumping from the glass in a mix of cassis, dark chocolate, pepper, a bit of grilled meat, a touch of fresh apricot in the upper register (from apricot trees in the vicinity of the vines?) and a nice base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still pretty primary, with a lovely core, a bit of firm tannin and lovely length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. I would give this at least a couple of years of bottle age, for though it is approachable today, it is still a puppy and will be far better with some bottle age. One must remember to treat this wine with respect, as it really is a cuvée of young vine St. Joseph from the greatest producer in the appellation- despite it wearing a lowly *Vins de Pays de l'Ardèche* label! BTW, 12.5 percent alcohol. 2015-2025. **89.**

2011 St. Joseph- Domaine Pierre Gonon

The 2011 St. Joseph from Domaine Pierre Gonon is a touch riper than the young vine, Iles de Feray bottling, coming in at an even thirteen percent, but with the great base of granitic soil found in these east-facing vineyards in the heart of the appellation, it is really a bit "cooler" and more soil-driven than the ostensibly lower octane Iles de Feray! The 2011 St. Joseph offers up a deep, vibrant and beautifully classic nose of cassis, black raspberries, black pepper, a gorgeously complex base of dark, stony soil tones, espresso, grilled meats, violets, gentle notes of lavender and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is oh, so pure, focused and serious, with its full-bodied format rock solid at the core, laser-like in its focus and perfectly balanced in its chewy and youthful magnificence. The wine is cool in the mouth, still very primary and nascently complex, with far more vibrancy and purity than the very good Les Iles de Feray bottling (from both older vines and superior *terroir* in the center of the appellation), firm tannins, good acids and simply stunning length and grip on the young and potentially magical finish. This is still very early days for this great wine and I would not touch a bottle for at least another five to seven years (keep in mind my last bottles of Trolat Vieilles Vignes in the cellar from the 1995 vintage have not yet really reached their absolute apogees, so one gets an idea of how long this wine still has ahead of it). The 2011 St. Joseph from Jean and Pierre Gonon is certainly approachable now, but anyone thinking about opening another bottle before 2018 should have their Gonon cache confiscated for lack of understanding! Now, if we could only get a few pretenders in Côte-Rôtie who are not really interested in winegrowing to lease their vines to the Gonon brothers! 2020-2040. **94+.**

Crozes-Hermitage

2011 Crozes-Hermitage- Yonn Chave

Yonn Chave is a fine young producer in both Hermitage and Crozes-Hermitage, as well as a distant cousin of Jean-Louis Chave. His 2011 Crozes is a lovely wine, coming in at a cool thirteen percent alcohol and offering up a fine, youthful bouquet of cassis, a touch of chocolate, gamebirds, a bit of *garrigue*, dark soil tones and a touch of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a good core of young fruit, low acids and very good length and grip on the softly tannic finish. Good juice. 2014-2020+. **88+**.

2011 Crozes-Hermitage “Le Rouvre”- Yonn Chave

The Le Rouvre bottling of Crozes from Yonn Chave is made from a parcel of fifty-plus year-old syrah vines in a very stony soil and is aged in one and two year-old *demi-muids*, rather than the stainless steel tanks of his *classique* bottling. The 2011 Le Rouvre is outstanding, soaring from the glass in a complex and very classy nose of cassis, black pepper, venison, stony soil tones, a bit of charred wood and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very elegant on the attack, with a superb core, lovely focus and balance, soft tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and stylish finish. This is a very, very classy bottle of Crozes-Hermitage! 2013-2025. **92+**.

2011 Crozes-Hermitage- Domaine des Entrefaux (Charles et François Tardy)

The 2011 Crozes from Domaine des Entrefaux is really a lovely example of this underrated appellation, offering up lovely precision and complexity in a cool, thirteen percent octane format that is a wonderful nod to yesteryear. The wine offers up a fine and classic nose of cassis, black olive, pepper, dark soil tones, a touch of gamebird, espresso and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and intensely flavored, with soft tannins, modest acidity and lovely length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is really a lovely, middleweight version of Crozes-Hermitage that is drinking well already, but despite its modest level of tannin, is so well-balanced that it will have no difficulties aging for many years. High class juice. 2013-2025+. **90**.

2009 Crozes-Hermitage- E. Guigal

The 2009 Crozes-Hermitage from the Guigal family is a very good bottle, but one wonders if the new oak here is perhaps not particularly well-suited to the style of this appellation. The wine is certainly deep and well-balanced, but it seems to me that the new wood here and fairly extracted style takes away some of the elegance for which I prize good Crozes. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of dark berries, roasted game, pepper, a touch of bonfire, gentle notes of pepper and well-done, nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately chewy, with a good, but not great core, low acids and good length and grip on the still fairly chewy finish. I get the distinct impression here that a fair bit of the tannins here are supplied from the wood, and though the wine is perfectly well-balanced, I would love to see just a bit more Crozes-Hermitage personality here and a touch less cellar technique. It is a very well-made wine that somehow lacks a bit of soul. 2013-2025. **88**.

2005 Crozes-Hermitage “Silène”- Jean-Louis Chave

To date, this is the only vintage of the Crozes-Hermitage “Silène” bottling from Jean-Louis Chave that I have tasted, so I am not sure if this was not a great vintage for this wine or if it was just not singing at the time I crossed paths with it. The wine offers up a pretty enough nose in its aromatic blend of black cherries, black raspberries, *garrigue*, pepper and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is a bit less convincing, as the wine is deep and full-bodied, but quite

four-square, with a good core and a fair bit of rustic tannin sticking out on the lumpy finish. The wine also closes with a bit of sourness that seems to have come from poorly-cured oak. The wine is okay, but I was expecting a bit more. 2011-2018+? **87.**

1990 Crozes-Hermitage “la Guiraude”- Domaine Alain Graillot

Alain Graillot’s 1990 la Guiraude has aged quite gracefully and is still drinking very well at age twenty-one. The bouquet is really lovely in its blend of raspberries, a touch of meatiness, coffee, lavender, gentle notes of cracked pepper and a stylish base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and focused, with solid depth, melting tannins and very good length and grip on the complex finish that closes with some nice, medicinal syrah tones. The wine is clearly getting to the tail end of its apogee and is already starting to get just a bit angular on the backend- indicative that its days are now getting numbered structurally and it would be best to drink this up over the next half dozen years or so. But, still a lovely wine as it starts to look westward towards its own sunset. 2012-2018. **89.**

Condrieu and Hermitage Blanc

2011 Condrieu- E. Guigal

It had been several years since I tasted an example of Condrieu from the Guigal family and I was very curious to see where the stylistic pendulum had swung with this bottling from the estate. The 2011 comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol on the label and this seems pretty accurate,



though I wonder if this number was reached in the tried and true California method of adding a few “Jesus Units” (water) to the fermentation tanks (if this method is even allowed in France) or if reverse osmosis or spinning cones were used, for the aromatics and flavors are plenty ripe for this octane level. I have not bothered to keep up with what is “legal” in the cellars in terms of removing troubling alcohol, but one of the methods of whatever is allowed in France was probably used for this wine. The tropical nose is ripe and focused, offering up scents of melon, honeysuckle, lemon, a bit of soil, white flowers and a deft base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows a good core, with the slightly pinched palate impression of a very ripe wine, but no signs of heat and still a bit of acidity on the well-balanced and long finish. The alcohol here is well-managed, but the overall impression is of a wine that was picked riper than 13.5 percent and then manipulated in the cellar to get the octane down to a more manageable level. Unfortunately, this tact does

not do anything for the rather overripe aromatics and flavors in the wine. Okay, but this bottling back in the 1980s was great, rather than just okay- so perhaps we can hit the rewind button and go back to making the wine the way it was back in the day? 2013-2015. **87.**

2009 Condrieu “les Cassines”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

This was the first white wine I had tasted under the new ownership at Paul Jaboulet, and it was significantly better than what I can recall from the last few years of the previous regime, where familial infighting seemed to me to greatly affect the quality of the wines. The 2009 Condrieu is a very pretty and elegantly-styled expression of this appellation, offering up a classy bouquet of peach, a touch of coriander seed, acacia blossoms, a lovely base of *terres blanches* soil tones and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely light on its feet for today’s Condrieu, with a good core and fine framing acids on the long and focused finish. There is no sign of heat here on the backend, which is pretty rare in the realm of Condrieu these days. Good juice. 2013-2018. **89.**

1994 Hermitage Blanc- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave

1994 is one of my favorite vintages of Hermitage Blanc from the Chave family, as this still predated the current trend to harvest the wine later and with lots more alcohol in the harness. The 1994 Blanc is an old school vintage for this wine, offering up a pretty and nicely complex nose of white cherries, orange rind, almonds, incipient notes of honeycomb and brown butter, a lovely and complex base of soil and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beginning to blossom nicely, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, bright acids and very fine length and grip on the complex and classy finish. Good juice. 2013-2040+. **92+.**

Hermitage

2006 Hermitage- Betts and Scholl

I was very impressed with the quality of the 2006 Hermitage from Betts and Scholl, which comes in at a very measured fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a fine nose of cassis, black pepper, dark chocolate, smoke, leather and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with fine focus, a good core, moderate, youthful complexity and a long, ripely tannic finish. This is a touch dense stylistically, and also gets a bit tarry with some aeration, but it is a very well-made bottle of Hermitage that should be quite enjoyable with five or six years more bottle age. 2017-2035+. **90.**

2005 Hermitage- Betts and Scholl

I did not write down the octane level on the 2005 Hermitage from Betts and Scholl, but the wine seems a bit riper, with lower acids and not quite the same structural integrity as the fine 2006 version. The bouquet is deep, ripe and chocolaty, as it offers up scents of cassis, coffee grounds, pepper, roasted venison, a bit of medicinal syrah overtones, bonfires and the aforementioned chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broader-shouldered than the 2006, with a sappy core of fruit, modest acids, ripe tannins and a long, slightly overripe finish. This is still a good wine, but the 2006 is more interesting to my palate and should age far more gracefully. 2012-2025+. **88.**

2001 Hermitage- Domaine Bernard Faurie

The 2001 Hermitage from Bernard Faurie is decidedly more new oaky in style than the lovely 1995 reported on below. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, dark berries, grilled meats, stony soil tones, chocolate and plenty of smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and borderline overripe, with good mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and good length and grip on the slightly four-square finish. The combination of lots of new wood (which,

though the wood tannins will not be an issue with the overall balance of the wine, will always be a defining element here in terms of aromatics and flavors) and the very high degree of ripeness conspire to keep the wine a bit less fresh than it could be and a decided notch below the superb (and far more classic) 1995 version. This is not a bad wine, but not a great Faurie Hermitage. 2013-2030. **87.**

2001 Hermitage “La Chapelle”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

I had never tasted the 2001 La Chapelle prior to this tasting, and the wine was showing lovely potential when it crossed my path back at the end of 2010. The bouquet is deep, complex and very promising, offering up a blend of dried red berries, cassis, smoked meats, hot stones, a bit of bacon fat, mint and plenty of smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very generously new oaky (but, still within the realms of balance), with a fine core, good focus and a fair bit of new oak spice poking out on the long, tannic finish. It seems to me that the balance here between fruit and tannins is going to be fine and this wine will end up being a good drink in the fullness of time- albeit, always with a fairly new oaky personality for this bottling that is certainly not classic. 2015-2035. **90.**

1999 Hermitage- Éric Texier

Éric Texier only produced two vintages of Hermitage during his career- the 1998 and this lovely 1999- before his source for this wine dried up. It is too bad, as he did a very nice job with these two vintages of Hermitage and it was one of his top wines while he had the opportunity to produce the wine. The 1999 was drinking very well indeed when I last had a bottle, offering up a deep and classic bouquet of black raspberries, ground pepper, black olives, stony soil, a nice dollop of fresh herbs, woodsmoke and bitter chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tangy, with lovely transparency, a fine core, still some ripe tannin to resolve and outstanding length and grip on the focused and complex finish. Just a lovely bottle of Hermitage that could use a few more years in the cellar to really come into its own. 2014-2040. **92+.**

1997 Hermitage- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave

I happily drank a case of the 1997 Chave over the course of the second half of the first decade of this new century, and always enjoyed the wine for its forward and plush character and lovely complexity. But, that said, I never ranked it in the top few vintages from this decade, as it always seemed a bit easy-going structurally to be a truly great Chave- and hence why I drank my case over its relative youth. It had been a good five or six years since I last had a bottle, and the wine has seemingly found its stride and was much more classically structured than I remembered it, which added grip and persistence on the backend that did not seem conceivable when the wine was around age ten. The bouquet is now outstanding, offering up a deep and pure aromatic constellation of raspberries, coffee, spiced meats, a touch of clove, lovely stoniness running through the fine base of soil, pepper and a nice touch of new leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and really beautifully focused, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins and superb length and grip on the perfectly balanced and complex finish. This wine has really come on in the last few years and I very obviously drank my case too young! 2012-2040. **94.**

1995 Hermitage- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave

I have had some varying showings of 1995 Chave Hermitage over the last year or two, and will post notes on two distinctly different examples. I am not sure when different cuvées of the wine stopped being produced here (if indeed, there does not continue to be different bottlings), but ironically, both of these notes hail from the same batch of cases shipped by the US importer of Langdon-Shiverick back in the late 1990s and in theory, should be identical wines.

This bottle came from my own cellar and offers up a brilliant and blossoming nose of cassis, black raspberries, bacon fat, cocoa powder, porcini, hot stones, woodsmoke and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with tangy acids, ripe tannins and stunning length and grip on the perfectly balanced, soil-driven and utterly classic Chave finish. 2012-2050. **96.**

1995 Hermitage- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave

This bottle came from a friend's cellar (though I sold him the wine back in my merchant days and this is from the identical batch as my bottle reported on above- though his cellar is probably a bit colder than mine and perhaps this might explain the dramatic differences in how the two bottles showed) and it was quite a bit more cranky and tarry than the bottles I have pulled out of my own cellar in recent years. The bouquet is a blend of cherry cough drops, dried herbs, hot stones, grilled meat, medicinal overtones and gentle tariness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, stony and completely shut down, with a good core, tangy acids, modest tannins and still very good length and grip on the reserved finish. Dramatically different. 2018-2040. **90+?**

1995 Hermitage- Domaine Bernard Faurie

I have not drunk a lot of Bernard Faurie's Hermitage, but the examples that I have tasted I have liked very well indeed. The 1995 is still a tad on the young side, but excellent, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of cassis, roasted meat, espresso, dark, stony soil tones, hickory smoke and a rather generous framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and displays a superb signature of soil, with a rock solid core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the complex and classic finish. Good juice in the making, but give it a few more years to more fully blossom. 2015-2040. **93.**

1991 Hermitage- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave

Talk about good fortune- the last bottle I drank of the 1991 Chave Hermitage was served alongside a bottle of the 1991 Guigal la Mouline! This is a brilliant vintage of Chave Hermitage and probably my favorite of all time, and at age twenty-two the wine is at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability and a great joy to have in the glass in front of you. The deep, perfumed and magically complex nose soars from the glass in a blend of raspberries, cherries, coffee, gamebirds, herb tones, black pepper, gentle, medicinal syrah overtones, woodsmoke and a brilliantly complex base of stony soil nuances. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and wonderfully complex, with stunning mid-palate depth, flawless focus and balance, bright acids and great purity and refinement on the seamless, meltingly tannic and very long finish. A great Chave in full bloom. 2013-2040. **97.**

1990 Hermitage "La Chapelle"- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

While I was recently fortunate to hit a "good" bottle of the 1989 La Chapelle (breaking a long losing streak with this wine), the most recent bottle of the 1990 La Chapelle was as disappointing a bottle of this wine as I have had yet! It was strange, because the wine was oddly aromatically vibrant, but yet, was also really pinched by its wood and overripe on the palate. It had very clearly been stored well and showed no signs of mishandling. The nose on this particular bottle was really showing a sloppy oak component in an aggressive manner, wafting from the glass in a blend of overripe boysenberry fruit, pickled oak (from poorly-cured barrels), coffee grounds, damp earth and grilled meats. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, overripe, short and decidedly bitter on the backend from green wood tannins, with an eviscerated finish that seems to have both feet firmly in the grave already. Given all the different cuvées out there,

perhaps one can find better bottles of this wine out there still, but this one was well on its way to the grave. ??? 67.

1989 Hermitage- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave

There was a time when I used to believe that the 1989 Chave Hermitage was just a touch coarse structurally and would lag behind the two vintages that it is sandwiched between- 1988 and 1990- but the wine has developed beautifully and its refinement is hardly an issue these days! The deep, complex and roasted nose wafts from the glass in a complex mix of roasted cassis, espresso, grilled meats, gentle medicinal tones, charred wood, dark soil tones and a touch of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely focused, with a rock solid core, moderate tannins and a very long, poised and impressively tangy finish. Whereas the 1988 Chaves seems to have gone into a shell again in the last couple of years, the 1989 is blossoming beautifully and is starting to drink with great style and gusto. 2013-2040+. 94+.

1989 Hermitage “La Chapelle”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

After a few absolutely desultory bottles of the '89 La Chapelle, I was very pleasantly surprised to hit a very good bottle of this wine. My last several examples prior to this bottle had been overripe prune juice that was already getting quite oxidative, but this bottle was very good and a far cry from those previous examples. As readers may know, there were multiple bottlings of La Chapelle back in this era, so there are some distinctly different wines out there under the same label and vintage banner. In any event, after several very disappointing bottles, I finally got a good one this last time around. The deep, complex and meaty nose offers up scents of ripe cassis, black pepper, grilled meats, smoky overtones, a touch of balsam bough and incipient notes of chipotle peppers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly roasted in personality, but, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and good focus and grip on the complex and gently tangy finish. I imagine that this is what sound examples of the better cuvées of this wine have shown consistently, and why folks with these bottles in the cellar thought I was completely off my rocker with my notes on less enjoyable bottles. This example is a good, solid Hermitage at its apogee, but with still a couple of decades of life ahead of it- though not quite in the league of the 1988 La Chapelle in terms of complexity and elegance. 2012-2030+. 90+.

1988 Hermitage “La Chapelle”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

The 1988 La Chapelle from Paul Jaboulet is a real sleeper from the decade of the 1980s and I have had some excellent luck with this bottling over the last few years. The beautiful and classic nose wafts from the glass in a lovely mélange of black raspberries, sweet cassis, bacon fat, black pepper, a lovely base of soil and a touch of hay in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and still shows a touch of tannin on the backend, with a fine core of fruit, a lovely, round attack and very good length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is a lovely wine- not as powerful as the highly-touted, but often inconsistent vintages of 1989 or 1990 here, but with classic aromatics and flavors and plenty of personality. 2012-2025. 91.

1983 Hermitage- Guigal

The 1983 Guigal Hermitage is fully mature and drinking beautifully, offering up a tertiary bouquet of roasted cassis, hung game, charred wood, black olive, chocolate, a touch of chicory, forest floor and a bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and reasonably complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, still a vestige of its chewy structure of yore, good focus and fine length and grip on the finish. This was never a great

example of Hermitage, but rather a very good one, and at age thirty, it has aged very well and is drinking at its apogee. 2013-2023+. **89.**

1983 Hermitage “La Chapelle”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

I have had some rather inconsistent results with the 1983 La Chapelle over the years, with this most recent bottle placing in the middle between previous highs and lows. The nose is deeper-pitched than the 1988 served alongside of it, offering up notes of cassis, dark chocolate, a touch of muddy soil, black pepper, venison and scorched heather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerfully built, but also a touch dense and tarry, with good focus, chewy tannins and a long, but fairly heavy-handed finish. Perhaps this is just young, but I get a sense that the wine was over-extracted perhaps and will never find the same suave palate impression as the 1988 La Chapelle served alongside of it. Given that some bottles of this wine have shown dramatically different over the years, it certainly seems quite clear that there are multiple cuvées of this made in many vintages and one is never really sure what they are going to find when the bottle is opened. Was it always the case with La Chapelle? 2012-2025+? **87.**

1978 Hermitage- Domaine de l’Hermite

The 1978 Domaine de l’Hermite Hermitage is a beautiful, fully mature and velvety example of the appellation, offering up a pure and complex nose of raspberries, cherries, black pepper, roasted game, a beautiful base of stony soil tones and a bit of bacon fat in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, resolved and quite transparent in style, with still a solid core of fruit, melted tannins, lovely elegance on the attack and a long, wide open and slightly angular finish. This is a very good wine from a great vintage that has been fully mature for decades, but still has plenty of life in it. Good, honest, old school Hermitage. 2010-2020+. **89.**

1978 Hermitage- Domaine de Vallouit

The 1978 Hermitage from Domaine de Vallouit was not quite as vigorous as the Domaine de l’Hermite bottling it was paired up with at this tasting, and is starting to show signs of sliding down the far side of the plateau of maturity. The slightly fatiguing nose offers up scents of dark berries, coffee grounds, damp earth, medicinal syrah tones and a smoky, autumnal topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite deep-pitched, with still some mid-palate stuffing, faded tannins and solid length and grip on the very mature finish. This is getting a bit old and creaking structurally, but still has some merit for mid-term drinking. 2010-2015. **86.**

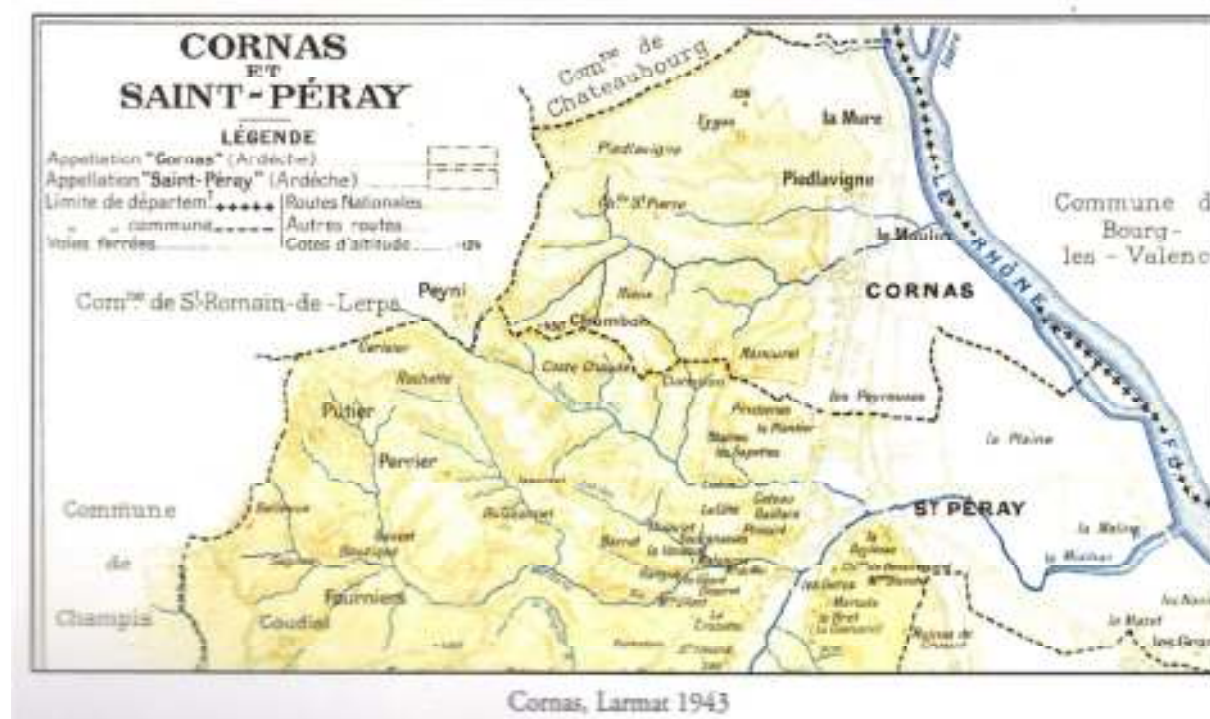
1976 Hermitage- Guigal

The 1976 Guigal Hermitage is really a superb example of the vintage and has kept better than the 1983. The lovely old Hermitage nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, dark berries, roasted game, pepper, hot stones and new leather. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and beautifully complex, with a fine core, impressive delineation, melting tannins and excellent length and grip on the perfectly balanced and still quite vibrant finish. This has certainly been fully mature for many, many years, but it shows more vigor than the 1983 today and will outlive that wine by at least a few years. It is really a lovely, mellowed example of mature Hermitage. 2011-2030+? **91.**

1938 Hermitage “La Chapelle”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

This was an absolute treat to taste a couple of years ago and remains one of the very greatest vintages of La Chapelle I have ever had the pleasure to try- ranking right up there with the 1959 and the 1961 at the pinnacle of my experience with this great wine. It is of course far beyond those vintages in terms of evolution and is now gently sliding down the far side of its plateau, but all of the beautiful elements of *terroir* that make this such a great wine are still very much in evidence in this fine old bottle and it is very clear that this was a truly brilliant wine at

its apogee several decades ago. The 1938 La Chapelle offers up a beautiful and delicate nose of dried raspberries, red currants, woodsmoke, gentle notes of pepper, straw, coffee and a lovely base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and very complex, with a very gentle palate impression, superb balance and really fine length and grip on the now fairly fragile, but still completely sound finish. The 1938 La Chapelle is getting towards the end of its long life, but it remains a very, very enjoyable wine to drink. 2010-2025. **88.**



Cornas

2012 Cuvée Grain Noir- Johann Michel

Cuvée Grain Noir from Johann Michel is the name of the wine made from Monsieur Michel's young syrah vines in his Cornas vineyards. The wine is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks and the 2012 comes in at a cool 13.5 percent alcohol and is excellent. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, offering up scents of cassis, black raspberries, a bit of pepper, dark soil tones, some meatiness and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately chewy, with surprising depth and stuffing for a young vine cuvée, with fine focus and balance and a long, moderately tannic finish. This is good juice and an excellent value! 2013-2020+. **89+.**

2011 Cornas- Johann Michel

Johann Michel's regular bottling of Cornas is raised in two to four year-old oak barrels and produced from vines that average around twenty years of age. The 2011 tips the scales at an old school thirteen percent alcohol and offers up outstanding promise on both the nose and palate. The fine and youthful bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, black raspberries, grilled game, plenty of black pepper, a bit of black olive, incipient notes of bonfire, stony soil tones and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with superb focus and nascent complexity, firm, well-integrated tannins and a very long,

balanced and primary finish. This will be an excellent bottle of Cornas in a decade or so. Impressive wine. 2023-2050. **93.**

2010 Cornas “Cuvée Casimir Balthazar”- Franck Balthazar

This bottling takes its name from Franck Balthazar’s grandfather, Casimir, who started this small family domaine in 1931. One of the things I really like about Monsieur Balthazar’s wines is that they retain “old school” sensibilities in terms of ripeness, with both the 2010 and the 2009 versions tipping the scales at a cool thirteen percent alcohol, which really allows for the underlying expression of *terroir* to take center stage. The 2010 Cuvée Casimir Balthazar is excellent, offering up a cool and youthful nose of cassis, black pepper, a nice touch of the stems, a beautiful base of soil tones, fresh thyme, incipient notes of meatiness and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a lovely core of fruit, superb soil signature, firm tannins and a long, nascently complex and tangy finish. This is a superb bottle of Cornas in the making, but it will need five or six years in the cellar to really blossom. Fine, classic Cornas that shows impressive transparency out of the blocks. 2018-2040. **91+.**

2010 Cornas “Chaillots”- Franck Balthazar

The 2010 Chaillots bottling from Franck Balthazar is just a tad riper than the Cuvée Casimir Balthazar in this vintage, coming in still at a very civilized 13.5 percent and showing off outstanding purity and soil signature on both the nose and palate. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, black raspberry, black olive, pepper, a touch of *garrigue* and a superb base of stony soil tones and a touch of spicy wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the young, primary and very promising finish. This is more backwards than the 2010 Cuvée Casimir Balthazar (as well as deeper) and it will need a bit longer in the cellar to really come into its own. Excellent juice. 2020-2050. **93.**

2009 Cornas “Cuvée Casimir Balthazar”- Franck Balthazar

The 2009 Cuvée Casimir Balthazar is quite good, wafting from the glass in a complex and slightly new oaky nose of cassis, black pepper, espresso, Provençal herbs, stony soil tones and a bit of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, and youthfully complex, with a fine core, firm tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. The wine seems just a touch pinched from its new wood, but it is balanced and this stage should pass with sufficient bottle age. Good juice in the making. 2016-2035+. **89+.**

2009 Cornas “Chaillots”- Franck Balthazar

The 2009 Chaillots from Franck Balthazar is a fine, classic bottle of Cornas in the making, offering up a youthful nose of cassis, black olive, espresso, black pepper, venison, a bit of bonfire and a lovely base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a fine core, firm tannins, lovely focus and a long, chewy, well-balanced and palate-staining finish. I like this wine better than the Cuvée Casimir Balthazar, as there is no new wood influence here. The 2009 Chaillots from Monsieur Balthazar comes in at a very old school octane level of 13.5 percent and is really a fine bottle in the making. 2019-2045. **91+.**

2000 Cornas- Domaine Noël Verset

It has been four years since I last posted a note on the 2000 Verset Cornas, but this is a wine I drink with some frequency, as I had the good sense to buy more than a case of it when it came out. It really is a lovely vintage for Monsieur Verset, as the wine wafts from the glass in a pure and vibrant mélange of black raspberries, cassis, black olives, pepper, a beautiful base of Cornas’ stony soils, a touch of licorice and grilled meats. On the palate the wine is pure, full-

bodied and very transparent, with a great core of black fruit, superb complexity, moderate tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the very, very long and perfectly balanced finish. This has been drinking very well for several years now, but it is not evolving at a particularly fast pace and I am thinking that I will not touch a bottle for several more years, as this may well end up every bit as stellar as the 1985 Verset if it is given enough time in the cellar! 2013-2040. **93+**.

1999 Cornas- Domaine Noël Verset

As is the case with the 2000 vintage from Noël Verset, I had not posted a note on the 1999 in four years, but time seems to have little touched this wine in the interim- other than perhaps the tannins melting away a bit more. The deep, pure and beautifully transparent nose wafts from the glass in a classic blend of raspberries, grilled meats, a touch of celery seed, hot stones, black olives, pepper and a lovely topnote of exotic spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully soil-driven, with a rock solid core, melting tannins and superb focus and grip on the perfectly focused and very long finish. This is a great vintage for Monsieur Verset's Cornas, and the wine should continue to dazzle for at least a couple more decades and probably longer. This seems to get better every time I revisit a bottle! 2012-2035+. **94+**.

1998 Cornas "Reynaud"- Domaine Thierry Allemand

The 1998 Reynaud from Thierry Allemand is a deep and powerful, old school example of the vintage that is still a few years from really starting to blossom and drink with some generosity, but all of the constituent components are in place for a long and fulfilling life in bottle. The deep and youthful nose offers up a primary blend of black raspberries, cassis, game, stony soil tones, medicinal syrah overtones and a bit of new leather. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, concentrated and soil-driven, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, chewy, but well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This is a fine bottle of Cornas in the making, but give it a bit more time. 2018-2045. **92+**.

1998 Cornas- Domaine Auguste Clape

The 1998 Clape Cornas is still a very young and primary example of this fine vintage, offering up a classic nose of black olives, black raspberries, dark berries, leather, venison, stony soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, closed and still quite monolithic, with a rock solid core, a fair bit of tannin and very good length and grip on the chewy, grumpy and soil-driven finish. This is old school Clape in need of several more years of bottle age prior to blossoming and starting to really drink well. But, it should be a very good wine in the fullness of time. 2018-2040+. **91**.

1998 Cornas "Ruchets"- Jean-Luc Columbo

The 1998 Ruchets bottling from Jean-Luc Columbo is really pretty simple and uninteresting Cornas, with an oaky, over-extracted modern style that is decidedly tough going at this age and seems unlikely to ever really blossom. The monolithic nose is a blend of spicy new oak, black cherries, tarry soil tones and pepper. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, dense and four-square, with an extracted core, aggressive (added?) acidity and a short, over-oaked and astringent finish. This is really pedestrian juice that is hard to imagine drinking with enjoyment anywhere along its journey from cradle to grave. ??? **74**.

1994 Cornas- Domaine Auguste Clape

I had the 1994 Clape Cornas a few years back served alongside of the 1994 Verset Cornas, and I was surprised at how much more "polish" this wine showed on the nose and palate in comparison to the Verset, as intuitively I would have expected the opposite. The bouquet is rather refined in its blend of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, espresso, a touch of shoe polish and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, nascently complex and perfectly

respectable at the core, with moderate tannins and good length and grip on the well-mannered finish. This is a good drink, but in my experience, Clape Cornas is usually a bit wilder than this very polite vintage. 2011-2025+? **89.**

1993 Cornas- Domaine Auguste Clape (served from magnum)

I have had some great Clape Cornas bottlings over the years, but the 1993 is more indicative of the difficulties of this vintage in the northern Rhône than it is of the consistent excellence of this estate. The wine is not particularly clean on its deep nose, delivering scents of cassis, medicinal syrah, a fair bit of barnyardy brett, damp leaves, pepper and a weird note of grape-flavored Kool-Aid. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rather stewy in personality, with little remaining tannin, a wide open personality and reasonable complexity and length on the finish. This is okay, but it could not escape the long shadow of this tough vintage. 2011-2016+? **86.**

1991 Cornas- Domaine Auguste Clape

The 1991 Clape Cornas is one of the great wines of this vintage in the northern Rhône, and at age twenty it is drinking splendidly. The superb bouquet is a complex blend of black currant, blueberries, ground pepper, laurel, gentle notes of bacon fat, a superb base of stony soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant on the attack, with a rock solid core, melting tannins and great focus and balance on the strikingly refined (particularly for Cornas), long and classy finish. I have not drunk as much old Clape Cornas as I would like, and a wine such as this brilliant 1991 certainly inspires one to look for more older vintages! 2011-2030. **94.**

1985 Cornas- Domaine Auguste Clape

A few years ago I opened on my lone bottle of the beautiful 1991 Clape Cornas, which was a more refined wine than this very good bottle of 1985. I suppose it is not too surprising that the '85 Clape is still a bit on the adolescent side of its developmental arc, as it offers up a bouquet of black raspberries, medicinal syrah tones, hung game, pepper, stony soil tones, a touch of walnut, fresh herbs and lovely spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and seemingly more evolved than on the nose, with a good core, still a bit of firm tannin to soften up and excellent length and grip on the complex and slightly rustic finish. This is a very, very good bottle of Cornas that still has many years of life ahead of it, and though today, it is not quite as complete as the 1991 Clape, it still has many years ago and may one day match that wine. 2013-2040. **93.**

1979 Cornas- Delas Frères

The 1979 Cornas from Delas Frères is a very nice bottle of fully mature Cornas that is a tad on the rustic side (and also with a touch of brett), but with good complexity and still plenty of life ahead of it. The deep and mature nose offers up a blend of cassis, cherries, grilled venison, pepper, stony soil tones, a bit of brett-induced barnyard and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and vibrant, with a good stony base of soil, still some remaining tannins and good length and grip on the balanced and gently rustic finish. Folks whose tolerance for a bit of brett is non-existent will not like this wine, but if you can put up with a bit of that taint in the wine, there is admirable complexity here in this sturdy and modestly rustic example of Cornas. 2012-2025. **88.**

Brézème Rouge et Blanc

2010 Brézème “Domaine de Pergault” Blanc- Éric Texier

It had been a few vintages since I last tasted this bottling from Éric Texier, which is made up entirely from Roussanne vines that are now closing in on their thirtieth birthday. The wine is barrel-fermented in older Burgundy barrels, and there were three barrels of the wine produced in the 2010 vintage. The bouquet is excellent, offering up notes of peach, apple, white flowers and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with lovely focus and core and a long, crisp and complex finish. Lovey juice. 2012-2017+. **91.**

2010 Brézème Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Rouge- Éric Texier

The “regular” bottling of Brézème rouge from Éric Texier is a lovely, suave middleweight that tips the scales at a very civilized twelve percent alcohol and is a very pure and classy rendition of syrah. The exuberant nose offers up a fine mix of cassis, black olive, a touch of black pepper, stony soil tones and a lovely topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and racy, with soft tannins, lovely focus and complexity and impressive grip on the long and light on its feet finish. Fine juice. 2012-2018. **90.**

2008 Brézème Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Rouge- Éric Texier

The 2009 Brézème Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages from domaine Texier is excellent, offering up a ripe and wide open nose of cassis, black raspberries, black olives, lovely minerality and espresso. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins and impressive focus and grip on the long, complex and nicely focused finish. This is one of the best values to be found out there in the world of wine for a serious red at a bargain price! 2012-2018. **89+.**



The vineyards of Brézème- one of the northern Rhône's best-kept secrets.

Éric Texier's Brézème “Vieilles Vignes” de Domaine de Pergault

2010 Brézème “Domaine de Pergault” Vieilles Vignes Rouge- Éric Texier

The old vine bottling from the Domaine de Pergault parcels of sixty-plus year-old, *petite serine* syrah vines has produced a simply beautiful wine in the 2010 vintage, wafting from the glass in a very refined bouquet of cassis, dark berries, granite, black olives, gentle notes of pepper, espresso and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and intensely flavored, with a lovely core of sappy fruit, superb soil inflection, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is not much

riper than the regular bottling at 12.5 percent alcohol, but has lovely intensity from these great old vines and is really a stellar vintage for this great, old school syrah. 2013-2025+. **93.**

2009 Brézème “Domaine de Pergault” Vieilles Vignes Rouge- Éric Texier

Fans of the Domaine de Pergault bottling are going to have a lot of fun over the coming years debating the relative merits of the 2009 and 2010 versions of this iconic wine. The really superb nose of the '09 delivers a lovely aromatic spectrum of cassis, black raspberries, espresso, game, a touch of new leather, woodsmoke and a stony base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, fine focus and grip and superb balance on the very long and quite stony finish. This is another absolutely superb bottle of low fat, northern Rhône syrah! 2013-2025+. **93.**

2008 Brézème “Domaine de Pergault” Vieilles Vignes Rouge- Éric Texier

The 2008 Pergault V.V. from Éric Texier is a lovely wine for near-term drinking, but it is not in the league as the top recent vintages of this cuvée. The wine offers up a complex and wide open nose of cassis, dark berries, a bit of roasted game, espresso and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and ready to drink, with a juicy core, sound complexity, fairly low acids for this bottling, but good backend length and grip. A lovely bottle of syrah-based Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages, I would opt for drinking this wine up over the relative near-term. 2012-2015+? **88.**

2000 Brézème “Domaine de Pergault” Vieilles Vignes Rouge- Éric Texier

Monsieur Texier's old vine bottling from Brézème is starting now to get to the far side of its plateau of maturity, and while it is still really lovely aromatically, it is getting a bit gentler in structural terms and is probably best drunk up over the near-term. The superb bouquet offers up a complex blend of cassis, French roast, gentle notes of grilled meat, black olives, a touch of pepper and a lovely base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and elegant, with nice fresh fruit tones on the attack and a fine base of soil, but with a relatively delicate core and the wine seems to be losing a bit of focus and grip now on the quite mature (and still pretty long) finish. Drink up, as this still offers up plenty of enjoyment in its more delicate phase, but the writing is on the wall. 2011-2014. **87.**

1989 Brézème “Domaine de Pergault” Vieilles Vignes Rouge- François Pouchoulin

This was the first time I had ever tasted an example of Brézème from François Pouchoulin, who owned the Domaine de Pergault prior to Éric Texier taking over the production of his vineyards and made wine in his spare time from this wonderful parcel of *petite serein* syrah vines. The 1989 from Monsieur Pouchoulin offers up a lovely, red fruity nose of raspberries, a touch of ground pepper, salami, leather and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full and fairly high-toned in style, with nice balance and bounce, but not a great deal of stuffing at the core. The finish is long, with melted tannins and lovely grip. This is a nice bottle that was probably a bit better in its youth, but still offers up some merit in the glass and shows no signs of imminent decline. 2012-2020+. **87.**

Gigondas

2010 Gigondas- Domaine du Terme

The 2010 Gigondas from Domaine du Terme is a very good example of the appellation, with its 14.5 percent alcohol level plenty ripe, but in the context of this day and age, also still in touch with the old school in this appellation. The deep and youthful nose offers up scents of cherries, raspberries, toffee, *garrigue*, hung game, sandy soil tones and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is big, full-bodied and moderately jammy, but with a fair bit of complexity, ripe,

chewy tannins and a bit of backend marinated fruit from its octane level that takes what could have been an excellent wine and drops it down to merely quite good. My guess is this is really a touch riper than 14.5 percent, and if it could be brought in at a legitimate fourteen percent, it would be really interesting. But, all in all, not a bad example. 2013-2020. **87.**

2010 Gigondas- E. Guigal

The Guigal Gigondas is raised in large *foudres*, of which fifty percent are new oak. This seems to have rounded off the wine nicely and gives it a very moderately oaky personality that marries well with the ripe fruit here. This is (happily) not a particularly heady example of Gigondas, coming in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and offering up a deep and ripe nose of black cherries, roasted game, a bit of bonfire, a nice touch of soil, balsam boughs, rosemary and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins (some from the new wood) and a long, quite polished and well-balanced finish. I really like this wine's sense of complexity and relative restraint in terms of ripeness, but it is a very polished wine that is not as typical of Gigondas as it is of the fine house of Guigal. That said, there is a lot to like here. 2015-2035. **89.**

2007 Gigondas- Domaine du Terme

I like everything about this bottle of Gigondas, except its crazy octane level! At 15.5 percent alcohol, this seems more like a cocktail than a bottle of wine to my (perhaps overly old-fashioned?) palate, and some absolutely lovely winemaking seems to have been wasted by letting the grapes hang out there to the "stun" level of ripeness. Surprisingly, the very ripe nose is quite attractive in its mix of black cherry preserves, chocolate, gentle notes of black pepper and a nice topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very velvety on the attack, with a good core of fruit, a bit of firm tannins and quite a bit of overt heat on the long finish. To my palate, 14.5 percent alcohol still seems excessive, but if this wine could be picked a bit earlier and land around that level, it would be stunning, rather than a curiosity. The potential here for excellent wines is self-evident, but, to my palate, not realized in this heady 2007. 2013-2016. **82.**

Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc

2011 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Domaine Pierre André

The 2011 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc from Domaine Pierre André comes in at fourteen percent octane and this number seems quite accurate on this well-made wine. The nose is deep, ripe and ready, offering up scents of marinated pears and apples, a touch of coriander seed, white soils and *Mirabelle* plums. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and wide open, with a good core, a bit of soil signature and a long, fairly heady finish that still shows nice framing acids for near-term drinking, but is probably too ripe in style to last more than a few years. This is riper than I like in my white wines, but in the context of white Châteauneuf these days, it is not too bad. 2013-2016. **86.**

2010 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Château Mont-Redon

The 2010 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc from Château Mont-Redon is a lovely example of this appellation, as befits the estate who produced the very first example! The wine comes in at a classic 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a complex and classy nose of fresh pineapple, pear, a touch of coriander seed, chalky soil tones, a touch of butter and a topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with good acids, fine focus and balance and a long, stylish and very suave finish. A great example of Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc, with the structure to age very well indeed, but which is already a superb drink. 2013-2020+. **93.**

2009 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc “Vieilles Vignes”- Château Beaucastel

The 2009 Vieilles Vignes from Château Beaucastel proclaimed only fourteen percent alcohol on the label, but the wine seemed decidedly higher in octane than that to my palate and was pretty hot on the finish. The bouquet is pretty, offering up scents of pear, acacia blossoms, gentle leesy tones, white soils and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully fresh, with a very gentle structure, low acids, good mid-palate depth and a long, complex and soft finish that shows a fair bit of alcohol on the backend. This is okay, but needs to be drunk up soon, and is really for those with new world palates that do not mind heady alcohol levels. 2012-2014. **85.**

2009 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Éric Texier

These days, my two favorite producers of white Châteauneuf du Pape are Éric Texier and Château Mont-Redon, as both wines tend to year in and year out avoid the excesses of alcohol and soft structures that so many of the other bottlings with which I cross paths demonstrate. The 2009 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc from Monsieur Texier is comprised of a blend of sixty percent clairette and forty percent bourboulenc and is lovely juice, wafting from the glass in a blend of peaches, fresh apricot, white soil tones, a touch of coriander and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively light on its feet, with fine focus and core, bright acids and a long, wide open and succulent finish. 2012-2015+. **92.**



Châteauneuf du Pape Rouge

2011 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine de la Solitude

The current release of Domaine de la Solitude's fine Châteauneuf du Pape is a ripe and well-balanced example of the vintage, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol and showing a fair bit of ripeness on both the nose and palate, without ever losing its sense of equilibrium. The wine is more black fruity in this vintage than I recall from the old days at Domaine de la Solitude (which used to be poster children for the red fruity, peppery and *garrigue*-laced side of Châteauneuf du Pape), offering up scents of black cherries, roasted game, balsam boughs, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee, bonfires and plenty of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and carries its ripeness very well, with a solid core, good focus and balance, ripe tannins and a long, chewy and youthful finish that promises to evolve very well. I miss the old, red fruity style here, which I always found to be absolutely classic, but this is well-made wine that is certainly not overtly modern and over the top in style. 2016-2035. **89.**

2009 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Pierre André

The 2009 Châteauneuf du Pape from Domaine Pierre André is plenty ripe at 14.5 percent alcohol, but it avoids the overripe aromatics and flavors, as well as the new wood, of so many wines in this region these days. The deep, ripe and powerful nose wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of baked cherries, fruitcake, coffee, *garrigue*, a nice base of sandy soil tones, hung game and pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced for its octane, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe tannins, no signs of heat and a long, chewy and still quite primary finish. This is good, old school Châteauneuf that needs some time in the cellar to blossom, but its level of octane does take just a bit of backend precision away and give the fruit tones here a bit of jamminess. I like the style of this wine a lot (this was the first vintage of Monsieur André's wines that I had ever tasted) and would love to see them in a so-called lesser vintage of more modest ripeness. But, all in all, good juice. 2017-2035+. **90.**

2009 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Mont-Redon

The 2009 Château Mont-Redon Châteauneuf du Pape is a lovely example of the vintage, with a nice, moderate level of alcohol for the region coming in at fourteen percent and the wine offering lovely bounce and vibrancy on the palate. The really impressive nose jumps from the glass in a complex mix of raspberries, cherries, coffee, lovely spice tones, *garrigue*, stony soil tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a velvety attack, a good core, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and classy finish. There are no signs of excess heat on the backend here and this is a fine bottle of young Châteauneuf du Pape that harkens back to the glory days of this region in the 1980s. Châteauneuf for grownups! 2013-2035. **93.**

2009 Châteauneuf du Pape "Vieilles Vignes- Éric Texier

The 2009 Châteauneuf du Pape from Éric Texier tips the scales at a very civilized (for this region in the heady 2009 vintage) alcohol level of 14.5 percent. The wine offers up a deep, ripe and complex nose of raspberries, coffee, grilled meat, a fine base of soil tones, pepper and a bit of coffee bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe tannins and superb length and grip on the youthful and well-balanced finish. This is good, old school Châteauneuf that shows no signs of jamminess or backend heat. 2014-2035. **92+.**

2009 Châteauneuf du Pape "Improbable"- Éric Texier

As readers may recall from the feature on Éric Texier back a few years ago, he only produces his "Improbable" bottling in top vintages and there are typically only two barrels, or

fifty cases of this superb, one hundred percent grenache-based wine made in any given vintage. The wine hails from a parcel of ninety-five year-old vines in the *La Crau* plateau of Châteauneuf, which is home, most famously, to Vieux Telegraphe. The 2009 Improbable is also 14.5 percent and is a great wine in the making, offering up a deep and youthful bouquet of red and black raspberries, coffee, grilled meat, pepper and a really complex base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with a sappy core of old vine fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins, outstanding focus and superb length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a great bottle of Châteauneuf du Pape! 2017-2035+. **94+**.

2009 Châteauneuf du Pape- Le Vieux Donjon

The 2009 Vieux Donjon Châteauneuf tips the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol- not outrageous as far as these things go these days in a ripe vintage, but high enough to take away some precision on the palate. The wine is really pretty red fruity aromatically for its octane level, offering up scents of cherries, woodsmoke, game, coffee and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows good mid-palate depth of red fruit, with fine length, low acids and a softly tannic, gently heady finish. This wine does a very good job of managing its alcohol and is not a bad drink, but at this ripeness level, it will need to be drunk up on the early side. 2012-2025. **88**.

2007 Châteauneuf du Pape- E. Guigal

The 2007 Châteauneuf du Pape from the Guigal family showed very nicely at my tastings for this report. The Guigals buy their production for this bottling early on (typically prior to the onset of malolactic fermentation in the cellars of their suppliers) and then bring it back to the cellars in Ampuis where it is aged for fully three years in *foudres* prior to bottling, which nicely gives the wine an evolved style that is tasty right out of the blocks. The 2007 is ripe, at 14.5 percent, but nicely balanced and offers up a deep and fully mature and quite black fruity nose of black cherries, a bit of dark berry, roasted game, a bit of pepper, damp soil tones, coffee, herb tones and just a bit of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, good focus and balance and a long, complex and gently heady finish. The 14.5 percent octane is only felt here in a whisper of backend heat, but this is a wine that very well manages its alcohol level and is really drinking very well at the present time. Good juice. 2013-2020+? **89**.

2006 Châteauneuf du Pape “Réserve des Célestins”- Henri Bonneau

The 2006 Réserve des Célestins is a lovely wine in the making and a remarkably “cool” and balanced wine for what must clearly be more than fifteen percent alcohol in this vintage. The only real sign that this is a very high octane vintage of Réserve des Célestins is the typical black fruity signature of youth here is not in evidence, as this is the most red fruity young vintage I have tasted of this bottling. But other than this anomaly, the wine is superb, offering up a deep and complex nose of raspberries, cherries, hickory smoke, coffee, a complex base of stony soil tones, herb tones and hung game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very, very pure, with a superb core of fruit, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused, chewy and very youthful finish. Despite the obvious heft of ripeness here, there is absolutely no signs of heat on the backend of this impeccably balanced wine! 2022-2050+. **93**.

2004 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Pierre André

Pierre André’s 2004 Châteauneuf du Pape also comes in at the same 14.5 percent octane as his 2009, and the wine is aging very well indeed and shows that the 2009 will also develop nicely with bottle age. The nose is still a bit jammy from its ripeness level, but this is now

augmented by lovely secondary notes of bonfires, roasted game, balsam boughs and rosemary to go along with notes of fruitcake, coffee, chocolate, pepper and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still plenty chewy, with more of a stony personality to its soil signature than the 2009, a fair bit of tannin still to resolve and fine focus and balance on the long, complex and fairly-tannic finish. This still needs several years to really soften, but it is developing quite nicely and augurs well for the 2009 version. 2018-2035. **90+**.

2003 Châteauneuf du Pape- Clos des Papes

This wine was served double-blind to me at a tasting a couple of years ago and it was pretty appalling stuff- almost worthy of bringing back the Road Kill section just for this sad and dispirited wine. To be fair, the vintage's scorching conditions were hardly conducive to those pre-disposed to make over the top wines already, but this wine is really grotesquely overripe and alcoholic- even by the sordid standards of modern-styled Châteauneuf du Pape! The dulled and stewy nose is a mix of overripe, marinated black cherries, fruitcake, spoiled meat, grappa and muddy earth. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat, formless and dense, with scorching backend alcohol, no structure or freshness, little tannin and a leaden, utterly cadaverous finish. A wine for necrophiliacs. DOA. **52**.

2000 Châteauneuf du Pape "Cuvée Barberini"- Domaine de la Solitude

The Cuvée Barberini from Domaine de la Solitude is their luxury bottling that is only produced in what the family perceives are top vintages. The 2000 is made from a blend of forty percent grenache and thirty percent each of syrah and mourvèdre, with sixty percent of the cuvée raised in new oak barrels, with the wine coming in at a very civilized fourteen percent alcohol in this very ripe vintage. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a mature mélange of dark berries, black cherries, charred wood, roasted venison, a nice serving of bacon fat and a nice framing of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with excellent focus and balance, moderate, well-integrated tannins, low acids and superb length and grip on the fully mature, complex and suave finish. This wine is not a particularly classic interpretation of Châteauneuf du Pape (it actually reminds me more of a wine like the 1987 Guigal La Landonne in its heyday!), but it is very well made and is drinking very well indeed. In the context of the 2000 vintage here in Châteauneuf du Pape (where I have tasted so much road kill), this is really a very successful bottle, and even if it is not long on classic aromatic and flavor profiles, it is a very well-made and complex wine. 2013-2025+. **93**.

1998 Châteauneuf du Pape "Cuvée de Mon Aïeul"- Domaine Usseglio

The 1998 Châteauneuf du Pape "Cuvée de Mon Aïeul" from Domaine Usseglio is a pretty ripe specimen, but it handles its alcohol fairly well and is one of the better made wines that I have tasted in recent times from the modernist school of relatively late-harvested Châteauneuf. The nose is a ripe and complex blend of black cherries, fruitcake, hickory smoke, *garrigue* and peppercorns. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and impressively tangy for its octane, with good purity on the attack, a solid core of jammy fruit, still a bit of tannin and a long, powerful finish that shows a bit of blurriness from its ripeness on the backend. But, all in all, this is one of the better wines I have had in this style and it should continue to drink well for another decade or so. 2011-2020+? **89**.

1996 Châteauneuf du Pape- Henri Bonneau

As I noted in my article on Henri Bonneau back at the end of 2008, the domaine's "regular" bottling of Châteauneuf du Pape is consistently superb and is all too often overlooked in the chase for his top end cuvées of Marie Beurrier and Réserve des Célestins. The 1996

straight Châteauneuf du Pape is outstanding, offering up a very complex nose of cherries, a touch of olive, lovely spice tones redolent of marjoram and turmeric, a fine stony base of soil, just a dollop of leather and a topnote of lavender and autumn leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave on the attack and modestly tannic, with a fine core, superb focus and balance and a very long, complex and poised finish. This is not cut from the power-monger school of the two reserve bottlings here, but is a classically balanced and very classy bottle of old school Châteauneuf du Pape. 2011-2025. **93.**

1990 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Rayas

There was a time when the 1990 Château Rayas was considered the equal of the brilliant 1989, but today it would be hard to persuade me that the two wines are in the same league. The 1990 is a very, very good wine, but the torrid conditions of this vintage have robbed the wine of some of the precision and magical complexity that are found in the very greatest vintages of Château Rayas. The bouquet on the 1990 is deep, plump, ripe and still fairly youthful in its buxom blend of red and black raspberries, grilled venison, *garrigue*, sandy soil tones, spices and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerfully built, with a jammy core of fruit, still a fair bit of ripe tannin and very good length and grip on the muscular and bottomless finish. This seems a tad more evolved than its 1989 counterpart, and while it is an excellent wine, it is one step behind its older sibling. 2014-2040. **94.**

1989 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Beaucastel

I have always been a fan of the 1989 Château Beaucastel, which I rank just behind the superb 1981 at this fine estate. The most recent bottle I tasted of this wine was still just a touch youthful, but offered up fine complexity on both the nose and palate and shows excellent promise. The bouquet is a blend of roasted fruitcake, cherries, new leather, venison, incipient notes of *sous bois*, woodsmoke and hot stones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with a bit of tannin still to resolve, fine focus and grip and a very long, classy and slightly chewy finish. I would be tempted to give this wine a few more years to really resolve, as it will be a superb wine and it would be most enjoyable to drink it at the same plateau that the 1981 has been enjoying for a good decade already. 2015-2050. **93+.**

1989 Châteauneuf du Pape- Guigal

The 1989 Guigal Châteauneuf du Pape is an okay example of the vintage, but this region was never Marcel Guigal's specialty and this wine is not in the first division in this year. The nose is complex, but getting a little old in its mix of cassis, leather, some herbal elements, a bit of bretty barnyard, balsam, damp soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and really pretty bretty, with a solid core and good length and grip on the well-focused finish. This obviously is not entirely clean, and it lacks the distinction of the best '89 Châteauneufs, but it is still quite serviceable (particularly if one is grilling meats) and has some life still ahead of it. Perfectly solid. 2011-2020+. **87.**

1989 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Rayas

The 1989 vintage of Château Rayas has long enjoyed legendary status as one of the greatest wines ever produced under the auspices of Jacques Reynaud, and rightly so, as this is a brilliant vintage of this iconic wine. The deep, ripe and magically complex nose wafts from the glass in a mix of raspberries, desiccated cherries, fruitcake, coffee, *garrigue*, a touch of chocolate, pepper, a very complex base of soil tones and a potpourri of exotic spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with still a fair bit of youthful, jammy opulence in evidence, ripe, well-integrated tannins and

stunning length and grip on the complex, still surprisingly youthful and totally stunning finish. This is still very early days for the 1989 Château Rayas, which is certainly very approachable today, but will be even better with further bottle age. I would not touch a bottle for another five to seven years (despite the wine being structurally wide open today), as I would prefer to catch this wine with the same degree of precision and perfume as is shown by vintages like 1978 or 1979 today and this wine has a long, long way to go! 2017-2050. **97.**

1988 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Beaucastel

The 1988 Château Beaucastel has been a stalwart bottle in my cellar for many, many years, as I have drunk this wine with some regularity since the mid-1990s. This was my very last bottle, and it showed beautifully, offering up a deep, complex and beautifully black fruity and autumnal bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, game, black pepper, hickory smoke, balsam boughs, incipient notes of the fallen leaves and coffee beans. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its apogee, with blossoming autumnal elements, a beautiful core of fruit, melting tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long and well-balanced finish. This has been one of my favorite vintages of Beaucastel for many, many years and I am sorry to see the case come to an end that was one of the first full cases of Beaucastel I ever purchased. A fine, fine vintage of this iconic wine. 2013-2030+. **94.**

1988 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Etienne”- Domaine Font de Michelle

The 1988 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Etienne” from Font de Michelle is a deep and robust wine that offers up a slightly roasted bouquet of cassis, coffee, herb tones, roasted meats, pepper and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit four-square and rustic, with a good core, modest tannins, good focus and complexity, but a bit of backend bitterness that detracts from the overall pleasure of the wine. This is okay, but no better. 2012-2030. **85.**

1988 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Vieux Telegraphe

The 1988 Vieux Telegraphe is a lovely example of the vintage, with a superb and quite classic aromatic and flavor profile. The bouquet is deep, vibrant and complex, offering up scents of dark berries, dried raspberries, ground pepper, woodsmoke, herbs, charred earth, stony soil tones, roasted game and just a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tertiary in its complexity, with melting tannins, a fine core of sweet fruit, lovely soil inflection and impressive focus and grip on the long, modestly tannic and soil-driven finish. This is a classic vintage of Vieux Telegraphe that is fully into its apogee of peak maturity, but will continue to age and evolve gracefully for at least another couple of decades. High class juice. 2013-2030+. **93.**

1986 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Beaucastel

This particular bottle of the 1986 Château Beaucastel did not show well, but although it seemed rather musty in personality, I did not get the sense that it was actually corked and affected by TCA. The nose is quite deep, offering up notes of black cherries, tarry tones, balsam boughs, spices and stony soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chunky and lacking in brightness, with a slightly dulled aspect to the flavors, but still reasonable length and grip on the finish. I am not really sure what to make of this showing, but I suppose it is best to put it down to a bad bottle and look to retaste the wine sometime in the future (this is not a vintage of Beaucastel I bought for my own cellar, so I will have to trust to serendipity to retry the '86). **???**



1985 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Rayas

The 1985 Château Rayas is a superb vintage for this great wine and it remains still a few years away from its absolute apogee, as there is still a bit of backend tannin in need of resolution. The deep, relatively young and classy nose offers up scents of raspberries, black pepper, coffee, roasted game, a touch of wild fennel, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke and *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plump and complex, with great depth of fruit at the core, lovely focus and balance, still a bit of old school tannin on the backend and a very long, superb finish. This is a classic Rayas that is certainly an outstanding drink today, but to my palate the wine is still climbing and will be even better with another five to ten years of bottle age, as I would love to see it arrive at the same superb level of refined resolution of a vintage such as the 1979 shows today. A great Rayas. 2012-2040. **94.**

1978 Châteauneuf du Pape “les Cédres”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

The 1978 Châteauneuf du Pape “les Cédres” from Paul Jaboulet Aîné is a beautiful example of this vintage, which was not quite as successful in my experience in the southern half of the region as it was in the northern Rhône. The bouquet is deep, complex and fully mature, wafting from the glass in a mix of baked black raspberries, hickory smoke, *garrigue*, coffee, Christmas Tree spices, game and a bit of forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with a superb core, moderate soil transparency, melting tannins and really lovely length and grip on the focused and classy finish. A really superb wine. 2010-2025. **92.**

Vacqueyras

2010 Vacqueyras “Les Clos”- Mon Tirius (Christine et Éric Saurel)

Éric Saurel’s 2010 Vacqueyras “Les Clos” is a bit less ripe (at 14.5 percent) than several of the southern Rhône’s that have crossed my path in the last several months and it is really a very, very good wine. The Les Clos bottling is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of grenache and syrah and the wine offers up a complex bouquet of black cherries, cassis, roasted game, pepper, dark soil tones, fresh herb tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with excellent focus and structure, moderate, ripe tannins and superb length and grip on the wide open, well-balanced finish. I generally am not a fan of southern Rhône syrah, but here it works superbly well. Superb juice for near-term drinking. 2013-2020. **91.**

Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc

2012 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc- E. Guigal

The 2012 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc from E. Guigal seems just a bit headier than its purported 13.5 percent, as the fruit components here seem slightly candied from ripeness and there is just a touch of backend heat on the finish as well. The wine is not bad, as it offers up scents of acacia blossom, pineapple, candied grapefruit, citrus peel and a bit of white soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rather modest in complexity, with ripe flavors, solid framing acids and a bit of uncovered heat on the backend that pinches the finish and leaves the wine lingering over a bit of phenolic bitterness. This is okay, but it really seems to be lacking in freshness and seems like all of the fruit tones are candied from ripeness. 2013-2016+? **85.**

2012 Domaine Saladin Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Blanc “Per El”

The 2012 Domaine Saladin Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Blanc “Per El” is comprised of a blend of marsanne, clairette, grenache blanc, bourboulenc and viognier and tips the scales at a very civilized 13.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet offers up a pretty, ripe and juicy blend of melon, pear, coriander, white soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, soft and elegant, with good focus and breadth, fairly low acids, but good length and grip on the well-measured finish. This will need drinking up pretty briskly, but it is a lovely bottle of Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc. 2013-2015. **88.**

Côtes-du-Rhône and Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages from the South

2011 Domaine Alary “La Grange Daniel” Vin de Pays de Vaucluse

Domaine Alary has long been one of my absolute favorite producers in Cairanne, which is one of the highest elevation towns in the Côtes-du-Rhône *villages* appellation, where cooler summer nights found in the foothills of the Alps often translates into the ability to keep more acidity and freshness in the wines. Their “La Grange Daniel” bottling is not entitled to Côtes-du-Rhône status, as it includes fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon (from forty year-old vines) and five percent merlot in its *cépages*, to go along with other classic southern Rhône grapes such as grenache, syrah, mourvèdre cinsault and counoise. The 2011 is really a lovely wine and a stunning value, offering up a ripe aromatic blend of black raspberries, cassis, *garrigue*, hickory smoke, game and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with lovely cabernet influence to its flavor profile, modest tannins and very fine length and grip on the focused and impressive finish. This is really a lovely bottle of wine for its price! 2013-2020+. **89.**

2011 Domaine Alary Côtes-du-Rhône “la Gerbaude”

The 2011 Domaine Alary Côtes-du-Rhône “la Gerbaude” bottling is made up of a blend of sixty percent grenache, twenty-five percent syrah and fifteen percent carignan and comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol in 2011. The wine is deep and ripe on both the nose and palate, but shows no signs of overripeness or heat, as it offers up scents of jammy black raspberries, balsam boughs, dark soil tones, a touch of game, pepper and just a touch of fresh apricot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is plump, full-bodied and modestly tannic, with a good core of ripe fruit, low acids and a long, well-balanced and juicy finish. This manages its ripeness very well, but even a half percent lower octane might have produced a wine that was even more precise on the backend. But, in these barren days of Parker’s Rhône, this is really a very good wine. 2013-2016. **88.**

2011 Domaine Alary Cairanne “Vieilles Vignes”

I used to drink this wine by the case back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the 2011 version is a bit riper than those wines of yesteryear (this is 14.5 percent and I have a hard time believing the vintages I drank regularly back in the day were above thirteen percent), it is still very well-made. These vines are all in excess of fifty years of age and the wine is primarily raised in cement tanks, with the finishing done for a couple of months in older oak *foudres*. The bouquet on the 2011 is deep, ripe and impressively pure in its *mélange* of black raspberries, chocolate, *garrigue*, a touch of coffee grounds, pepper and a whisper of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and pretty well-balanced, with a juicy core, good length and grip on the jammy and quite ample finish. The higher octane here (in comparison to the old days) makes itself felt mostly in terms of much more fat on the attack, but also a bit of blurriness on the finish. There is no heat or signs of *sur maturité* here, but as is my custom (as a wine dinosaur), this wine really made me long for the previous incarnation of this wine as a leaner and much more precise bottle of Cairanne. This is still very well-made in its style. 2013-2018. **88.**

2011 Domaine Charvin Vin de Pays d’Orange”

Domaine Charvin used to be one of my very favorite estates in Châteauneuf du Pape, but I have lost track of how their style might have changed under the relentless pressure of the high octane fruit bombardier, and these days I do not know if they still make the same brilliant wines as they did back in the day. In any event, their *Vin de Pays* still comes in at a reasonable 13.5 percent alcohol, is a fifty-fifty blend of grenache and merlot (from vines in excess of forty years of age) and is a very, very fine wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a ripe blend of black raspberries, espresso, pepper, a touch of game and a nice base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe, chewy tannins, fine focus and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice and great bang for the buck! 2013-2025. **89.**

2011 Domaine Jean David Côtes-du-Rhône

The 2011 Domaine Jean David Côtes-du-Rhône is a good, solid example of its appellation that seems just a touch riper than its purported 13.5 percent alcohol on the label. The bouquet is deep, young and jammy, offering up scents of raspberry preserves, bonfires, a bit of roasted game, *garrigue* and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly complex, with good mid-palate concentration, moderate tannins and a long, peppery and focused finish. There is some backend ripeness here that suggests this wine is north of fourteen percent in reality, but the wine stays nicely balanced and is a good example. 2013-2018. **87+.**

2011 Domaine Jean David Seguret Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages

The 2011 Seguret from Domaine Jean David is my favorite of the three wines I tasted from the estate in preparation for this report, as it sports a bit more aromatic precision and complexity than its stable mates. The wine is plenty ripe at 14.5 percent, but handles its octane very deftly as it wafts from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, cherries, a nice base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of espresso, wild fennel and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely delineated, with a good core, ripe tannins and just a whisper of backend heat poking out on the long and youthful finish. The wood tannins here on the backend turn just a touch gritty (probably from its relatively high octane) and will need a year or two to get absorbed back into the body of the wine, but this is a well-made wine that should be quite tasty once it softens. Good, solid wine that again seems to show potential to be really exceptional if it were a bit lower in octane. 2015-2020. **88.**

2011 Domaine Jean David Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Cuvée Beau Nez”

The 2011 Cuvée Beau Nez from Domaine Jean David is pretty ripe at 14.5 percent alcohol, but does a nice job keeping its aromatic and flavor components from crossing the line into *sur maturité*. The bouquet is a mix of raspberries, toffee, *garrigue*, stony soil tones and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and borderline jammy, with a good core, chewy tannins and just a bit of heat poking out on the long finish. I like this wine quite well for its octane level, but it is a good example of a wine that if it were just a touch less heady, it would be outstanding, rather than pretty good. 2013-2018. **87.**

2011 Côtes-du-Rhône- Château Mont-Redon

The 2011 Côtes-du-Rhône from Château Mont-Redon is a juicy, old school example of this appellation, offering up a bright and pure nose of raspberries, cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of *garrigue*, coffee and a nice dollop of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, juicy and reasonably complex, with soft tannins, good balance and a long, ripe and easy-going finish. This wine is fourteen percent alcohol, but it seems just a touch higher than that number to my palate, as it is not quite as complex on the palate as the nose promises and the wine loses a bit of backend precision from ripeness on the finish. But, all in all, not a bad example by any stretch of the imagination. 2013-2016. **87.**

2011 La Grange de Piaugier Côtes-du-Rhône

The 2011 La Grange de Piaugier Côtes-du-Rhône is a very nice example of its appellation, coming in at a relatively cool (for these crazy times) fourteen percent alcohol and offering up quite nice precision on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a classic mélange of black raspberries, bonfires, a touch of gamebird, *garrigue*, a touch of cedar and a nice base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with fine focus that shows no signs of jamminess, a good core and a long, ripe and chewy finish that shows just a bit of wood tannin on the backend that will need to be waited out with a year of cellaring. This is good juice that harkens back positively to the old days in Côtes-du-Rhône. 2014-2020. **88.**

2011 Domaine Piaugier “Sablet” Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages

The 2011 Sablet from Domaine Piaugier is a fine example of Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages that is quite ripe at fourteen percent, but well-balanced, nicely structured and shows every indication of blossoming nicely with a couple of years bottle age. The youthful nose wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, black raspberries, coffee, hung game, dark soil tones, dried herbs and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully primary, with a good core, a fair bit of ripe tannin to resolve and good length and grip on the ripe, but

balanced finish. This needs a few years in the cellar for the complexity here to emerge, but it will be a good drink. 2015-2023. **88+**.

2011 Domaine Saladin Côtes-du-Rhône “Paul”

Domaine Saladin makes superb, old school bottlings of Côtes-du-Rhône, with their “Paul” bottling hailing from their oldest vines of grenache and clairette, with the vineyards more than half a century in age. The old school approach here translates into a cool 13.5 percent alcohol for this bottling and the wine is outstanding, offering up scents of raspberries, cherries, coffee, *garrigue*, a touch of chocolate and a really lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a fine core, superb focus and balance, melting tannins and a long, velvety finish. Lovely juice in a style that once defined high quality Côtes-du-Rhône. 2013-2020+. **91**.

2010 Domain Alary Cairanne “La Jean de Verde”

The La Jean de Verde bottling from Domaine Alary hails entirely from a parcel of seventy-plus year-old grenache vines that is raised entirely in cement prior to bottling. This too is a pretty ripe wine at 14.5 percent alcohol, but manages its octane with great dexterity, as it offers up an aromatic mix of red and black raspberries, *garrigue*, pepper, woodsmoke, a touch of coffee grounds and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused on the attack, with a lovely core, very soft tannins and just a touch of backend blurriness keeping down the score on the long and well-balanced finish. This is very good at 14.5 percent alcohol and might be utterly magical at 13.5 percent! 2013-2018. **89**.

2010 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Vaison”- Éric Texier

The Vaison bottling of Côtes-du-Rhône from Monsieur Texier hails from a parcel of fifty-five year-old grenache vines that he has located in a high altitude vineyard that sits eight hundred meters above sea level and stays relatively cool at night, to undo some of the baking effects of so many vineyards in this region. The 2010 is a lovely wine, delivering a fine bouquet of cherries, fresh herb tones, coffee, a touch of peppercorn and a stony base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with a bit of ripe tannin and impressive length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice. 2012-2020+. **89**.

2010 Domaine Saladin Côtes-du-Rhône “Loï”

The Côtes-du-Rhône “Loï” bottling from Domaine Saladin is made up of a blend of grenache, syrah and carignan, with the average age of vines fully forty years of age. The wine tips the scales at a very civilized 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely bouquet of cherries, black raspberries, coffee, a fine base of soil, *garrigue*, game and a touch of fresh apricot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, precise and rock solid at the core, with moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the classy finish. Good juice. 2013-2020+. **89+**.

2009 Domaine Saladin “Chaveyron 1422”

The Chaveyron 1422 bottling from Domaine Saladin is a homage to Côte-Rôtie in the south, as the wine is comprised of a blend of ninety-five percent syrah and five percent viognier. The wine is just a touch riper than the Côtes-du-Rhône bottlings from the estate, as it tips the scales at fourteen percent, but offers up lovely precision on the nose, with scents of cassis, black pepper, game, stony soil tones, smoke and a touch of chicory wafting from the glass in a classy blend. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-focused, with ripe tannins, a good core and fine length and grip on the long finish. There is just a whisper of backend heat that pokes through here on the finish, but the wine is really a very classy bottle that

should drink well for several years. I would love to see a vintage of this wine in the thirteen percent range someday, just to see what could happen! 2013-2020. **90.**

1986 Coudoulet de Beaucastel Côtes-du-Rhône

The 1986 Coudoulet de Beaucastel is starting to get a bit long in the tooth, and while it is clear that the wine was a good drink in its day, it is now in decline and should be drunk up with alacrity. The bouquet is already showing the first signs of overt oxidation, in its mix of red berries, dried herb tones, coffee, tar and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and starting to crack up a bit structurally, with still a bit of mid-palate depth and signs that it was once long and classy on the finish. This was not a great vintage in the southern Rhône, but I drank plenty of bottles of the '86 Coudoulet back in the early to mid-1990s and always enjoyed them immensely. The wine has just run out of gas after a good run. Drink up.



Languedoc, Roussillon, Provence and Other Country Cousins

I know that these wines really do not belong in this article, but as I have not yet had time to write an article devoted to these regions, I thought I would append these notes here to at least get them embedded in the database for future reference. As you will see, a couple of very, very nice wines and one not so much...

2007 Château Hélène Corbières Rouge

The 2007 Château Hélène is a beautiful bottle of Corbières, offering up a deep and complex nose of cherries, a touch of dark berry, gentle notes of meatiness and tree bark, woodsmoke and fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite classy, with lovely focus and mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and a long, tangy finish. This is really a lovely bottle. 2012-2020+. **91.**

2007 Domaine des Triennes “St. Auguste” (Provence)

I really like the wines of Domaine Triennes, which is a joint venture between the Seysses family of Domaine Dujac and Aubert de Villaine of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, and I wish that I had more opportunities to drink these wines, as they are impeccably well-made. The 2007 St. Auguste bottling is a superb bottle of Provençal rouge, offering up a deep and complex nose of cassis, black cherries, *garrigue*, smoke, coffee and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and classy finish. Fine juice. 2012-2020+. **92.**

1995 Domaine de l’Aiguelière “Côte Rousse” (Coteaux du Languedoc)

Domaine de l’Aiguelière is based in the village of Montpeyroux, with the Côte Rousse bottling made from some of their oldest syrah vines and raised in new wood and bottled unfiltered with only a light, egg white fining. It was a darling of Robert Parker (perhaps still is?) and the 1995 was one of the first vintages here to really sell well in the US. At age seventeen the wine is already shot and starting to dry out from its sloppy new wood treatment and getting quite astringent as it sits in the glass. The nose is currently the best part of the wine, offering up a deep, ripe and slightly tarry mix of black cherries, a bit of raspberry, spice tones, stony soil, woodsmoke and a plenty of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, chunky and fairly meaty with air, with a solid core and uncovered wood tannins that come forward like gangbusters as the wine evolves, so that the wine is completely astringent once it has had about twenty minutes of aeration. Drink this up with large groups and pour it immediately, as it really is not too bad prior to the tannins getting unleashed and the wine drying out precipitously. 2012-2016+? **81.**

BACK TO THE ALENTEJO PORTUGAL'S RISING STAR WINE REGION



The beautiful Herdade dos Grous winery- one of Alentejo's finest addresses.

After not having been to Portugal in a few years, I was very happy to spend a week in the Alentejo region during the middle of May on my marathon springtime of travel. On this trip, I was once again the guest of the Alentejo's vintners' association promotional arm for visiting wine journalists, who organized a fine schedule that allowed us to visit several of my favorite producers from my previous visit here back in October of 2010, as well as bring our group to several domaines that were new to me on this trip and whose wines were absolutely outstanding. As I wrote extensively about the region's history and its wines back in Issue 31, I will only do a brief background sketch of the Alentejo here in this report and either direct readers back to the full article from that issue that can be accessed through the database, or for new subscribers who have not seen it, they can email me directly and I will be happy to send along the first piece on this fine up and coming wine region. In short, the Alentejo is Portugal's largest wine-producing region, lying along the Spanish border in southeastern Portugal and owing its new found reality as a major wine-producing region to the completion of the huge Alqueva Dam project on the Spanish-Portuguese frontier in 2004. Prior to this time, the region was really a bit too arid for grape production on a commercial scale, as there was simply not enough water to keep the vines going in most summers. This was also true of olive trees, which are the other new crop that has been added to the Alentejo agricultural mix since the completion of the dam in 2004, and prior to this time, the Alentejo was known as the "bread basket" of Portugal and the primary crops in this

agricultural region were cereals and cork oak trees. Both crops remain important in the mixed agricultural base of the region, but they have been augmented by vineyards and olive trees and the Alentejo has quickly become one of the best-kept secrets in the world of European wine.

While wine production in the Alentejo is a fairly recent phenomenon on the scale that it is practiced today in the region, (where most of the estates are very large, mixed crop farms that have several hundreds or even thousands of hectares now under vine), wines were produced in this region all the way back to Roman times and really continued up until the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal took effect in 1932. The Salazar regime was determined to make the Alentejo the cereal-producing center of the country and actively discouraged wine production during the era of the regime, so that from 1932 until the decline of the dictatorship in the late 1960s, there were only a few cooperatives (established in the 1950s) which were tolerated to produce a bit of wine from the remaining vineyards scattered around the region and the Alentejo effectively ceased as a wine-producing region at this time. After the fall of the Salazar regime, grape growing in the Alentejo did not really take root again for another twenty-five to thirty years, as the combination of the rural poverty here and the country-wide economic malaise brought about by thirty-six years of dictatorship conspired to keep things much as they were during the Salazar years here until the Alqueva dam project started to turn the corner in the mid-1990s, at which time estates began to see the dawning possibilities of both vineyards and olive plantations and investment began to creep back into the region. The European Union was also instrumental at this time in promoting the plantation of olive trees in the Alentejo, as they had a program to provide credits for new olive orchards that helped spur a blossoming in the region.

In any event, today, two of the most important cash crops for agricultural estates in the Alentejo are olives and grapes and the quality of both the olive oil and the wines from the region is now widely recognized within Europe. The wines of the Alentejo now occupy the largest share of the domestic Portuguese market (forty-three percent) and are very important in the export markets in countries such as Angola, Brazil, the Benelux countries and Scandinavia. Pretty impressive growth for a region that only really began serious wine production again in the late 1990s and early years of the 2000s and only produces eighteen percent of Portugal's wine! As I noted in the feature on the Alentejo back in Issue 31, this is a region with a wide variety of different *terroirs* to take advantage of for vineyard plantations on these rolling hillsides and river valley floors. The region is primarily made up of varying blends of clay and limestone, with a bit of schist found on the hillsides in the region. Drip irrigation is utilized for almost all of the vineyards planted here (as well as the olive groves), so one can see that the completion of the Alqueva Dam project (which created Europe's largest reservoir) was critical to jumpstarting the Alentejo as a serious wine-producing region. Wines are generally produced from a blend of different grapes, with red wine varieties including Tempranillo (called Aragonez here in the Alentejo), Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Nacional, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, a lovely indigenous grape called Trincadeira, Periquita (called Castelão here) and Alfrocheiro. White wines in the Alentejo are primarily produced from local varieties such as Antão Vaz, Arinto and Roupeiro, with new arrivals such as Verdelho, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Viognier and Chardonnay also now planted in certain areas. But, the Alentejo is a hot wine-producing region, so that imported grapes such as Chardonnay and Viognier are not really at home here- or at least that has been my impression on my couple of trips to the area. Similarly, the small amounts of Merlot and Pinot

Noir planted in the Alentejo really seem to be a bit out of place here as well, whereas new arrivals such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah have done exceedingly well in this region.

The wine producing regulation for the Alentejo deserve a bit of comment, as they strike me as some of the most forward-thinking to be found in the world these days. As blended wines have been the custom here for many years, no blended wine can contain more than seventy-five percent of any single varietal, and indeed, most blended red wines will include at least three varietals in the cuvée- which seems a good blend to maximize complexity without losing precision. If a wine is going to be bottled and sold as a single varietal wine, it must include one hundred percent of that grape, rather than for instance, the seventy-five percent mandated for a wine labeled as a single varietal bottling in California. There are also two classes of grapes in the region, with varieties that have proven to have the most success in the region- for example, with red wines, Aragonez, Trincadeira, Touriga Nacional, Alicante Bouschet, Cabernet or Syrah are included in this top level, and second division grapes- in this case both Merlot and Pinot Noir are ranked in the second division (rightfully so it seems to me in this hot region), no blend can contain more than twenty-five percent of the lower ranked grapes and still be entitled to the DOC of Alentejo. As a whole, the region also seems very intent on not making similar mistakes to other young wine-producing regions of the recent past, such as Chile or Argentina, and they are committed to continuing to use their traditional grape varieties extensively in their blended wines so as to create a unique panoply of flavors and aromatics in the wines that harken back to the Alentejo, rather than just becoming another source for lower-priced cabernet sauvignon or chardonnay done in the ubiquitous international style! By the way, as I noted in my first piece on the region, cabernet sauvignon does exceedingly well in the Alentejo and in my opinion this is really one of the very best places in the world to grow this grape variety.

Anyway, this should be sufficient background information for the article (those desiring more in-depth information can certainly find it in the article in Issue 31) to tackle the wines I tasted on my recent trip to this beautiful region. As I noted in my previous article, the region is very intent on promoting wine tourism and many of the top estates in the Alentejo include lovely, elegant small hotels and top-notch restaurants right on the ranch, as well as a myriad of daytime activities to make a stay here memorable beyond the excellent wine and food. As cork oak trees are still a very important component of the agricultural mix in the Alentejo, this is also the home of the black pigs from the region that feed on the acorns from the cork oaks and are probably the best pork I have ever had the pleasure to eat, with the chefs in the region using it in a myriad of different preparations. The Alentejo has its own version of ham made from these black pigs, which is called *Porko Preto* (and is the equivalent to the great *Pata Negra* of Spain) and is absolutely fabulous. I was very pleased on this most recent trip to have the opportunity to stay at a couple of the wineries' hotels and enjoy their superb cuisine and hospitality and I cannot recommend these visits highly enough. There is a very gracious and relaxed atmosphere to be found in wine country in the Alentejo that quickly recharges one's batteries and this has to be one of the best wine regions for visiting anywhere in the world. And, did I mention that there are an awful lot of absolutely stellar wines to be found here as well!

The following notes are listed in the order that our small group of journalists visited the estates. I have included brief background paragraphs on the estates that I visited on my last trip (as more complete information can be found in Issue 31) and more in-depth information on

wineries that I was visiting for the first time. As I noted in the last feature on the Alentejo, this is still a fairly young wine-producing region and some growing pains can sometimes be in evidence in the glass, with new oak sometimes more than I would like and alcohol levels sometimes a bit on the heady side, as it is a very warm growing region and it is easy to get pretty high octanes if one is disposed to do so. Of course, these are characteristics that are not unique to the Alentejo! But, already I seem to notice that these more modern wines are fewer and fewer and that the wine producers of the Alentejo seem to realize that their future is not tied to producing “monster truck” styled wines, so that there is no shortage of elegance and complexity to be found in the top wines from this region. Some of the bigger and oakier wines produced here seem to be reserve bottlings, and not surprisingly, many of these “*cuvées de luxe*” are most cherished on the export markets (particularly in Angola), but often, at estates where the top of the line wines are a bit heady and oaky in style, the remainder of the range can be excellent! I am not yet certain how well the wines from the Alentejo will ultimately age, as I have not had many examples of older bottles on my two trips, but it seems to me that at least the domestic Portuguese market prefers their wines on the younger side and many of these wines are probably best drunk over their first decade in bottle (with a few notable exceptions). On my previous trip I had been under the impression that many of the reds in particular might age a bit longer, but now I am not so sure that those estimates were not a bit overly optimistic, as the handful of older bottles I tasted on this trip seemed to indicate that the wines evolve fairly briskly in bottle. But, in any case, there are an awful lot of really well-made, unique and exciting wines currently coming out of the Alentejo and this is a wine region that is fully worth exploring. And, do not forget to sample fully the superb olive oils from the Alentejo and that glorious black pig in all its wonderful guises!

Carmim (Reguengos de Monsaraz)

Carmim is the quality-oriented cooperative located in the region of Monsaraz, which lies on the far eastern edge of the central Alentejo, not far from the Spanish frontier and due east of the city of Évora. The cooperative was formed in 1971 by a band of sixty winegrowers, and has grown along with the wine production of the Alentejo over the years and now boasts more than a thousand members. This is a big, modern operation that can handle a large volume of grapes at harvest time, with the winery and cellars recently expanded and now state of the art. Changes here include a smaller, dedicated winery for the higher quality wines- those that will receive the DOC of Alentejo, which was completed in 2001. The gentleman in charge of the winemaking here is Rui Veladas, the Production Manager at Carmim, who oversees all aspects of the winemaking at this large and high quality cooperative. At our visit, we were hosted by both Rui Veladas and Carmim's top sales manager, Luis Ribeiro, and the two gentlemen poured us a wider array of wines from the cooperative's lineup. As is the case with almost all larger cooperatives (with the notable exception of the magicians at the Produttori del Barbaresco), one has to pick and choose here a bit, as many of the bottlings here are large volume cuvées produced for everyday consumption and priced quite inexpensively. In a poorer country such as Portugal, it is not surprising that these very reasonably priced, solid quality wines are quite popular for everyday drinking, and in fact, one out of every ten bottles drunk in Portugal these days is produced by the cooperative of Carmim! In fact, a lot of the wines that I really liked from Carmim sell in the domestic market for three or four euros a bottle- so you can see what kind of value the best wines here can offer.

As is to be expected, not everything at Carmim is world class, but there are lots of fine bottlings that one can pick and choose from here in the very extensive lineup, and there were several wines that I would be absolutely delighted to have in my portfolio if I were an importer. I found a few of the red wines in particular a bit riper and headier than I would really prefer, but part of this was that both the 2009 and 2010 vintages in the Alentejo were quite warm growing seasons, so that many of the wines we tasted from these two vintages were a bit riper than would be ideal in a cooler growing season. In fact, though I did not take a note on the wine as it was still very early on in its evolution, as 2012 bottling of straight Trincadeira was decidedly less muscular than the 2009 reported on below and shows that Carmim is certainly not wed to the bigger and more powerful style of red wines. I did not love every wine we tasted here, but there were some very impressive high water marks and please keep in mind that the vast majority of these wines sell for under seven euros a bottle and the best ones are really pretty extraordinary bargains. Given the size of the cooperative, Rui Veladas really has quite a varied palette to work from and there are several bottlings of quite different blends amongst the lineup of red wines, with several truly superb and simply astonishing values. The cooperative has a lot of Trincadeira to work with- one of my absolute favorite grapes in the Alentejo (though on this trip I did gain a fuller understanding of how capricious the grape can be in certain growing seasons), and this lovely varietal is often one of the cornerstones of Carmim's most impressive blends. There are some awfully good wines to be found here at great prices!

White Wines

2012 Monsaraz Branco- Carmim

The 2012 Monsaraz Branco from Carmim is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of Antão Vaz and Arinto and was raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The wine is bright and vibrant on both the nose and palate, coming in at thirteen percent alcohol and offering up a complex and stylish nose of tart pear, lime, a nice base of white soil tones, sea salts and wild flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with an impressive, soil-driven personality, crisp acids and good length and grip on the finish that closes with a distinct note of lime peel. This is all of three euros a bottle and really a splendid value for an everyday white! 2013-2015. **87+.**

2011 Reguengos Vinho Branco “Reserva”- Carmim

The 2011 Reguengos Vinho Branco Reserva is made from a blend of twenty percent Antão Vaz and eighty percent Arinto and has some oak staves included in its *elevage* for three months to give it a bit of an oaky personality (without having to go the expense of barrels, which would push its price point up). The 2011 is 13.5 percent in alcohol and a bit too marked by the oak for my tastes, offering up a bouquet of pear, orange peel, sea salts and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sports a good mid-palate core, as well as sound acids, but it is pretty oaky in terms of flavors and a bit one-dimensional as a result. The balance here is fine, but this seems to me that this cuvée would be a perfect candidate for raising in three to five year-old barrels down the road, rather than using new oak staves. 2013-2016. **84.**

2011 Régina Colheita “Reguengos Reserva” Branco- Carmim

The 2011 Régina Colheita “Reguengos Reserva” from Carmim is all barrel-fermented, with the vast, vast majority of the barrels used here “one wine” barrels and only a handful of new barrels used. The blend is seventy-five percent Antão Vaz and twenty-five percent Arinto and the wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane. The wood here is far less obtrusive than in the above wine and aromatically, this wine is quite fine in its blend of pear, nice, white soil tones, citrus peel, smoke and a stylish base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very

well-balanced, with a good core, fine focus, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the finish. This is good juice. 2013-2015. **87+**.

Red Wines

2011 Monsaraz Tinto- Carmim

The 2011 Monsaraz Tinto (the entry level bottling) from Carmim is composed of blend of forty percent Trincadeira and thirty percent each of Aragonez and Alicante Bouschet, with the wine tipping the scales at fourteen percent alcohol. This is really not bad for an everyday drinker, offering up a robust nose of raspberries, *garrigue*, a nice base of soil and plenty of pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and well-balanced, with plenty of stuffing and a bit of chewy tannin perking up the surprisingly long finish. A year or two in the cellar would not hurt this wine, but I imagine that most of it is drunk up within six months of release. Just a touch rustic, but for the price, one could do a lot worse than this hearty red. 2013-2018+. **86+**.



The beautiful, traditional tasting room at Carmim, known as the Enoforum, which is available for larger functions.

2009 Trincadeira- Carmim

The 2009 Trincadeira bottling from Carmim was a bit ripe for my tastes, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol and losing a bit of precision on both the nose and the palate as a result. The wine is raised in fifty percent new wood and fifty percent two year-old barrels. The bouquet offers up scents of blackberries, dark soil tones, a bit of barnyard, chocolate and a topnote of hay that is reminiscent of Touriga Nacional. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty jammy from its ripeness, with some chewy tannins perking up the solid, long finish. Not bad, but this is from a warm vintage and has lost some charm as a result. (The sample of the 2012 still in

cask was far fresher and more complex, so I am assuming that this is just how the grapes turned out in the hot summer of 2009 and not necessarily typical of the Trincadeira bottling at Carmim.) 2013-2018. **84.**

2011 Syrah- Carmim

The 2011 Syrah from Carmim is also a bit heady at 14.5 percent octane and also a bit lacking in precision as a result. This has a similar *elevage* regime as the Trincadeira, with sixty percent new barrels and forty percent two year-old barrels. The bouquet is a ripe and ready blend of cassis, black cherries, chocolate, soil and an impressively light touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and solid at the core, with plenty of ripe fruit and a rather gritty tannin impression on the backend. This is okay, but would be far more interesting if it were in the 13.5 to 14 percent alcohol range. It will need a couple of years to soften up those tannins, but given its ripeness, I would expect it to have a pretty short window of drinkability. 2015-2020+. **85.**

2009 Alicante Bouschet- Carmim

The Carmim Alicante Bouschet bottling from the warm 2009 vintage came in a bit cooler than the Trincadeira, at fourteen percent, and the wine is notably more focused and precise as a result. This was aged almost entirely in new barrels, but is quite discreet in its oakiness, as it wafts from the glass in a fine aromatic constellation of dark berries, espresso, bonfires, fallen leaves, incipient notes of roasted game, a fine base of dark soil tones and a fine framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and classy, with a good core, impressive complexity and fine length and grip on the ripely tannic and well-balanced finish. This is fine juice. 2015-2025+. **89+.**

2007 Cabernet Sauvignon- Carmim

The 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon bottling from Carmim was raised in two-thirds new wood and one-third two year-old barrels, but only spent five months of its *elevage* in wood prior to be racked over to stainless steel tanks. The wine is 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a young and fairly weedy nose of cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, herbs and a bit of tariness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and a bit rustic and herbal, with a rather muddled and imprecise finish. Not one of the strongest bottlings from Carmim. 2016-2025. **84.**

2005 Tinto Caiada- Carmim

Tinto Caiada (also known as Bastardo) is a very interesting grape that is grown quite widely in other regions of Portugal, but is not one of the main varieties in the Alentejo. I really liked the 2005 version from Carmim, that was raised entirely in new, Portuguese oak barrels during its *elevage* and came in at a very civilized 13.5 percent alcohol. The lovely bouquet is now offering up plenty of secondary elements in its blend of black cherries, cigar smoke, coffee grounds, a touch of black pepper, a fine base of soil, fresh herbs and a gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impressively transparent, with a good core, ripe tannins, bright acids and very good length and grip on the mature and classy finish. This is good juice and a real bargain. 2013-2025+. **89.**

2010 Reguengos Vinho Tinto “Reserva”- Carmim

The 2010 Reguengos Vinho Tinto “Reserva” from Carmim is comprised of a blend of Trincadeira, Alicante Bouschet, Aragonez and Tinta Caiada and tips the scales at an even fourteen percent alcohol. I really loved this wine, which sells in Portugal for all of four euros a bottle- talk about a steal! The deep and lovely nose wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of red and black raspberries, *garrigue*, a fine base of soil tones, exotic spices and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and vibrant, with a good core,

moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. This is really a superb bottle of wine and shows just how good some of the bottlings here can be- at four euros this is insanely cheap! 2014-2025+. **89+**.

2011 Monsaraz Tinto Reserva- Carmim

The 2011 Monsaraz Tinto Reserva is made up of a blend of Trincadeira, Alicante Bouschet and Touriga Nacional and is also fourteen percent in octane. I suspect the Touriga Nacional vines here are on the young side, as this variety is just being widely planted in the last several years, and to me, it seems to add a bit of heaviness on the palate here. The bouquet is a ripe blend of black cherries, cassis, coffee, a bit of leather, dusty soil tones and a discreet framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and slightly heavy-handed in personality, with good complexity and grip, and a fair bit of chewy tannins poking out on the long finish. This is okay, but not the most interesting of the blends here at Carmim. 2016-2025+. **86.**

2009 Bom Juiz “Reguengos Reserva” Tinto- Carmim

Carmim’s 2009 Bom Juiz “Reguengos Reserva” is a lovely wine that really shows off all of the elements in the different grapes in its blend- Trincadeira, Alicante Bouschet and Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine is fourteen percent in octane and wafts from the glass in a classy aromatic mix of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, floral tones, a lovely base of dark soil and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and impressively light on its feet, with fine intensity of flavor, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused finish that closes with a signature note of fallen leaves that is so typical of Alicante Bouschet. Fine juice and another excellent value. 2013-2025+. **89.**

2008 Monsaraz “Premium”- Carmim

As might be expected from the name, the Carmim “Premium” is a more modern and new oaky wine. This is made from a mix of Cabernet Sauvignon, Tinto Caiada, Trincadeira, Aragonez, Alicante Bouschet, Castelão and Moreto, and aged in a high percentage of new oak I assume (I did not write down its new wood percentage in my notes). The wine is very well-made in its more modern style, offering up a nose of black cherries, chocolate, woodsmoke, a nice touch of soil, fresh herbs and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, fine focus and balance and a long, ripely tannic and chewy finish. This is good juice, but there are other cuvées here that seem to have even more personality and are lower in price as well! 2016-2025+. **88.**

2007 Reguengos “Garrafeira Dos Sócios”- Carmim

Carmim’s Garrafeira Dos Sócios is a superb wine and another truly exceptional value. The *cépages* here is Trincadeira, Aragonez and Castelão, with the wine selected from parcels grown in volcanic soils and earmarked early on for this cuvée. The wine receives eight to ten months barrel aging in a combination of French and Portuguese wood, and then is laid down for several more years of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. The 2007 is flat out superb, jumping from the glass in a fine aromatic mix of black cherries, cigar smoke, new leather, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and a stylish base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. I would opt for giving this fine wine another few years of bottle age before having at it in earnest. It should age quite gracefully. 2015-2030+. **92.**

Herdade do Esporão

Herdade do Esporão is one of the most famous estates in all of the Alentejo, as well as the largest private winery in the region. During my previous trip here I had the pleasure to taste a couple of the estate's wines during a competition for judging the very top wines of the region, and I left the region on that first visit looking forward to tasting "sur place" at Herdade do Esporão on my next trip. This is a large and beautiful estate, having been laid out back in the middle ages and now stretching fully 1800 hectares, with mixed agriculture interspersed with beautiful virgin land and a large lake which are the home to an extraordinary variety of wildlife. Herdade do Esporão was first established in 1267 as a large estate and has passed through the hands of various Portuguese noble families and conquering generals during its long history, with the property finally purchased at the end of Salazar regime in 1973 by its current owners, José Roquette and Joaquim Bandeira. Today, Herdade do Esporão has fully five hundred hectares of vineyards planted, so this is no small-scale enterprise, but the quality of the wines here is exemplary. The estate is in the process of converting its vineyard management to organic principles and hopes to be completely organic within the next five to seven years. Herdade do Esporão is located in the Reguengos de Monsaraz sub-region of the Alentejo, which is due east of the city of Évora (south-centrally located on the region's north-south axis) and on the eastern edge of the Alentejo, not far from the waters of the Alqueva Reservoir. Monsaraz is an ancient walled town, dating back prior to Roman times, and is the center of one of the top wine-producing sub-regions in the Alentejo, where one finds quite a bit of volcanic and schist soils interspersed with clay, and these are the building blocks for the terroir of Herdade do Esporão.



The underground red wine cellars at Herdade do Esporão in Reguengos de Monsaraz.

Herdade do Esporão has established a nine hectare nursery vineyard on the estate that is planted with 189 different grape varieties, with an eye towards safeguarding the incredible diversity of indigenous Portuguese grapes and also track how international grapes such as cabernet sauvignon, merlot, syrah, chardonnay, viognier, sauvignon blanc and verdelho adapt to both the Alentejo's climate and soils and to see how global warming will affect all of these grapes in the years to come. In terms of winemaking facilities, there are fully three distinct

wineries on this large property, with one dedicated to red wines (completed in 1987), one to white wines and a new small one that is designed to handle small lots of wine that are earmarked for the various Reserva bottlings produced at Herdade do Esporão. Given the large volume of the estate, it is not surprising that there are actually three winemakers at Esporão: Sandra Alves who makes the white wines of the estate, Luis Patrão, who makes the red wines here, and David Baverstock, who is the executive winemaker and oversees the entire project. The domaine has a wide range of different bottlings to comprise its eleven million bottles produced annually (with seventy percent of its production in red wines), but our visit focused on the higher range cuvées, which include the Reservas, the Two and Four “Castas” blended bottlings, the estate’s single varietal bottlings called “Monocastas” and their top of the line Private Selection, but there is also here a wide variety of low-priced wines that have a very strong following in the domestic market. Herdade do Esporão was also the first winery in the Alentejo to open up the winery for wine tourism in 1997, and today boasts a superb restaurant and a variety of activities for visitors to the estate. Those interested in the traditional flora and fauna of the region will find the Biodiversity museum and tours of particular note, and quite useful in building up a hunger and thirst to sated at the restaurant or wine bar at the estate after a tour!

2012 Verdelho- Monocastas Herdade do Esporão

Esporão was the first winery in the Alentejo to plant the Verdelho grape in its vineyards, as this white wine import does a very good job of retaining its acidity in the hot summers of the region. The 2012 Verdelho comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a lovely and impressively complex nose of fresh lime, green olives, sea salts, bread fruit, a lovely base of soil, wild fennel and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine focus and very good grip and bounce on the long finish that closes with a nice touch of green olive and perhaps a whisper of heat. Good juice for drinking over the near-term and very food-friendly. 2013-2015. **90.**

2012 Esporão Reserva Branco- Herdade do Esporão

The 2012 Esporão Reserva Branco is comprised of a blend of thirty percent each of Antão Vaz, Arinto and Roupeiro, along with ten percent Semillon and about thirty percent of the blend is barrel fermented in a combination of American and French oak. The 2012 Reserva had only been bottled one month prior to my visit, but was showing lovely potential in its aromatic blend of green apple, tart orange, a gentle touch of leanness, wild fennel, excellent minerality and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite tight, with a fine core, crisp acids, lovely focus and nascent complexity and impressive length and grip. This is a fine bottle in the making, but I would be inclined to give it a year in the cellar to really let it blossom. 2014-2020. **92+.**

2011 Esporão Reserva Branco- Herdade do Esporão

The 2011 Esporão Reserva Branco is also made up of the same four grape blend as the 2012 and, given that 2011 was a hotter and riper vintage, it is not quite a match for the 2012 in terms of precision and cut. The ripe and generous nose offers up scents of oranges, lime, leesy tones, a touch of almond, vanillin oak and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch chunky in profile, with good balance, solid framing acids, but a touch of blurriness from its slightly higher alcohol (14.5 percent for the ’11 versus 14 percent for the ’12) that keeps its score down a bit. This is a well-made wine that will continue to drink well for another four or five years, but it is not quite as interesting as the slightly lower octane 2012 version. 2013-2018. **87.**

2011 Esporão “Private Selection” Branco- Herdade do Esporão

The 2011 Esporão “Private Selection” Branco from Herdade do Esporão is also a wine that suffers just a bit from the hot conditions of the vintage, as this wine too tips the scales at a full 14.5 percent alcohol. The Private Selection white is made up of a blend of Antão Vaz and Semillon and is one hundred percent barrel-fermented and aged entirely in new, French oak barrels for six months, and it is quite a bit new oakier in its personality than the Reserva bottling (though with the wood well done and not particularly obtrusive). The bouquet is a ripe blend of pineapple, tart pear, wild fennel, salty soil tones and buttery new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and focused, with a bit less complexity than the Reserva 2012 from its new wood, and with the impressively long finish a bit blurry again from the octane found in this torrid vintage. I would love to taste this bottling from a cooler vintage to see its true potential. The 2011 Private Selection is not bad, as it carries its alcohol quite well, but hot vintages like 2011 are really not great white wine vintages in the Alentejo. 2013-2016. **87.**

2011 Quatro Castas- Herdade do Esporão

The 2011 Quatro Castas from Herdade do Esporão is made up of a blend of Aragonez, Alicante Bouschet, Petit Verdot and Syrah and is aged in one hundred percent new, French and American oak for six months of its *elevage*. This is a very good wine, but it is a touch slick in style (perhaps from the use of roto-fermenters?), as it offers up scents of raspberry, red plum, pepper, *garrigue*, coffee and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just a touch oaky, with fine mid-palate intensity, ripe tannins and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced and youthful finish. A very good, modern-styled wine that needs a few years in the cellar to really blossom. 2016-2030+. **88.**

2010 Esporão Reserva Tinto- Herdade do Esporão

The 2010 Esporão Reserva Tinto is made up of an intriguing blend of thirty percent Trincadeira, thirty percent Aragonez, thirty-five percent Cabernet Sauvignon and five percent Alicante Bouschet and was raised entirely in one wine and two wine barrels. The 2010 tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol but shows no signs of overripeness or backend heat, as it is a beautifully balanced wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mélange of cassis, blackberries, a touch of chocolate, a fine base of soil, fennel, lavender and a gentle touch of vanillin oak from these slightly older barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very poised, with a lovely core, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and poised finish. This is very good juice that could use another year or two to let the tannins fall away a bit more. 2014-2025+. **91.**

2007 Aragonez- Herdade do Esporão

The label for the 2007 Aragonez simply has an “A” in the center to denote which varietal the wine is produced from, and this is a ripe and classy example of tempranillo. The wine is fully 14.5 percent alcohol and was raised entirely in new French barrels, but the twenty-five to thirty year-old vines planted in schist soils do a nice job of delivering a fine signature of soil in the finished wine. The bouquet is a ripe and complex blend of raspberries, cherries, coffee, a lovely base of soil, spice tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure on the attack and velvety at the core, with ripe tannins, good focus and a long, complex and moderately chewy finish. This still needs a couple more years of bottle age to fully blossom, but it is very well-made and handles its octane quite admirably. 2015-2030. **90+.**

2009 Esporão “Private Selection” Garrafeira Tinto- Herdade do Esporão

The 2009 Esporão “Private Selection” Tinto is a lovely wine that is made up of a blend of Touriga Nacional, Alicante Bouschet and Syrah (which is slightly different than the *cépages* of

the 2008- see below) and comes in at fourteen percent alcohol. The wine is aged for three years prior to release, with half of this spent in barrel and half in bottle. The 2009 is a lovely wine, but like many wines with a significant percentage of Touriga in the blend, it is a deeper-pitched and slightly heavier style of wine from the inclusion of this variety. The complex bouquet is a mix of black cherries, cassis, leather, a touch of hay (so typical of Touriga), dark chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered in personality, with a rock solid core, suave tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and well-balanced finish. Good juice in the more resonant style of Touriga-based wines. 2013-2025. **88.**

2008 Esporão “Private Selection” Garrafeira Tinto- Herdade do Esporão

In contrast to the 2009 version, the 2008 Esporão “Private Selection” Tinto is comprised of a blend of Aragonez, Alicante Bouschet and Syrah, and the substitution of Aragonez for Touriga Nacional in the blend gives the wine a bit more brightness on the nose and a less powerful personality. The 2008 is a tad riper vintage than 2009, so the wine tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol, but manages its octane very well and shows no signs of heat and is quite tangy in personality (from a very judicious acid adjustment). The vibrant nose is a mix of cassis, dark berries, espresso, leather, lovely soil tones, a bit of fennel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite vibrant, with a fine core, ripe tannins and lovely length and grip on the ripe, balanced finish. This is good juice 2015-2030+. **91+.**



The dining room at the superb restaurant at Herdade do Esporão.

Cartuxa (Fuñdacio de Eugénio de Almeida)

Cartuxa is a former Jesuit monastery that has historical records which indicate that wine has been produced here since 1776. The estate today is the home of the non-profit group of Fuñdacio de Eugénio de Almeida, which produces wines here from a lovely spread of vineyards in the surrounding countryside outside of Évora. The foundation was created in 1963 by the wealthy Vasco Maria Eugénio de Almeida and has been active in the Évora region since then in assisting those less fortunate in the region. The welcome here is very cordial, the humanitarian

mission of the foundation very laudable, but most of the wines that I tasted were pretty oaky, ripe and modern in inspiration and not really my cup of tea.

2010 Cartuxa Branco

The 2010 Cartuxa Branco is a fifty-fifty blend of Arinto and Antão Vaz, with half of the cuvée fermented in stainless steel and half in barrel. The octane here is 13.5 percent and the wine offers up a stylish nose of pear, tangerine, a touch of green olive, a nice base of soil and a bit of buttery new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, with crisp acids, good focus and grip and just a bit of backend, uncovered heat detracting on the finish. One of my favorite wines here at Cartuxa. 2013-2015. **87.**

2010 Pêra-Manca Vinho Branco- Cartuxa

The 2010 Pêra-Manca Branco is a blend of forty percent Arinto and sixty percent Antão Vaz, with sixty percent of the cuvée barrel fermented. This is a bit marked by its new wood on both the nose and palate, offering up a bouquet of pear, apple, a touch of lavender and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rather lacking in complexity, with a good core and grip, but a rather one dimensional, new oaky finish. This might be really interesting if done all in one and two wine barrels, so that some of the soil flavors could make it into the wine. 2013-2015. **85.**

2012 Eugénio de Almeida Rosé- Cartuxa

The 2012 Eugénio de Almeida Rosé is comprised of a blend of Syrah, Touriga Nacional and Grenache and comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is a pretty blend of cherries, orange rind, granitic soil tones and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and fairly deep, but rather soft and simple as well, with solid length on the rather heavy-handed finish. Passable, but could use a bit more bounce on the palate. 2013-2014. **83.**

2011 Eugénio de Almeida Tinto- Cartuxa (European Cuvée)

The European bottling of the 2011 Eugénio de Almeida Tinto is made from a different blend than the bottling designated for the US, as this wine is made from Trincadeira, Aragonez, Alicante Bouschet and Castelão and tips the scales at fourteen percent alcohol. The nose offers up a fine blend of cassis, black cherries, oak leaves, a nice base of soil, woodsmoke and a bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with slightly sharp (added) acidity, moderate tannins and good length on the slightly blurry and ripe finish. Not bad, and far more interesting of a blend than that earmarked for the Americans. 2013-2020. **86+.**

2011 Eugénio de Almeida Tinto- Cartuxa (American Cuvée)

The American version of the 2011 Eugénio de Almeida Tinto from Cartuxa is a completely different wine, comprised of Aragonez, Alicante Bouschet and Syrah and tipping the scales at a slightly higher octane level of 14.5 percent. The wine is raised in forty percent new oak barrels for four months. The wine is ripe and fairly muddled on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet a blend of cassis, chocolate, coffee grounds, dark soil and new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and four-square, with a fat core, modest tannins and a short and simple finish. At least it carries its alcohol pretty well. 2013-2017. **82.**

2010 Cartuxa Tinto

The Cartuxa Tinto in 2010 is made from a blend of Trincadeira, Alicante Bouschet and Aragonez and tips the scales at 14.5 percent. The complex nose is a blend of cassis, dark berries, espresso, a bit of tree bark, stony soil tones and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, a bit blurry from its octane, with ripe tannins, a good core and perfectly

acceptable length and grip on the ripe and out of focus finish. Okay at best, the 2010 Cartuxa Reserva needs a few years to soften. 2017-2025+. **86.**

2009 Cartuxa Tinto Reserva

The 2009 Cartuxa Tinto Reserva is also 14.5 percent alcohol and is comprised of a blend of Aragonez and Alicante Bouschet. The wine is reasonably balanced on the nose, but lacks focus and detail on the palate from its octane. The bouquet is a mix of cassis, chocolate, smoke, a bit of pepper, coffee grounds and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and chunky, with velvety tannins, good length and a blurry finish. Pretty simple stuff. 2016-2025+. **83.**

2010 Scala Coeli Tinto

The 2010 Scala Coeli Tinto is a one hundred percent syrah bottling that tips the scales at a heady 15.5 percent alcohol and sees plenty of new oak. The modern and boring nose is a mix of black raspberries, cassis, chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and surprisingly bright (from a suave acidulation), with a fat core, zero complexity and a hot and chewy finish that includes some uncovered wood tannins from the new oak. Mediocre wine that needs some years to soften, but really is hard to imagine ever being interesting in the glass. 2017-2025? **79.**

Herdade do Perdigoão Brut NV

The Herdade do Perdigoão non-vintage Brut is made from one hundred percent Arinto and really is a nice bottle of sparkling wine. The fine nose is a blend of lemon, sea salts, sourdough bread and a nice base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with quite refined *mousse*, crisp acids and sneaky length and grip on the focused finish. Not bad at all! 2013-2017. **86+.**

Monte dos Cabaços (Estremoz)

The winery of Monte dos Cabaços is owned by renowned Portuguese chef, Margarida Cabaço, who is one of the most famous names in cuisine in the country. Madame Cabaço owns the restaurant called Restaurante São Rosas in the beautiful hilltop village of Estremoz, which lies just below the town's castle and has frequently been ranked as the very finest restaurant in the Alentejo and also received awards as amongst the finest restaurants in the entire country of Portugal. I can heartily recommend the food at the intimate Restaurante São Rosas. In addition to running her restaurant and winery here in Estremoz, Margarida has also spent many years cooking abroad in the earlier part of her career (particularly in Holland, where she grew up) prior to returning full-time to her native Estremoz. The Cabaço family had long been grape growers and farmers in this region, and in 1992, they began to plan for the opening of the Alqueva project and the blossoming of the Alentejo as a wine-producing region by reorganizing their twenty hectares of existing vineyards at that time and planting an additional thirty hectares of vines. As Madame Cabaço is still a full-time restaurateur and chef- all in addition to making the wines in conjunction with her Oenologist, Susana Estéban- the family's vineyards are overseen by her husband, Joaquim Cabaço, so that Margarida can concentrate on cuisine and winemaking. By all reports, Joaquim Cabaço is one of the top viticulturists in the region and he ensures that the family's vineyards are in the bloom of health and produce pristine grapes. This was my first encounter with the wines of Monte dos Cabaços, and I was struck instantly by their superb quality, impressive mineral drive and Margarida's clear desire to more fully explore the capabilities of the terroir of the Alentejo to produce longer-lived wines that will blossom with time in the bottle. Consequently, she holds back her red wine cuvées for an extended period of

bottle aging prior to release, which may still be standard operating procedure in other wine-producing regions of Portugal- such as the Dão- but remains quite rare here in the Alentejo. Estremoz is known as one of the “marble cities” of the Alentejo, as it has been well-known for centuries for the nearby marble quarries (many of its streets and plazas are made of marble) and this stony spine of geology also contributes to the underlying minerality which can be readily found in the wines from the vineyards that surround Estremoz.

There are currently three distinct bottlings of red wines here at the domaine: Monte dos Cabaços Tinto which is the regular bottling at the property and which is comprised primarily of a blend of Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Nacional and Aragonez and which is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks and given several years of bottle age prior to release; Margarida Tinto, which is almost entirely made up of old vine Alicante Bouschet in the vintage that I tasted and is raised for twelve months primarily in “one wine” French oak barrels (with about twenty percent of the wood new), and Monte dos Cabaços Tinto Reserva, which is made up of a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Touriga Nacional, Alicante Bouschet and Syrah and raised in fifty percent new French barrels for twelve months prior to bottling. All three bottlings were outstanding in their respective styles, with all of them seeing significant bottle aging prior to release, so that the youngest of the reds currently on the market is the 2009 Margarida Tinto, with the current release of the Monte dos Cabaços Tinto from the 2007 vintage and the Reserva from the 2005 vintage! I should note that the Margarida Tinto bottling is likely to change from year to year, as it reflects what Madame Cabaço feels “is an intriguing blend each year from grapes that are most successful in a given vintage”, so that the previous year’s version was primarily Syrah with a touch of Viognier blended into the cuvée (an Estremoz version of Côte-Rôtie?), whereas in the current release the bottling relies almost entirely on old vine Alicante Bouschet. Margarida Cabaço is equally skilled with her white wines, which were also excellent in quality and equally showed the structural integrity for aging. There are currently two bottlings of white wines at the estate: the Monte dos Cabaços “Colheita Seleccionada” Branco which is made from the traditional “big three” indigenous grapes of Roupeiro, Arinto and Antão Vaz and raised entirely in stainless steel, and the Margarida Branco which is made from a blend of Verdelho and Encruzado grapes and of which a small percentage sees some time in older oak barrels during its élevage. Monte dos Cabaços is clearly one of the very top producers in the Alentejo and Margarida Cabaço deserves to be every bit as well-known for the superb quality of her wines as she is in Portugal for her extraordinary culinary talents. I have listed the wines below in the order that we tasted them over the course of a truly superb lunch at Restaurante São Rosas.

2011 Monte dos Cabaços “Colheita Seleccionada” Branco

The Roupeiro, Arinto and Antão Vaz vineyards that contribute to this bottling are some of the family’s older parcels, with the average age of the vines here thirty years of age. As I noted in the introduction, this bottling is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks after a cold fermentation and is really a lovely wine, wafting from the glass in a deep and youthful blend of green apple, lime peel, superb minerality, a bit of green olive, fresh herb tones and a nice dollop of sea salts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and intensely flavored, with a fine core, ripe, vibrant acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and zesty finish. Just a lovely wine that should have no difficulties aging and will be even better with a year or two’s worth of cellaring. 2013-2020+. 91+.

2010 Monte dos Cabaços “Colheita Seleccionada” Branco

The 2010 Monte dos Cabaços Branco is another fine bottle for current drinking, but as it comes from a warmer vintage, it is without quite the same cut as the 2011 or the 2009 versions, though there is still plenty of framing acidity in evidence to keep the wine bright and light on its feet for another three or four years. The classy nose offers up scents of green melon, a touch of pear, sea salts, wild fennel and a lovely base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impressively complex, with lovely mid-palate intensity, sound framing acids and excellent length and grip on the wide open and elegant finish. Of the three vintages of this wine that we tasted, the 2010 would be the one that I would opt for drinking sooner, as it is at its apogee today, whereas both the 2011 and the 2009 might continue to improve with even a bit more bottle age. Good juice. 2013-2017. **90.**

2009 Monte dos Cabaços “Colheita Seleccionada” Branco (375 ml.)

Margarida Cabaço wanted to give us an idea how this cuvée ages, so she opened a half bottle of the 2009 to follow-up the 2011 at our lunch tasting. The wine has blossomed beautifully with a couple of years of cellaring and offers up a wide open and complex bouquet of lime, green olive, wild fennel, salty minerality, a fine blend of fresh herb tones, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, still plenty of acidity and superb grip on the long and classy finish. This is really a lovely bottle of wine that has gained in complexity and really opened up structurally with a bit of cellaring time. 2013-2018+. **91.**



Margarida Cabaço (right) and her talented oenologist, Susana Estéban, in front of Margarida's restaurant.

2010 Margarida Branco- Monte dos Cabaços

The 2010 Margarida Branco from Monte dos Cabaços is quite a different-styled wine, as it relies on fully eighty-five percent Encruzado in its blend, along with fifteen percent Verdelho, and it sees just a touch of barrel aging as well. The 2010 is outstanding, offering up a fine nose of lemon, melon, stony minerality, citrus peel, dried flowers and sea salts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil inflection, bright acids and fine grip on the very long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is a touch riper than the two Monte dos Cabaços Branco bottlings (14 percent versus 13.5 percent), but it exploits the same superb mineral drive that is found in the all the wines from the Estremoz region. A superb bottle that is also built to age very nicely. 2013-2023+. **92.**

2007 Monte dos Cabaços Tinto

The 2007 vintage is the current release of the flagship bottling of Monte dos Cabaços Tinto, and this is really a stunning wine and a brilliant value! The wine tips the scales at a cool 13.5 percent alcohol and is comprised primarily of a blend of Touriga Nacional, Aragonez and Alicante Bouschet in this vintage, with a small percentage of other grapes included in the blend. The very complex and classy nose wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, dark berries, tree bark, espresso, dark soil tones and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure, complex and impressively light on its feet, with a fine core, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. This is great juice that shows every indication of having the structure and balance to age gracefully for at least the next fifteen years! 2013-2030. **93+.**

2009 Margarida Tinto

The 2009 Margarida Tinto bottling from Madame Cabaço is excellent, with a deeper and riper personality than the 2007 Monte dos Cabaços bottling and a touch more alcohol at 14.5 percent. As I noted above, this wine is ninety-six percent Alicante Bouschet this year (from some of the oldest vines from the domaine), with four percent “other grapes” incorporated into the blend and the wine sees about twenty percent new wood. The deep and ripe nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of black cherries, espresso, woodsmoke, soil tones, incipient notes of dried oak leaves and a nice dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a plush core and a much “cooler fruit” personality than the nose suggests. The tannins here are modest and very well-integrated, with fine focus and grip on the long and quite refined finish. This does not (yet?) have quite the same complexity as the superb 2007 Monte dos Cabaços Tinto, but it is a very stylish and classy wine in its own right. 2013-2020. **90.**

2001 Monte dos Cabaços Tinto

The 2001 Monte dos Cabaços Tinto is a lovely wine that is fully at its peak of maturity and offers up lovely, tertiary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate. The complex and autumnal nose offers up scents of dark berries, coffee bean, tree bark, complex soil tones, chicory and a decidedly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still has excellent mid-palate intensity, with a bit of remaining tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, refined and fully mature finish. While the 2001 Monte dos Cabaços is at its apogee, it shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon and has years and years of life ahead of it. 2013-2025+. **90.**

2005 Monte dos Cabaços “Reserva” Tinto

The 2005 Monte dos Cabaços “Reserva” Tinto is a fine, fine wine in the making, but even at eight years of age, it is still at least four or five years away from really reaching its

apogee and starting to drink at its best. The blend this year is Touriga Nacional, Alicante Bouschet, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah and the wine was raised in fifty percent new French barrels, but shows wonderful wood integration and a lot of style. The wine tips the scales at a full 14.5 percent alcohol, but shows no signs of heat of *sur maturité* in its excellent bouquet of cassis, black cherries, pepper, dark soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a generous core of fruit, ripe tannins, lovely purity, good acids and impressive length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. This is going to be an excellent bottle, but give it another five years in the cellar to blossom! An outstanding wine in the making. 2018-2035+. **92+**.

Adega Tiago Cabaço (Estremoz)

Tiago Cabaço is the thirty year-old son of Margarida and Joaquim Cabaço, who worked several years with his mother and father before striking out on his own with his own label in 2004 at the tender age of twenty-one. He has just built a new, understated, modern winery with his wife on the outskirts of Estremoz, and the couple enjoys the services of the same, highly-talented oenologist, Susana Estéban, as their parents use to assist in their cellars. Tiago Cabaço, as befits one of his generation, has come up with a very innovative line of wines over the course of his short tenure at his own winery, launching first a series of bottlings called “.com”, which is short for the Portuguese “comere” (to eat- very appropriate for the son of one of Portugal’s most famous chefs!) and soon followed it up with a second line called “.beb” (from the Portuguese verb “beber”- to drink). In the 2009 vintage the winery rounded out its current lineup with a “.blog” series of bottlings, which currently represent their top of the line. Susana Estéban started out her winemaking career in the Douro, and one of the aspects of winemaking in the Port region that she very much enjoyed and brought south with her to the Alentejo when she married and relocated to this region was the penchant for co-fermenting different grape varieties together, which she likens to cooking, where the acidity of one ingredient will harmonize with the richness of another. Consequently, several of the Tiago Cabaço bottlings are blends that are fermented together. These are very well-made wines that offer outstanding value, as the “.com” bottlings are really priced for everyday consumption and sell for well south of ten euros a bottle. As this is still a young winery, there are still some ups and downs to be found in the lineup, with a couple of the reds a bit too heady for my personal tastes, but there is a ton of promise here. Tiago Cabaço is clearly one of the rising stars in the Alentejo, with his wines offering a superb combination of quality and value that is so hard to find these days of overheated prices and a wine world focused on “luxury goods” and the world’s wealthiest coterie of wine collectors.

2012 .com Branco- Tiago Cabaço

The 2012 .com Branco from Tiago Cabaço is made up primarily of a blend of Antão Vaz, Arinto and Roupeiro, which make up more than eighty percent of the cuvée, with a gentle seasoning of Verdelho and Viognier. The wine is raised entirely in stainless steel and all five grape varieties are fermented together. The bouquet is bright and beautifully aromatic in its mix of melon, peach, lovely floral tones, wild fennel and a lovely base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, vibrant and complex, with good acids, good focus and fine grip on the long finish that closes with a touch of youthful lime peel. This is an entry level wine from the estate and is long on personality for its very modest price point! 2013-2015. **88+**.

2011 .com Branco- Tiago Cabaço

The 2011 .com Branco from Tiago Cabaço is a very pretty wine as well, but shows that this bottling is clearly crafted for early drinking and is probably best in the newest vintage. The bouquet is a stylish blend of melon, tart orange, again a nice touch of wild fennel, salty soil tones and lime peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and reasonably complex, with a solid core, still good acids and sneaky length and grip on the bright and quite quaffable finish. Good juice for the money. 2013-2014. **87.**

2012 .beb Branco- Tiago Cabaço

The 2012 .beb Branco from Tiago Cabaço is a blend that is similar to his mother's Margarida Branco bottling, in that it is made up of a *cépages* of eighty-five percent Encruzado, though with the other fifteen percent split between Arinto, Roupeiro and Viognier (as opposed to Verdelho in the Margarida Branco bottling from Monte dos Cabaços). Additionally, this wine is raised fifty percent in stainless steel and fifty percent barrel-fermented, with half of the barrels used for this wine new and the others having had two wines raised in them (which I think works out to twenty-five percent new oak if my math is correct). The 2012 version is excellent, jumping from the glass in a complex bouquet of melon, peach, a touch of honeysuckle, salty minerality, a touch of green olive and a gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with good framing acids, lovely focus and a long, classy finish. This superb wine is all of five euros a bottle ex-cellar! 2013-2016. **91+.**

2011 .com Tinto- Tiago Cabaço

The 2011 .com Tinto bottling from Tiago Cabaço is comprised of a blend of Touriga Nacional, Aragonez, Trincadeira and Cabernet Sauvignon and is raised all in stainless steel. The wine comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a deep and black fruity nose of cassis, leather, a touch of pepper, a bit of hay and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fruit-driven in personality, with a bit of backend tannin, good balance and sound length and grip on the easy-going finish. This is an inexpensive quaffer that is long on fruit tones and is a pretty good value, but I slightly prefer the additional complexity found in the white wine version of this bottling. 2014-2020. **87.**

2010 .com Tinto- Tiago Cabaço

The 2010 .com Tinto from Tiago Cabaço is also comprised of these same four grape varieties and shows a nice touch of evolution on both the nose and palate from the additional year's-worth of bottle age. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, dark berry, a touch of coffee grounds soil and dried oak leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly chewy, with good length and grip and a finish that closes with a note of bitter almond. Not bad and may yet improve with a bit more bottle age. 2013-2019. **86+.**

2011 .com Syrah-Touriga Nacional- Tiago Cabaço

The 2011 bi-varietal blend of Syrah and Touriga Nacional from the .com lineup is still a bit on the young side and was still showing a bit of CO2 on the palate at the time of my visit to the winery in mid-May. The nose is a black fruity blend of cassis, dark berries, leather, a touch of barnyard, stony soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and still a bit reductive, with good balance and a long, chewy finish. This will need a year or two in bottle to blossom, and today it is tough to get a solid read on the wine, but it could well end up being very tasty once it has settled down a bit. 2014-2020+. **86-88.**

2011 .beb Tinto- Tiago Cabaço

The 2011 .beb Tinto is a blend of Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Nacional and Syrah and is raised entirely in two and three wine barrels. The 2011 vintage tips the scales at fourteen percent

alcohol and is a fair bit more complex and suave on the palate than the “.com” bottlings of Tinto. The fine nose wafts from the glass in a blend of dark berries, cassis, espresso, lovely, stony soil tones and plenty of woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and a long, suavely-tannic finish. This is my favorite red in the Tiago Cabaço lineup and a stunning bargain. 2013-2025. **90.**

2011 .beb Alicante Bouschet- Tiago Cabaço

Tiago Cabaço and his winemaker, Susana Estéban, firmly believe that Alicante Bouschet is the finest grape variety in the Alentejo- with the caveat that it has to be ripe- and this is their one hundred percent Alicante bottling from the “.beb” line, which they happen to trod by foot. To my palate, the wine is a bit too ripe at fully fifteen percent alcohol, but it is quite well-balanced and reasonably cool for such a heady octane. The nose is a blend of black cherries, dark berries, dark chocolate, coffee bean, a hint of meatiness and incipient notes of dried oak leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core, but a rather gritty backend from its ripeness level and some heat poking out on the chewy finish. This is okay in its genre, but not even remotely as interesting as the above. It will need a few years to soften, but should age reasonably well. 2016-2025. **86.**

2010 .blog Tinto- Tiago Cabaço

The 2009 vintage was the first for Tiago Cabaço to produce his top of the line “.blog” bottling, and from all reports, the ’09 was very warmly received in Portugal and led to two different bottlings being produced under this rubric in the 2010 vintage. The regular version of “.blog” in 2010 is comprised of equal parts Touriga Nacional and Alicante Bouschet blended with just under ten percent syrah, and the wine is raised in a combination of fifty percent new wood and fifty percent one wine barrels. The 2010 tips the scales at 14.9 percent alcohol. The wine is quite ripe in personality, but I prefer it to the 2011 .beb Alicante Bouschet bottling, as it offers up superior freshness on the nose and a bit more polished palate impression. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, cassis, espresso, a touch of pepper (from the syrah?) and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused for its nearly fifteen percent alcohol, with ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long tangy finish that does not yet show any signs of heat. This is a very well-made wine, but I would take the 2011 .beb Tinto for my cellar over this equally well-made wine, as it comes in at a lower octane level and is able to show more of the lovely minerality of Estremoz as a result. Still, this is good juice that others may prefer over that more classically styled wine. 2018-2030+. **90.**

2010 .blog Bi-Varietal- Tiago Cabaço

The 2010 .blog Bi-Varietal bottling from Tiago Cabaço comes in a Burgundy-shaped bottle (in contrast to the Bordeaux-shaped bottle for the above wine) and this wine is made up of a fifty-fifty blend of Alicante Bouschet and Syrah, with the wood treatment the same as the above (fifty percent new wood and fifty percent one wine barrels) and the wine tipping the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol. This is very well-balanced for its heady ripeness, but fifteen percent is fifteen percent and the wine shows just a bit of backend heat. The nose is a blend of cassis, black raspberries, coffee bean, chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly chewy, with the tannins ripe and well-integrated, the core fat and generous and the finish long and not too excessively hot. It will need four or five years to soften, but I have a hard time imagining that it will be long-lived, as this has a lot of alcohol to manage. Not bad for a more modern style of wine, but a bit riper in style than wines that find their way into my own personal cellar. 2018-2025. **88.**

Herdade das Servas (Estremoz)

Herdade das Servas has a long history as an estate where wine production was an integral part of its agricultural mix. For several generations this property has been in the hands of the Serrano Mira family, and today Herdade das Servas is co-managed by the brothers, Luís and Carlos Serrano Mira. Located on the outskirts of the town of Estremoz, this region has some of the coolest nights in the Alentejo and consequently, the wines tend to retain good acidity and it is pretty rare that the wineries here have to acidulate. Consequently, many of the white wines here at Herdade das Servas rely on much less Arinto in their blends than is customary in other sub-regions of the Alentejo. The large estate includes two hundred and twenty hectares under vine, with most of these vineyards ranging from twenty years of age back to some original plantations that are now sixty years old. The wine maker at the estate is Tiago Garcia, though Luís Mira is also very active in this aspect of the estate as well. There are generally three levels of wines produced here: the entry level Vinha das Servas, the middle level, Monte das Servas and the top echelon of cuvées, which are sold under the Herdade das Servas label. There are some very good wines made here, but also some that are a bit to ripe and heady for my palate, and predictably, the higher alcohol wines tend to be those higher up the food chain. If the winery could dial back the ripeness here a bit on its higher level bottlings- particularly its red wines- they could move into the top division of producers in the Alentejo. But, to my palate, there are too many very well-made wines that sacrifice both complexity and focus because they come in at 14.5 or 15 percent alcohol and really have to manage a high wire act to avoid signs of heat or overripeness.



The Herdade das Servas winery as night falls on the outskirts of Estremoz.

2011 Vinha das Servas Branco

The 2011 Vinha das Servas Branco is comprised of a blend of fifty percent Roupeiro, forty percent Antão Vaz and ten percent Arinto and is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and is quite nice, though done in a slightly more forceful style. The bouquet is ripe and complex blend of peach, lemon, lovely soil tones, orange peel and a bit of sea salts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, crisp acids and very good length and grip. This is a good bottle that has lovely raw materials, but I would love to see just a bit more emphasis on finesse here. 2013-2016. **87.**

2011 Monte das Servas Branco

The 2011 Monte das Servas Branco includes some Viognier in its blend (fifteen percent) to go along with forty percent Roupeiro, thirty percent Verdelho and fifteen percent Antão Vaz. The wine is a bit riper at fourteen percent alcohol (perhaps due to the inclusion of Viognier in the blend?), but offers up a stylish bouquet of peach, acacia blossoms, just a whisper of soil, citrus peel and a nice topnote of Alentejano *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and buxom on the attack, with a fine core, crisp acids and a long, classy finish. This does not quite have the cut and soil inflection of the best white wines in the Alentejo, but it is very well-made and should drink nicely for four or five years. 2013-2017. **89.**

2011 Herdade das Servas Branco

The Herdade das Servas bottling from the 2011 vintage is an intriguing white wine blend of fifty percent Roupeiro (from the oldest vines on the estate- sixty years of age!), twenty-five percent Verdelho and twenty-five percent Alvarinho. Thirty percent of the blend is raised in oak barrels and the 2011 tips the scales at a rather hefty 14.5 percent octane. This is pretty well-balanced for such a high level of alcohol, but predictably, the extra ripeness has taken away from its complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a blend of peach, pineapple, musky floral tones, a touch of salty soil and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plump, with pretty good acidity and balance, sound grip and a long, four-square finish. This is okay, but, why so much octane? 2013-2015. **86.**

2012 Monte das Servas Rosé

The 2012 Monte das Servas Rosé is pretty ripe at fourteen percent alcohol and is made up of a blend of seventy percent Touriga Nacional and thirty percent Syrah. The wine offers up a pretty, albeit simple, nose of strawberries, cherries, salty soil tones and dried roses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rather low acid in style, with good length and grip, but a missing a bit of backend zip on the finish. Okay. 2013-2014. **85.**

2011 Vinha das Servas Tinto

The 2011 Vinha das Servas Tinto is comprised of a blend of forty percent Aragonez, thirty percent Trincadeira and fifteen percent each of Alicante Bouschet and Touriga Nacional. This is ripe at fourteen percent, but not overripe, and the wine is pretty well-done in a more extracted style. The bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, pepper, *garrigue*, a touch of game, just a hint of stony soil and a topnote of coriander seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad shouldered, with a good, slightly dense core, chewy tannins and good length and grip on the finish. This needs a couple of years to soften. 2015-2020+. **87.**

2011 Monte das Servas Tinto

The 2011 Monte das Servas Tinto is comprised of an even more complex mix of grape varieties, with the *cépages* including thirty percent Aragonez, twenty percent Touriga Nacional, twenty percent Trincadeira and fifteen percent each of Alicante Bouschet and Cabernet Sauvignon. Unfortunately, this wine is even riper, coming in at fully 14.5 percent alcohol and the

wine certainly sacrifices precision and complexity as a result. The jammy nose offers up a ripe mélange of raspberries, coffee, chocolate and *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again quite extracted in style, with firm tannins, a rather blurry backend and a long, chunky finish. This carries its alcohol pretty well and shows no overt signs of backend heat today, but it would be a lot more interesting at a lower octane level. 2013-2020. **86.**

2011 Herdade das Servas “Colheita Seleccionada” Tinto

The blend on the 2011 Herdade das Servas “Colheita Seleccionada” Tinto is forty percent Touriga Nacional, twenty percent Alicante Bouschet, twenty percent Syrah and twenty percent Trincadeira, and unfortunately, this too comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol. That said, this wine seems to manage its ripeness far better than the above and shows some precision on both the nose and palate that is missing in the more jammy 2011 Monte das Servas bottling. The bouquet is ripe and shows plenty of extraction in its blend of cherries, black raspberries, woodsmoke, spices, a touch of coffee, pepper and a discreet base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and impressively focused for its octane, with velvety tannins and a long, classy finish. This really manages its octane very well indeed. 2015-2030. **88+.**

2008 Touriga Nacional- Herdade das Servas

The Touriga Nacional bottling from Herdade das Servas is quite good. The vines here were budded over onto forty-five year-old rootstocks back in 1998, so there is none of the young vine character here that tends to plague some Touriga Nacional in the Alentejo. This is ripe and ready at 14.5 percent, and was aged in a combination of seventy percent French oak and thirty percent American barrels. This wine does not quite manage to keep its alcohol level fully in check on the palate, so there is a touch of backend heat, but also a lot to like on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a good mix of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, leather, chocolate and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively focused for its octane, with a good core, chewy tannins and fine length and grip on the slightly hot finish. Well made in its style, I would love to see this wine come in at 13.5 to 14 percent alcohol! 2015-2030. **87.**

2008 Herdade das Servas Tinto Reserva

Somehow I did not manage to write down the *cépages* for the 2008 Herdade das Servas Reserva, but the octane is a full fifteen percent. The very ripe (or borderline overripe) nose offers up scents of black cherries, raisins, leather, *garrigue* and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fat and full-bodied, with a solid core, ripe tannins, sound acids and a long, slightly heady and jammy finish. The balance is really quite impressive for fifteen percent alcohol, but the wine would be a lot more interesting if it were lower octane. 2013-2020. **86.**

2009 Vinhas Velhas- Herdade das Servas

The Vinhas Velhas, or “Old Vines” Tinto bottling from 2009 is comprised of fifty percent Alicante Bouschet and twenty-five percent each of Aragonez and Touriga Nacional. Sadly, this too is fully fifteen percent alcohol. The wine is quite well done for its octane, but there is little doubt that a lot of potential was lost here harvesting this wine so late. The wine was raised entirely in new wood, with eighty percent of the barrels French and twenty percent American oak. The ripe wine is certainly well-made for its genre, delivering a bouquet of black raspberries, chocolate, Taransaud oak spice and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush and buxom, with a good core of jammy fruit, moderate tannins and a long, slightly hot finish. In my opinion, the old vine fruit was wasted by letting the octane get out of hand, but it is not too bad in that style. 2013-2020. **86.**

Herdade do Sobroso (Vidigueira)

As I noted back in Issue 31, Herdade do Sobroso is also located in the Vidigueira section of the southern Alentejo, right on the Guardiana River, and it is one of the largest estates in the region at 1600 hectares, but at the present time, only fifty hectares of this is planted to vineyards. The vast, vast majority of the estate is committed to a hunting preserve, as it is considered one of the most popular locations in the Alentejo for hunting, with an abundance of game and lovely variations in terrain. On this trip I had the pleasure to spend a night at Herdade dos Sobroso and can heartily recommend the accommodations here. The estate is run by Filipe Teixeira Pinto and his lovely wife, with Filipe in charge of the winery at the property and his wife overseeing the hotel and restaurant. The wine component at this estate is still in the very early days, as the Teixeiras have only been producing vintages here for a half dozen years or so, and with each passing year they seem to become better and better. This is a very warm and inviting destination, with excellent food and wine, and I am sure that the hunting is also excellent for those so inclined. As a full background on Herdade do Sobroso can be found in Issue 31, so I only include here a brief sketch and jump right to the wines. I should note that the red wines that we tasted on this vintage all hailed from the very warm years of 2009 and 2010, and the alcohol levels here were a bit higher than I remembered for the reds as a result. I suspect that this was simply a function of those two hot vintages, as the overall style of the estate's wines seems to focus on purity and elegance.

2012 Sobro Vinho Rosé

The 2009 Sobro Rosé is comprised of entirely of Aragonez these days and is produced by the *saignée* method. The 2012 comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a superb nose of white cherries, blood orange, lovely soil tones, dried roses and a vibrant topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and a long, crisp and focused finish. Good juice here. 2013-2014. **88.**

2012 Sobro Vinho Branco

The 2012 Vinho Branco bottled under the Sobro label is made from a blend of seventy percent Arinto, twenty percent Antão Vaz and ten percent Perom (a grape variety that was new to me with this wine). The wine wafts from the glass in a lovely and quite expressive aromatic constellation of lime, wild fennel, lovely, complex minerality, tart pear, citrus peel and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and bouncy, with a good core, crisp acids and fine focus and grip on the complex and succulent finish. A fine bottle and a superb value! 2013-2016. **89.**

2012 Vinho Branco- Herdade do Sobroso

The 2012 Vinho Branco produced under the Herdade do Sobroso label is comprised of a blend of fifty percent Arinto, forty percent Antão Vaz and ten percent Perom and is truly superb. The bouquet delivers a young and vibrant mix of green apple, lime, stony minerality, citrus peel and a distinct topnote of *fleur de sel*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and very intensely flavored, with a fine core, impressive focus and nascent complexity, bright acids and excellent cut and grip on the long and dancing finish. High class juice. 2013-2018+. **91+.**

2009 Vinho Tinto- Herdade do Sobroso

Sixty percent of the Herdade do Sobroso Tinto is aged in 500 liter *muids*, rather than the 225 liter Bordeaux sized barrels, with the remainder raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The larger barrels should produce a bit less wood influence in the future. The *cépage* for the 2009 Herdade do Sobroso Tinto is a blend of Aragonez, Trincadeira, Alicante Bouschet and a bit of

Alfrocheiro. The vintage is a bit riper than the 2008 (which I tasted on my last visit to the estate), coming in at a full fifteen percent alcohol, but manages this octane quite well and shows very little signs of heat on the backend. The bouquet is a ripe and nicely balanced mélange of red and black cherries, chocolate, pepper, a touch of game and a stylish base of nutty new oak from the *demi-muids*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still young and fairly fruit-driven, with ripe tannins, good focus and balance and just a whisper of alcohol making itself felt on the long and velvety finish. This is usually way over my octane threshold, but I was quite impressed with how well this bottling handled its ripeness in the hot 2009 vintage. 2013-2023. **88.**

2009 Vinho Tinto “Cellar Selection”- Herdade do Sobroso

The 2009 Cellar Selection bottling from Herdade do Sobroso is a fifty-fifty blend of Alicante Bouschet and Syrah and was raised entirely in one and two wine, 500 liter *demi-muids*. This is a touch less ripe than the above, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol and offering up a fine bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a touch of oak leaf (from the Alicante), carob, a gentle base of minerality, woodsmoke and oak spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and youthfully chewy, with very good focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and well-balanced finish. This is a lovely wine in the making, but it will need a few years in the cellar to soften and blossom. 2016-2030+. **91+.**

2010 Vinho Tinto Reserva- Herdade do Sobroso

The 2010 Herdade do Sobroso Reserva is comprised of a blend of thirty-five percent Aragonez, thirty-five percent Alicante Bouschet and thirty percent Cabernet Sauvignon and aged all in one year-old French oak barrels for fourteen months prior to bottling. The wine is the same octane level, 14.5 percent, as was the case with the last vintage of this cuvée that I tasted (the 2007). The wine delivers a fine and ripe nose of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, a gentle touch of tariness, coffee bean, a stylish base of oak and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, ripe tannins and a very long, well-balanced and still quite primary finish. This too needs some time in the cellar, but it will lovely. 2017-2030+. **92.**

Herdade Paço do Conde

Herdade Paço do Conde is another very young winery that grew out of the Alqueva hydric project, as this large estate was previously restricted to the production of cereals and the raising of cattle before the possibility of widespread irrigation made other crops a possibility. Paço do Conde only begun planting vineyards fourteen years ago and produced its first vintage in 2002. However, the family which owns it has a long history of farming in the Alentejo, having been important ranchers here since 1928. The estate in its entirety consists of several thousand hectares, of which, one hundred and ten are committed to vineyards and more than nine hundred hectares to olive groves. The winery produces wines under two distinct labels- Herdade dos Albernoas for its more basic bottlings and Herdade Paço do Conde for its top of the line wines. I have been very much impressed with virtually everything I have tasted at Paço do Conde on my two visits to the estate, and this is clearly an up and coming star in the region. Keep in mind that these are very well-priced wines under either label, and they may well represent some of the finest wine values to be found anywhere in the world! A full profile of Herdade Paço do Conde can be found back in Issue 31. The estate is in the process of planning out a new set of rooms for vino-tourists and a restaurant for the near future, so visits here are only going to get more pleasurable in the years to come. As I mentioned back in my previous article on the Alentejo, Herdade Paço do Conde is also producing absolutely superb olive oils at bargain basement

prices, and many popular high end olive oil brands these days are actually comprised of Paço do Conde oils!

2012 Herdade Paço do Conde Vinho Branco

The 2012 Paço do Conde Branco is comprised of a roughly fifty-fifty blend of Antão Vaz and Arinto and is raised in stainless steel. The wine is lovely, as it wafts from the glass in a bright and juicy aromatic mix of lemon, tart pear, salty soil tones, citrus peel and white flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, fresh and beautifully balanced, with a nice core, very good complexity, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the bouncy and focused finish. A perfect aperitif wine or for summer sipping on the veranda with a bit of *Porko Preto*. 2013-2016. **89.**

2012 Herdade Paço do Conde Rosé

The Paço do Conde Rosé's blend has changed a bit since I tasted it a couple of years ago. The past iterations were made from a mix of Aragonez and Cabernet Sauvignon, but beginning in the 2012 vintage, the *cépages* now is sixty percent Aragonez and forty percent Touriga Nacional, with the wine still raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The bouquet is lovely, offering up a vibrant mélange of blood orange, melon, a nice base of white soil tones, orange peel and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and shows off a lovely core, with bright acids and nice length and grip on the long finish that closes with a nice touch of the skins. 2013-2015. **88.**

2009 Herdade Albernoas Vinho Tinto

The Herdade Albernoas Vinho Tinto is comprised of a blend of Aragonez, Trincadeira and Castelão and is crafted for early appeal, but I asked if we might be able to taste a slightly older vintage to see how the wine is evolving (the current release is the 2011 vintage) with a bit of bottle age. The 2009 is an even fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a lovely and maturing bouquet of dark berries, woodsmoke, a touch of pepper, tobacco leaf, coffee bean and the first signs of the autumnal overtones that will come with more bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and complex, with a good core, fine focus and balance and still just a touch of backend tannin to keep the wine cruising along for several years. For a wine that is made to be drunk young, this is evolving quite nicely and shows that there is no rush to drink this cuvée up in the first blush of youth! Fine juice. 2013-2018. **88.**

2011 Herdade Paço do Conde Vinho Tinto

The 2011 Paço do Conde Vinho Tinto is made of a blend of Aragonez, Trincadeira, Alicante Bouschet and Cabernet Sauvignon and tips the scales at fourteen percent octane. The grapes for this bottlings are totally de-stemmed, vinified in stainless steel tanks and aged for only three months in a bit of new French and American oak. I had previously tried the 2008 version of this wine and the 2011 is a lovely follow-up, delivering a superb bouquet of cassis, dark berries, coffee bean, a touch of oak leaf (from the Alicante Bouschet), a complex base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a very good core of fruit, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the refined and focused finish. This is a lovely wine and an absolutely stellar value! 2013-2020+. **90.**

2009 Herdade Paço do Conde Touriga Nacional- Syrah “Colheita Seleccionada”

The 2009 “Colheita Seleccionada” from Paço do Conde is a blend of Touriga Nacional and Syrah and was raised in twenty percent new wood. The warm vintage of 2009 has seen this wine come in at 14.5 percent alcohol, but there are absolutely no signs of *sur maturité* or excess heat to be found anywhere in this lovely wine. The deep and exquisite nose jumps from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, coffee, a touch of hay, new leather, a fine base of soil and just a

touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a fine core, ripe, well-measured tannins and very fine length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2014-2025+. 92.

2009 Herdade Paço do Conde Tinto Reserva

As I noted about this cuvée when writing up the 2007 vintage back in Issue 31, the “Reserva “ bottling at Paço do Conde is made up of a blend that relies primarily on Touriga Nacional and Syrah, with small percentages of Alicante Bouschet, Aragonez and Cabernet Sauvignon also included. The wine is aged for ten months in French oak barrels, with a moderate percentage of the wood new. The 2009 Reserva is a touch less ripe than the 2007 version (14.5 percent versus 14.9 percent back in ’07) and the wine is excellent. The deep, complex and beautifully refined nose offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, a complex base of soil, a touch of tree bark, coffee, a gentle base of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a plush core, ripe, suave tannins and superb length and grip on the focused and classy finish. As is the case with the 2009 Colheita Seleccionada, there are no signs of either overripe fruit flavors or excess alcohol to be found anywhere in this perfectly balanced and very classy wine. Another great bargain. 2013-2025+. 93.

Herdade dos Grous

Herdade dos Grous has been one of the leading estates in the Alentejo for the last decade, and is widely considered one of the top three or four producers in the region. The estate is located just outside of the city of Beja in the southern section of the Alentejo in the hamlet of Albernôa (which also is home to Malhadinha Nova, with whom Herdade dos Grous shares its chief winemaker, Luis Duarte, who is considered one of the very top consulting oenologist in the Alentejo). The winery was only started in 2002 by its German owners, the Pohl family, with the planting of the domaine’s first vineyards, which now amount to just over eighty-five hectares of vines and also includes fifty hectares of olive groves. In addition to all of its wine and olive oil business, Herdade dos Grous is also very much in the thick of things when it comes to wine tourism, as the Pohl family’s various business interests in Germany make frequent use of this bucolic estate for management retreats and a prime rest and relaxation focal point for its thousands of employees. A full domaine profile for the estate can be found in the article on the Alentejo back in Issue 31. I did note that several of the cuvées that I tasted here two and a half years ago that were raised with a significant percentage of new oak have now seen their wood nicely dialed back, and the winemaking team here, led by Signor Duarte and Ricardo Manuel Silva, is now using quite a bit of two to four year-old barrels in their cellar rotation, with the wines even more subtle and soil-driven as a result. While the wines at Herdade dos Grous have been excellent since the inaugural vintage of 2004, I have a very strong sense that the estate is really still in its formative stage and each passing vintage will witness more refinement and greater complexity in the wines as techniques continue to be fine-tuned- both in the vineyards and in the cellars. Exciting wines!

2012 Branco dos Grous- Herdade dos Grous

The regular bottling of Branco from Herdade dos Grous is a very fine, crisp and zesty middleweight, made from a combination of fifty percent Antão Vaz, thirty percent Arinto and twenty percent Roupeiro, with all of the vines planted in *argilo-calcaire* soils. The wine is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks and the 2012 is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a fine

aromatic mix of green apple, tart pear, salty soil tones, lime peel and a gentle topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and crisp, with lovely complexity and intensity of flavor, bright acids and a very long, very minerally finish. High class juice. 2013-2017. **92.**

2012 Branco dos Grous Reserva- Herdade dos Grous

The 2012 Branco Reserva was aged in for six months in oak- this year with all of the barrels already second year barrels (as opposed to the one hundred percent new wood in the 2009 version). The blend has also changed a touch since the last rendition I tasted (2009), with the singular mix of fifty percent Antão Vaz, thirty percent Viognier and fifteen percent Verdelho, now augmented with five percent Alvarinho. The wine goes entirely through malo and the 2012 is 13.5 percent in octane. The bouquet is a very pretty blend of peach, a touch of pink grapefruit, a nice base of salty soil tones and still plenty of vanillin oak (even from the two year-old barrels). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with sound acids and lovely creaminess on the attack, but without quite the length or mineral drive as is found in the regular bottling that is raised entirely in stainless steel. This is good juice, but the older the barrels get, the more interesting this wine is likely to become. 2013-2018. **90.**

2010 Tinto dos Grous- Herdade dos Grous

The 2010 Tinto dos Grous is comprised of a blend of Aragonez, Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Nacional and Syrah and is aged for nine months in a mix of two to four year-old barrels, with no new wood used. The deep and youthful nose is superb, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, coffee bean, woodsmoke, a touch of wild fennel, lovely soil tones and still a deft touch of oak from its sojourn in older barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and grip, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very pure finish. This will need a couple of years to really blossom, but the 2010 is a step up from the 2008 version I tasted here on my last visit. High class juice and a superb value. 2015-2025+. **92.**

2007 Tinto dos Grous- Herdade dos Grous

The 2007 Tinto dos Grous is now fully mature and offers up quite a tertiary aromatic profile of dark berries, coffee grounds, black cherries, tobacco, wild fennel and a lovely base of forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with melted tannins, nice, bright acidity and very good length and grip on the focused and fully mature finish. The 2007 vintage of this bottling came in at fourteen percent alcohol, and it is really at a nice place in its evolution at age six, but does not seem likely to keep more than another handful of years before it starts to slide into a gentle decline. I am not sure if the vines now being a bit older and Luis Duarte having more experience with the vineyards here will result in the 2010 lasting a bit longer in the bottle than the 2007, but this certainly seems likely to be the case. 2013-2017. **89.**

2011 “23 Barricas”- Herdade dos Grous

As I noted back in Issue 31, the 23 Barricas is a special cuvée that is only produced in outstanding vintages and is comprised of a blend of sixty percent Syrah and forty percent Touriga Nacional. The wine had been aged in one hundred percent new oak back in the 2009 vintage, but the winery has already stepped back from this approach for this bottling, with the syrah now raised in two year-old American oak barrels and the Touriga raised in two year-old French barrels for the 2011. I am assuming that the malos here are still done in barrel, as was the case with the 2009, but I did not think to ask this question when we were tasting the wine. The 2011 comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a ripe and modern-styled nose of black cherries, sweet cassis, pepper, new leather, wild fennel, gentle tariness (from the Touriga) and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a fine

core, ripe tannins and a long, focused and beautifully balanced finish. This wine carries its octane seamlessly and shows no signs of heat, and I really prefer the integration of the wood here with the use of two year-old barrels. A lovely wine. 2015-2025+. **93.**

2011 “Moon Harvested”- Herdade dos Grous

As the name implies, the Moon Harvested cuvée is picked at night to take advantage of cooler temperatures and retain acidity. The wine is made up entirely of Alicante Bouschet, from a vineyard that is now farmed biodynamically, and it is still aged in one hundred percent new oak. The 2011 is pretty heady at a full fifteen percent alcohol and a bit less successful in my book than the “23 Barricas” from the same vintage. The bouquet is deep, borderline overripe and jammy, offering up scents of black cherries, coffee grounds, oak leaves, chocolate and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and simply, with firm tannins, a chunky personality that is long on ripeness and short on complexity, but at least with its high octane pretty well managed on the reasonably long and chewy finish. This is okay, but really should have less new wood and much less alcohol. It is not in the league with the other Grous wines that I tasted on this visit. 2016-2022+?



The beautiful barrel-aging cellars at Herdade dos Grous- with the wood getting older with each passing year!

2009 Tinto Reserva- Herdade dos Grous

The 2009 Tinto Reserva is made up of a blend of fifty percent Alicante Bouschet and twenty percent of Tinto Miuda and thirty percent Touriga Nacional (which represents a ten percent increase in Touriga and a ten percent decrease in Alicante from the 2008 version). The wine is still aged in one hundred percent new oak. The bouquet on the 2009 is superb, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of dark berries, black cherries, a nice touch of eucalyptus, wild

fennel, soil tones, coffee and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impressively complex, with a fine core of fruit, suave, well-integrated tannins and lovely focus and balance on the very long, classy finish. I did not take note of how high the alcohol was on the 2009 Reserva, but I would guess it is between fourteen and 14.5 percent in this vintage, but it shows no signs of jamminess or heat on the backend and is really a beautiful wine. 2013-2025. 93.

Herdade da Malhadinha Nova (Albernã)

As I noted in my previous article on the Alentejo, Herdade da Malhadinha Nova is an absolutely beautiful winery and small hotel that is also a ranch for a diversity of projects: thoroughbred horses and other cattle, black pigs, cork oak trees, not to mention a beautiful spa and top flight restaurant to go along with the vineyards. I had failed to mention the restaurant on the premises in the last article, but had a chance to dine there on this visit and the cuisine is every bit as fine as all the other top drawer amenities at Malhadinha Nova. The Soares family are the owners of Herdade de Malhadinha Nova, which they restored from a state of near abandonment in the last decade and which they have turned into one of the jewel estates of the Alentejo. The ranch is located just to the south of the city of Beja in the small community of Albernã, and it is an absolutely bucolic setting, with man-made lakes providing a beautiful counterpoint to the verdant rolling hills (as well as providing the requisite source for irrigation for the vineyards). On this most recent trip I had the opportunity to stay at the lovely small hotel on the property and partake in the excellent cuisine in the Malhadinha restaurant and can happily confirm that this is indeed a terrific location for a wine and food lover's get away.

The winery hand harvests all of its vineyards (fairly rare on the large estates in the Alentejo, where machine harvesting is far from uncommon), has a three floor winery that allows all movements of the wines to be done by gravity and without pumping, and a sorting table is used for all varieties prior to the start of fermentation. The winery produces wines under two different labels, all of which have been designed to include drawings by the Soares' young children included. The two labels are Monte da Peceguina and Herdade de Malhadinha Nova, with the latter reserved for the more ambitious cuvées. A couple of years ago, I had loved the winery and the hotel here, but was a bit less enamored of the wines, as they struck me as a bit overly oaky and fairly high in alcohol to really place in the top division of Alentejo producers. However, on this visit I had the opportunity to taste some superb new releases, as well as several older wines, and I clearly did not do the estate justice in my reviews the last time around, as many of the wines that I tasted on this visit were exceptional in quality and really showed that this is one of the top producers in the Alentejo. There are still a few holdouts of the high alcohol, heavily-oaked wines in the lineup (2010 Syrah and 2010 Touriga Nacional were both at least fifteen percent in alcohol and quite modern in style), but these may be the last wines from the previous regime in the cellars here. The Soares family has brought in a new winemaker to lead their cellar team, Nuno Gonzalez, who happily showed us the estate's new releases and also hand-picked a few back vintages from his predecessors to sample over the course of our dinner together, with the older wines that he selected clearly showing that my first impression here of the wines was not entirely accurate and there were some good wines made here in the early days as well.

2012 Monte da Peceguina Rosé

The 2012 Monte da Peceguina Rosé is a blend of Touriga Nacional and Aragonez and comes in at a cool and classy 12.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is bright and very pretty, wafting from the glass in a mix of white cherries, strawberries, salty soil tones and a nice touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, sound, framing acids and very nice balance and grip on the sneaky finish. Good juice for near-term drinking and the perfect *aperitif* to shake out a bit of road dust from the back of the throat. 2013-2014. **87**.

2011 Verdelho de Peceguina Branco

The one hundred percent Verdelho bottling from Peceguina is fairly ripe at 13.5 percent octane, but does not show any lack of grip or backend heat- just a bit of blurriness on the finish, which could be as much a result of *battonage* as it is ripeness in this case. The nose is still quite youthful in its rather reserved mix of lime peel, plenty of leesy tones, orange and a fine base of salty soil nuances. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and zesty, with good soil signature, but really quite moderate levels of focus and complexity at the present time. The wine is still quite long on the backend, but it needs to snap into better focus with some bottle age to fulfill its promise- not a foregone conclusion. 2014-2019? **86+?**

2012 Monte da Peceguina Branco

The 2012 Monte de Peceguina white is a bit different blend than was the case with the 2009 that I tasted on my last trip, as this wine is comprised of a mix of forty-five percent of Antão Vaz (down from sixty percent in the '09) and just under twenty percent each of Arinto, Roupeiro and Verdelho. The wine is thirteen percent alcohol and offers up a lovely and quite complex bouquet of green apple, lime, white flowers, a complex base of salty soil tones, wild fennel and a nice touch of green olive. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nicely defined by its underlying minerality, with good depth and complexity, bright acids and fine grip and focus on the long and succulent finish. Good juice. 2013-2015. **88+**.

2012 Antão Vaz- Monte da Peceguina

The 2012 Antão Vaz from Monte da Peceguina also has seen a fair bit of *battonage* during its *elevage* in stainless steel tanks and in consequently a bit leesy and currently showing just a touch of imprecision on the backend from the lees stirring. Hopefully this is just a passing stage for the wine and it will blossom with a bit of bottle age, as there are some excellent raw materials here. The wine is thirteen percent octane and offers up a lovely bouquet of green apple, orange peel, leesy tones, salty soils and a nice touch of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the aforementioned, slightly blurry finish. I wonder how much stuffing is added here from the *battonage* and if this is really a worthy trade-off for backend precision and extended minerality? This is a very good wine that may be even better if its gets more precise with bottle age. 2013-2018. **88+**.

2011 Malhadinha Branco- Herdade de Malhadinha Nova

The 2011 Malhadinha Branco cuvée is made up of a blend of sixty-five percent Arinto and the remainder of the cuvée split evenly between Chardonnay and Viognier. The wine is barrel-fermented, with thirty percent of the wood new and the remainder split between two and three year-old barrels, with the vintage coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. There is a fair bit of *battonage* practiced on this wine for the first three to four months, after which the wine is left alone in barrel. To my palate, the wine is quite expressive on both the nose and palate, but the combination of wood and *battonage* has also taken some complexity away from the equation.

The bouquet is a ripe blend of pineapple, peach, acacia blossoms and a fair bit of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core and reasonably good length and grip, but not much complexity at the present time. Will it develop more with bottle age? 2013-2018? **86+**?

2011 Monte da Peceguina Tinto

The Monte da Peceguina Tinto is now a field blend of everything in the vineyard dedicated to this bottling, which includes Alicante Bouschet, Aragonez, Touriga Nacional, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon (and there may be others). The wine is raised mostly now in two and three year-old barrels for nine months prior to racking and bottling, and the 2011 is a full point lower in octane (fourteen versus fifteen percent) than the 2009 I reported on back in Issue 31. However, many of the older barrels originated from Taransaud, and that aggressive spice is still here in slightly decreased proportions, so one has to like that oak-derived *pain épice* element. The complex nose is a mix of black cherries, *garrigue*, smoke, black pepper, a touch of oak leaf and that good old Taransaud spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely focused, with very good length and grip on the moderately tannic finish. This wine is still a bit too marked by Taransaud for my palate, and its score is a bit lower as a result, but the wine is certainly well-made and as the wood gets older and the spice starts to fade more from the blend, this will be a fine bottling. 2013-2020. **87.**

2009 Aragonês- Herdade de Malhadinha Nova

I had a chance to taste the young 2009 Herdade de Malhadinha Nova bottling of one hundred percent Aragonês back in October of 2010, and this 15.3 percent octane and new oaky wine did not overly impress me then. Two and a half years later, the wine is pretty much as expected, offering up a ripe and jammy nose of raspberries, cherries, chocolate and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and four-square, with just a touch of tannin and its alcohol fairly well-managed and not scorching on the backend, but ever-present. The wine is not going to die anytime soon, but it is not a wine I would want to drink. 2013-2020. **82.**

2010 Syrah de Peceguina

I noted that both the 2010 Syrah and the 2010 Touriga Nacional will be sold off under the lesser of the two labels at this estate- Monte da Peceguina- which was not the case with the 2008 Touriga bottling I tasted here two and a half years ago and perhaps is an indication that these fifteen-plus octane bottlings are no longer going to be the direction of the top wines at the estate. In any event, the 2010 syrah is 15.5 percent alcohol and was raised entirely in new oak. The wine is quite good for its octane and modern penchant, offering up scents of black cherries, black raspberries, pepper, chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fat, full-bodied and quite simple, with moderate tannins and a long, slightly hot finish with no rough edges and also no complexity. A typical modern wine that is well-made and quite forgettable- but with all that alcohol and new wood, it could have been a lot worse! 2013-2018. **84.**

2010 Touriga Nacional de Peceguina

The 2010 Touriga Nacional de Peceguina is also quite ripe and new oaky, with its numbers reading fifteen percent alcohol and one hundred percent new wood, but the half degree lower in alcohol actually does make a difference here *vis à vis* the syrah bottling. The nose is a classic aromatic blend for Touriga, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, leather, a touch of hay, gentle notes of violet and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, moderately complex and nicely tangy, with a rock solid core, ripe tannins and a long finish that shows just a bit of backend heat. This is really very well-made for its genre. 2014-2020+? **87+.**

2010 Malhadinha Tinto- Herdade de Malhadinha Nova

The 2010 Malhadinha Tinto is made up of a blend of Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Nacional, Tinta Miuda, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah and was raised entirely in new wood. This is a ripe wine- remember 2010 (like 2009) was a very hot growing season in the Alentejo- coming in at a full fifteen percent alcohol, but I was surprised that the alcohol was so well-managed here. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a ripe (but not overripe) mélange of dark berries, coffee grounds, woodsmoke, chocolate, a touch of pepper, leather and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fleshy, with surprising complexity for its octane, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. At fourteen percent alcohol, this would be a great wine, but, much to my surprise, I had no difficulties finishing my glass of this wine (despite its pretty heady octane level) and saw little signs of heat on the backend. 2013-2025? **91+**.

2004 Monte da Peceguina Tinto

I really liked how the 2004 Monte da Peceguina Tinto has evolved with bottle age, as this wine was drinking beautifully at age nine and showed no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The deep and mature nose offers up a superb blend of dark berries, oak leaves, a touch of leather, dark chocolate, woodsmoke and a gentle base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with a good core, still a touch of remaining tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, tertiary finish that closes with a lovely note of bitter chocolate. I did not note what the octane level was on the '04, but I am sure this is back down in the fourteen percent or less range and the wine is aging very well indeed and is a lovely drink at the present time. 2013-2020. **90**.

2006 Malhadinha Tinto- Herdade de Malhadinha Nova

The 2006 Malhadinha Tinto is blossoming beautifully at age seven and is really a lovely glass of wine. The deep and classy bouquet is starting to show some secondary layers in its aromatic mix of dark berries, coffee, a touch of pepper, chicory, woodsmoke, incipient notes of the cigar ash to come and a judicious base of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and emerging from its youth very nicely, with a good core, ripe, softening tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and well-balanced finish. I did not get the particulars for this wine in terms of *cépages* or octane level, but simply enjoyed it immensely with the meal. 2013-2025+. **92+**.

2010 Marias da Malhadinha - Herdade de Malhadinha Nova

I am not one hundred percent sure if this is the correct label for this wine, as this was a barrel sample still and the winemaker told us this cuvée will be the “top of the line”, which is formerly what the Marias da Malhadinha label was reserved for (but, this may end up being labeled differently). In any case, the 2010 “Top of the Line” is a blend of Tinta Miuda, Aragonez, Touriga Nacional, Alicante Bouschet, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon, was raised in one hundred percent new oak and brings an octane of 14.5 percent to the party. The nose is deep, ripe and superb, jumping from the glass in a mix of cassis, dark berries, *garrigue*, coffee bean, woodsmoke, soil and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and beautifully balanced, with no sense of heat or *sur maturité*, ripe tannins, a fine core and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and focused finish. At least out of the blocks, this looks likely to be a wine that will age very well indeed at 14.5 percent and should be a dynamite bottle in three or four years. Now, if I had only gotten the name right.... 2016-2035. **93**.

2010 Malhadinha “Late Harvest”- Herdade de Malhadinha Nova

Sadly, my notes do not include what grape(s) this lovely dessert wine was made from, nor how it was produced, but it was a fine closing wine to an excellent meal at the restaurant at the estate. The bouquet offers up a beautiful mélange of pear, orange zest, incipient notes of honeycomb, wild flowers and a pretty base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with fine focus and length, crisp acids and lovely balance on the pure and classy finish. Fine juice. 2013-2023. **90.**

Alentejano Wines Tasted Here in New York

Quinta do Mouro

Quinta do Mouro is a large estate right on the outskirts of the beautiful hilltop town of Estremoz. The estate was expropriated from its aristocratic owners following the overthrow of the Salazar dictatorship in 1974, and eventually returned to the family and put up for sale in 1979. The property was bought in that year by Miguel Louro, who pursued several different agricultural avenues for the estate prior to turning to viticulture in the late 1980s and producing the first Quinta do Mouro wines in the 1994 vintage. This is one of the top estates in the Alentejo, but unfortunately, several of the red wines that I tasted from the estate here in New York had been damaged in transit and were not representative. The Louro family had been kind enough to expedite samples from Estremoz via one of the big international freight carriers to New York in August, so that they could be included in this feature, but somewhere between Portugal and New York, the bottles received a nice blast of August heat and were not in great shape when I got around to tasting them. Happily, the white wines reported on below were already here in the US at Quinta do Mouro’s American importer and did not have to try to survive the vagaries of international shipping in high summer and were consequently, in pristine condition. I look forward to tasting in the future sound bottles of the red wines, as even the bottles that arrived here with some heat damage very clearly showed plenty of depth and complexity and good examples are likely to be excellent wines. But, obviously, it would make no sense to print notes on bottles that had been gently simmered somewhere along the road...

2012 Vinha do Mouro Branco- Quinta do Mouro

The Vinha do Mouro bottling from Quinta do Mouro is a relatively new line for the winery, with an eye towards producing a wine more user-friendly out of the blocks than the more structured wines produced under the Quinta do Mouro label. The 2012 Branco is a blend of with thirty-five percent of the blend Arinto, thirty-five percent Antão Vaz and thirty percent Verdelho and tips the scales at a cool and classy 12.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up an excellent nose of lime, green melon, beeswax, chalky, sandy soil tones, a touch of green olive, gentle notes of citrus peel and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the complex and intensely flavored finish. This is excellent. 2013-2016+. **92.**

Adega do Monte Branco

Adega do Monte Branco is owned by Luís Louro, who spent six years working at the family estate of Quinta do Mouro with his father (as well as working in California) prior to setting up on his own in 2004 in the village of Estremoz. The two wines that I tasted from Adega

do Monte Branco were excellent, and I am assuming these are their entry level wines, and I would love to taste the entire range in the near future.

2012 Alento Branco- Adega do Monte Branco

The 2012 Alento Branco from Adega do Monte Branco is a lovely wine that is comprised of a blend of the “big three” indigenous white wine grapes of the Alentejo, with forty percent of the blend Arinto, thirty percent Antão Vaz and thirty percent Roupeiro. The wine comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a bright and vibrant bouquet of lemon, tart pear, wild fennel, salty soil tones and a gentle touch of lime zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fairly full-bodied and offers up a lovely core, with crisp acids, fine focus and balance and a long, complex and intensely flavored finish. This wine has plenty of personality and really works wonders at the table. Fine juice. 2013-2016. **90.**

2011 Alento Tinto- Adega do Monte Branco

The 2011 Alento Tinto from Luís Louro is comprised of a blend of forty percent each of Aragonez and Trincadeira, and ten percent each of Alicante Bouschet and Touriga Nacional. The wine is raised entirely in stainless steel and undergoes a three day “cold soak” prior to the onset of fermentation. The 2011 offers up a fine nose of dark berries, coffee bean, a touch of tree bark (from the Trincadeira), a nice base of soil and a bit of chocolate. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and intensely flavored, with good depth, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the succulent, bouncy and well-balanced finish. The Alento bottling is made for immediate consumption and the 2011 Tinto offers up plenty of good drinking right out of the blocks. It is not the most complex of wines, but it offers up a lot of personality for its price point. Good juice. 2013-2018. **88.**

Herdade do Rocim

Since my first visit to Herdade do Rocim back in the autumn of 2010, I was happy to find that this superb estate now has an American importer (Langdon-Shiverick) and the wines are now quite available here in the states. On my most recent trip, I did not have an opportunity to visit the estate, but was fortunate to have samples sent of several of their new releases for inclusion in this article. Rather than rewrite background information on the winery, I have culled some facts from the last article on the region and include them here for new subscribers who may not have seen the feature on the estate in Issue 31. As I noted in my first piece on the region back in Issue 31, Herdade do Rocim is widely recognized as one of the top two or three estates in the entire Alentejo, with both their reds and their whites ranked amongst the very best that region has to offer at the present time. The domaine is located in the southern Alentejo, between the towns of Vidigueira and Cuba. The very talented young woman behind the wines is the charming Catarina Vieira, whose family created Herdade do Rocim in 2000, purchasing the one hundred hectare ranch that is now home to the winery and which already had a few parcels of older vine Trincadeira, Aragonez, Arinto and Antão Vaz planted here when they purchased the property. Further vineyards were laid out to bring the land under vine on the estate up to just over sixty hectares, with Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Nacional, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah added to the mix of grape varieties planted on the property. The family also set about building a new winery and have created one of the most architecturally striking in the Alentejo, with its clean and modern lines burrowing into the surrounding hillside and really at one with its surroundings. The interior of the winery is strikingly modern, with an airy and casual aesthetic that is a beautiful foil to the refined and very complex wines produced here. As is the case with

several other of the top estates in the Alentejo, the winery offers a wide range of amenities, with a superb restaurant, wine bar and conference center, and there are plans well under way to build a small hotel to complete the compound.



On my visit to the winery in October of 2010, there had been two distinct labels at the winery- Rocim for the more basic bottlings and Olho de Mocho for the Reservas. There were also several specific bottlings in addition these two, which include a big and oaky Grande Rocim and a superb wine from a family vineyard planted in the outskirts of Lisbon, called Vale da Mata. Today there is an additional layer of bottlings, that appear under the Mariana label and are now the entry level wines from the property. While a few of the bottlings at the winery are raised in entirely new wood (naturally the Grande Rocim falls into this category), in the few short years that the winery has been open, the oak regimen has evolved briskly in the direction away from a high percentage of new oak, and many of the Reservas are now done with fifty percent new wood or less. Sagely, Catarina Vieira did not send me any of the oakier cuvées for inclusion in this article, so I am not even sure if she is still producing these wines. Herdade do Rocim is clearly one of the shining stars in the Alentejo.

2012 Mariana Branco- Herdade do Rocim

The 2012 Mariana Branco from Herdade do Rocim is comprised of a blend of sixty percent Antão Vaz, thirty percent Arinto and ten percent Alvarinho, with the wine fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The 2012 comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely and vibrant bouquet of pear, lime blossoms, lovely, white soil tones, a touch of fresh almond and wild fennel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a good core, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. A fine bottle. 2013-2016. **89+**.

2012 Herdade do Rocim Vinho Branco

The 2012 Rocim Branco is made from a blend of Antão Vaz, Arinto and Roupeiro and tips the scales at a ripe and civilized thirteen percent octane. The wine is raised entirely stainless steel as well and offers up lovely precision and vibrancy on both the nose and palate. The aromatic constellation of the 2012 wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of tart pear, green melon, a touch of green olive, salty soil tones, beeswax, wild fennel, lime peel and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, with a deep core of fruit, lovely soil signature, sound framing acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and beautifully focused finish. This seems just a touch softer than the Mariana Branco 2012, and I suspect that it should probably be drunk a bit sooner. A beautiful wine for near-term consumption. 2013-2015. **91**.

2011 Olho de Mocho Branco “Reserva”- Herdade do Rocim

While I have only tasted a couple of vintages of the Olho de Mocho Branco, I find it is quickly becoming one of my favorite white wines in the region, as its gently oaky and classy personality really works well at the table. The 2011 Olho de Mocho Branco Reserva was made entirely from Antão Vaz, from the domaine’s oldest vines and came in at a ripe, but again, quite civilized thirteen percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, complex and beautifully presented, offering up scents of tart pear, beeswax, lovely, white soil tones, wild fennel, spring flowers and a stylish base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with excellent focus and balance, a rock solid core, a generous, but well-measured framing of new wood, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and elegant finish. This is a white wine of high aspiration and the 2011 version has really turned out beautifully. High class juice and a beautiful barometer of just how good the white wines can be in the Alentejo. 2013-2018. **93+**.

2011 Mariana Tinto- Herdade do Rocim

The *cépages* of the 2011 Mariana Tinto from Herdade do Rocim is made up of Aragonez, Alicante Bouschet and Cabernet Sauvignon and the wine is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling, and then held in the cellars an additional three months in bottle to allow the wine to blossom a bit prior to release. The 2011 is fourteen percent alcohol and excellent, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of roasted meat, cigar ash, a nice base of soil and just a touch of leafy tones from the Alicante. I really like the influence of the Cabernet on the blend, which gives the wine a nice vein of Médoc-like aromatics. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off plenty of mid-palate depth, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long, slightly chewy and quite complex finish. High class juice. 2013-2023. **90**.

2011 Herdade do Rocim Vinho Tinto

The 2011 Herdade do Rocim Vinho Tinto is a more complex blend of grape varieties than the Mariana Tinto, as it includes Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Nacional, Trincadeira, Aragonez and Syrah. The wine sees a touch of new wood during its *elevage*, but the wood is

handled very suavely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a superb blend of cassis, black cherries, bitter chocolate, cigar smoke, a beautiful base of soil, a touch of new leather and a gentle base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and still quite primary, with a great core of pure fruit, excellent soil inflection, firm, well-integrated tannins and stunning length and grip on the still very youthful and palate staining finish. This wine comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and really shows that this is the “sweet spot” for ripeness in the region, as this wine is perfectly balanced for long-term cellaring. A superb wine. 2017-2030+. **93.**

2010 Olho de Mocho Tinto “Reserva”- Herdade do Rocim

The 2010 Olho de Mocho Tinto Reserva is a superb wine that really shows off the elegance found in all of this estate’s wines. The bouquet is a complex blend of black cherries, sweet cassis, dark chocolate, a bit of *garrigue*, a lovely base of soil, fresh herb tones and a nice framing cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe tannins and excellent focus and grip on the well-balanced, complex and very classy finish. This wine will age very well, though it is so nicely balanced that it is eminently approachable today. My inclination would be to tuck it away in the cellar for at least a few years to allow its secondary layers to start to emerge. Fine and very classy juice. 2015-2030+. **92+.**

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Alphabetical Listing of Producers and Their Wines Covered in This Feature:

Ayala: “Brut Majeur” NV; “Brut Majeur” Rosé NV; 2005 Blanc de Blancs “Brut Millésimé”.

André Beaufort: “Réserve Grand Cru Ambonnay” Brut NV (Lot 94-A); “Grand Cru Ambonnay” Brut Rosé NV; 2005 “Brut Millésime Rosé” (Lot 05-R).

Bérêche Père et Fils: 2004 “Vieilles Vignes Sélectionnée” Brut.

Besserat de Bellefon: “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Cuvée des Moines” Brut NV; “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Rosé NV.

Billecart-Salmon: Brut NV (French Cuvée); “Sous Bois” Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV (French Cuvée); 1999 “Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart” Brut Millésime.

Bollinger: “Speciale Cuvée” Brut NV (French Cuvée); “Speciale Cuvée” Brut NV (American Cuvée); Brut Rosé NV.

Bernard Brémont: “Cuvée Prestige” Grand Cru Brut NV; 2005 Brut Millésime.

Pierre Brigandat: 2007 “Dentelles et Crinolines” Extra Brut Millésime;

Le Brun Servenay: “Brut Sélection” Grand Cru NV; 2004 “Exhilerante” Vieilles Vignes Brut Millésime; 2004 Vieilles Vignes Brut Millésime.

Vincent Carré: Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru “Brut Réserve” NV; Premier Cru Brut NV; Premier Cru “Brut Rosé” NV;

Claude Cazals: 1998 Blanc de Blancs “Clos Cazals” Brut

A. Chauvet: “Cachet Vert” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV;

S. Coquillet: 2001 Brut Millésime.

Champagne Marie Courtin: “Résonance” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged May 2013); “Résonance” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged March 2013).

R. H. Coutier: Grand Cru “Tradition Brut” NV; “Brut Rosé” Grand Cru NV;

Baron Dauvergne: “Cuvée Privilège” Brut NV; “Oiel de Perdrix” Brut NV;

Demièr-Ansiot: Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV; 2008 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Grand Cru;

Champagne Deutz: “Brut Classic” NV; 2007 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 1989 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (served from magnum); 2006 Brut Millésimé; 2000 “Cuvée William Deutz” Brut; 2008 Brut Millésimé Rosé NV.

Champagne José Dhondt: Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV; “Rosé de Saignée” Brut NV; 2008 “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut; 2007 “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut.

Hervé Dubois: Blanc de Blancs “Brut Réserve” Grand Cru NV; 2006 Blanc de Blanc “Brut Millésime” Grand Cru.

Didier-Ducos et Fils: “Absolu Meunier” Brut; 2006 Brut Millésime;

Duval-Leroy: Brut NV.

Egly-Ouriet: Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut NV; “Brut Tradition” NV Grand Cru;

Joël Falmet: “Brut Tradition” NV.

Nathalie Falmet: Brut Nature NV; “Tentation Rosée” Brut NV;

Gatinois: “Brut Tradition” NV; Brut Rosé Grand Cru;

Pierre Gerbais: “Prestige” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; “l’Audace” Brut Nature NV; “Cuvée de Réserve” Brut NV; “Cuvée l’Originale” Brut NV.

Domaine Bruno Gobillard: Brut NV; “Vieilles Vignes 18th Century” Brut NV; “Mademoiselle Sophie” Brut Rosé NV;

Godmé Père et Fils: Extra Brut NV; Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut NV; Brut Grand Cru NV;

“Brut Intégral” Premier Cru NV; Brut Rosé NV; 2005 “Les Champs St. Martin” Brut; 2005 “Les Alouettes Sant Bets” Brut; 2005 “Les Romaines” Brut.

Gosset: *“Grand Blanc de Blancs” Brut NV; “Brut Excellence” NV; Grande Réserve Brut NV; “Grande Rosé” Brut NV;*

Henri Goutorbe: *Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV.*

Charles Heidsieck: *“Brut Réserve” NV; “Rosé Réserve” Brut NV; 2000 Brut Millésime.*

D. Henriët-Bazin: *Blanc de Noirs “Grand Cru” Extra Brut NV; “Sélection des Parcelles” Premier Cru Brut NV; 2006 “Cuvée Marie-Amélie” Blanc de Blancs Brut; 2007 “Millésime Carte d’Or” Premier Cru Brut.*

Henriot: *Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Brut Souverain” NV; Brut Rosé NV;*

Huré Frères: *Extra Brut “Réserve” NV; “Mémoire” Extra Brut NV; “Invitation” Brut Réserve NV; “l’Insouciance” Cuvée Rosé Brut NV; 2006 Blanc de Blancs “l’Inattendue” Brut Millésime; 2000 “Terre Natale” Brut Millésime.*

Jacquesson: *Cuvée Number 736 Extra Brut NV; 2002 Brut Millésime.*

Krug: *Grande Cuvée Brut NV (current release- ID # 112001); Grande Cuvée Brut NV (aged six years on the cork from release); Krug Grande Cuvée Brut NV (aged ten years on the cork from release); Brut Rosé NV (ID # 212020); 2000 Clos du Mesnil Blanc de Blancs Brut; 2000 Vintage Brut; 1998 Vintage Brut; 1998 “Clos d’Ambonnay” Brut; 1989 Krug Collection Brut; 1961 Vintage Brut (served from magnum).*

Benoît Lahaye: *“Violaine” Brut Zero;*

Laherte Frères: *“Les Empreintes” Brut Nature NV; “Les 7” Extra Brut NV; “Ultra Tradition” Brut NV; “Ultra Tradition” Brut Rosé NV; 2007 “Les Vignes d’Autrefois” Extra Brut NV; 2005 “Brut Millésime”.*

Lamiable: *2009 “Cuvée Héliades” Grand Cru Brut Millésime; 2007 “Cuvée Phéerie” Grand Cru Brut Millésime.*

Lanson: *2007 Brut Millésime.*

Larmandier-Bernier: *“Latitude” Extra Brut NV; “Longitude” Extra Brut NV; “Rosé de Saignée” Premier Cru Extra Brut NV; 2008 “Terre de Vertus” Blanc de Blancs 1er Cru Brut Nature.*

Laurent-Perrier: *Ultra Brut NV; Brut NV; “Grande Siècle” Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV (American Cuvée); Brut Rosé NV (French Cuvée- served from magnum); 2004 Brut Millésime.*

R. L. Legras: 1996 “Cuvée St. Vincent” Brut Millésime.

Legras & Haas: Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV; “Brut Tradition” NV;

Gérard Lorient: Brut NV.

Michel Lorient: 2006 “Pinot Meunier Vieilles Vignes” Brut Millésime.

Nicolas Maillart: “Platine” Brut NV Premier Cru; 2005 “Brut Millésime Premier Cru.

Champagne Marion-Bosser: Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Premier Cru NV; 2004 Brut Millésime Premier Cru.

Thierry Massin: “Brut Réserve” NV; 2006 Brut Millésime.

Marcel Moineaux: “Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV; Blanc de Blancs “Brut Tradition” Grand Cru NV; 2007 Blanc de Blancs “Brut Millésime” Grand Cru.

Pierre Moncuit: Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet” Brut NV; Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV;

Moutard Père et Fils: “Grande Cuvée” Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV.

Jean Moutardier: “Cuvée Rosée” Brut NV.

Bruno Paillard: “Première Cuvée” Brut NV; “Première Cuvée” Brut Rosé NV;

Pierre Paillard: Grand Cru Brut NV; 2002 Grand Cru Brut Millésime.

Parigot: Blanc de Blancs Brut NV Crémant de Bourgogne; Blanc Tradition Brut NV Crémant de Bourgogne; Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Bourgogne; Bourgogne Tradition Rouge Brut NV Crémant de Bourgogne.

Piper-Heidsieck: Brut NV; Rosé Sauvage Brut NV; 2005 Vintage Brut.

Philipponnat: “Non-Dosé” Brut Zero NV; “Royale Réserve” Brut NV; “Réserve Rosée” Brut NV; 2005 “Cuvée 1522” Brut Millésime Premier Cru; 2002 “Clos des Goisses” Brut.

Ployez-Jacquemart: “Extra Quality” Brut NV; Extra Brut Rosé NV; 2004 Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs NV; 1998 “Liesse d’Harbonville” Brut.

Patrick Piuze: “Non-Dosé” Brut Nature NV Crémant de Bourgogne.

Roederer Estate: Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV; 2004 “l’Hermitage” Vintage Brut.

Louis Roederer: “Carte Blanche” Extra Dry NV; Brut Premier NV; 2007 Blanc de Blancs Brut; 2008 Brut Rosé.

Camille Savès: Grand Cru Extra Brut NV; “Carte Blanche” Premier Cru Brut NV; “Carte d’Or” Premier Cru Brut NV; “Cuvée Anaïs Jolicoeur” Grand Cru Brut NV; “Cuvée Prestige” Grand Cru Brut; Brut Rosé NV; 2007 Grand Cru Brut Millésime.

Saint-Charnant: 1993 “Cuvée Royale” Blanc de Blancs (served from magnum)

Scharffenberger: “Brut Excellence” NV; “Brut Rosé Excellence” NV.

Champagne Jacques Selosse: Brut Initial NV (disgorged 2012); Brut Initial NV (disgorged 2011); Brut Initial NV (disgorged 2003); Brut Tradition NV (disgorged 2001); Cuvée Substance Brut NV (disgorged 2011); Cuvée Substance Brut NV (disgorged 2001); 1999 Brut Millésime (served from magnum); La Côte Faron Brut NV (Aÿ- disgorged 4/12); Le Bout du Clos Brut NV (Ambonnay- disgorged 4/12); Sous Le Mont Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ- disgorged 1/12); Le Chemin de Châlons Brut NV (Cramant- 2005 vintage-based); Les Chantereines Brut NV (Avize- 2005 vintage-based); Les Carelles Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger- 2003, 2004 & 2005 vintage-based).

Serveaux Fils: “Cuvée Pur Chardonnay” Brut NV; “Carte Noire” Brut NV; “Cuvée Pinot Meunier” Brut NV; “Rosé de Saignée” Brut NV;

Champagne Charlotte De Sousa: “Vieilles Vignes” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV.

Taittinger: “Nocturne” Sec NV; Brut “La Française” NV; Prélude “Grands Crus” Brut NV; “Prestige Rosé” Brut NV; 2004 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut; 2002 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut; 2005 Brut Millésimé; 2004 Comtes de Champagne Brut Rosé.

Michel Turgay: “Réserve Sélection” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV; 2004 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Grand Cru.

Vazart-Coquart et Fils: Extra Brut NV; Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV; 2007 “Grand Bouquet” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Millésime; 2006 Blanc de Blancs “Special Club” Grand Cru Brut; 2005 Blanc de Blancs “Special Club” Grand Cru Brut; 2004 “Grand Bouquet” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Millésime (served from magnum).

Jean Velut: Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV; “Brut Tradition” NV.

J. L. Vergnon: “Eloquence” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV; “Conversation” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV;

THE ANNUAL CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINE REPORT SUMMER OF 2013



One of my favorite times of the year is summer, as this is the time I traditionally start work on my big annual review of Champagne (not to mention getting out on the tennis court with much greater regularity and trying to learn how to rip my backhand with the same artistic grace as Richard Gasquet!), and it is very easy to get accustomed to tasting Champagne each and every day of the warm weather months here in New York, where the heavy weight of the sultry New York summer can certainly be lightened with a proper glass of bubbly. But, no matter the time of year, I find that Champagne and sparkling wines are always a welcome addition to my tasting or drinking itinerary, as I firmly believe that there are no more exciting wines out there today and that the changes that continue to sweep (particularly) through the Champagne region represent a renaissance of historical proportions that will be looked back upon with great affection many decades from now. We are simply living through one of the most exciting periods in the history of Champagne, with the wines never better than they are today, and with all of the changes taking root here in terms of superior viticulture and more refined winemaking, the present and near-future of this region are as bright and promising as anywhere in the world of wine. There have never been more very serious producers of high class Champagne than there are today, and each year, as I begin to tackle the impressive lineup of samples that come my way,

I discover new and very high-quality wines from producers which I have never had the pleasure to taste before and my list continues to expand of the top domaines and *Grandes Marques* in the firmament of the Champagne universe.

I spent a very large part of my spring and early summer on the road in 2013, and when I originally laid out my (overly?) ambitious travel schedule for these months, it was supposed to be crowned off with a week to ten days in the Champagne region around the middle of June. However, given the burden of the road during the first several months of travel, I ended up rethinking the end of my series of trips and finishing up in Burgundy around the tenth of June and heading back to New York to taste here and recover a bit from an overabundance of travel. I would have loved to have found the energy to make the trip to Champagne happen this summer, but the last thing I wanted to do was show up there exhausted and tasted-out after several months of near-non-stop travel and not have my faculties and imagination fully focused on the task of tasting there, so I cancelled that leg of my last trip and had to content myself with tasting simply from bottles here in the US in preparation for this article. However, I hope that this will be the last of these annual reports on Champagne that does not include a significant period of tasting *sur place* with the domaines of Champagne, as I plan to rework my annual travel schedule to henceforth include at least a week or so in Champagne every year. There is simply too many good things currently going on in this region to not spend a significant period of time tasting in the cellars here and getting to better know the people behind the wines, (so expect more depth of coverage of this region in future issues).

As I noted in last year's feature on the region in Issue Forty, I find the quality of offerings from both Grower-Récoltants and a great many of the *Grandes Marques* climbing upwards with each passing harvest and the wine world really is awash these days with an amazing array of brilliant sparkling wines. While most of this report is focused on the region of Champagne itself, I should note that the very evident march upwards in quality here certainly has a gravitational effect on other sparkling wine-producing regions around the globe, so that the rising tide of quality in Champagne-proper can also be felt in regions such as Cataluña where more and more high-quality Cava is now being produced or in the sparkling wines from regions as far afield as California or the Loire Valley. What I hope is happening concomitant with the increase in both the breadth and depth of high quality offerings from Champagne and other sparkling wine regions is that more and more wine lovers are waking up to the possibilities of cellaring these wines and treating them much as one would young bottles of other age-worthy regions and tucking the wines away in their cellars for a period of bottle aging, as there is little doubt that Champagne improves dramatically with cellaring. I have now been cellaring Champagne for extended aging for eight to ten years (and lament the fact it took me so long to get around to laying these wines down with the same alacrity that I did for wines from other regions) and have greatly benefited from having a cellar of Champagne starting to blossom with time, so that I now have the luxury of pulling out bottles that are now fully into their apogees of peak drinkability. I have mentioned in the past that I certainly cellar as much non-vintage bubbly as I do vintage-dated bottlings, as the vast majority of non-vintage cuvées from top estates also benefit from mid-to-long-term cellaring and are far more enjoyable to drink if given at least some bottle age. I hope that others are also taking advantage of the renaissance in the region and are putting cases away for the future, as Champagne and high-quality sparkling wines remain one of the best values for long-term cellaring (particularly where premature oxidation issues have compromised

so many other white wine regions for extended aging) and one can really do awfully well with top bottlings from the lower end of the pricing spectrum if one lays them down for three to ten years in the cellar.

It is sad to think that the American market for Champagne continues still to be dominated in volume terms by a few well-known brands and that the vast majority of Champagne consumption here in the states still tends to be focused around the end of the year holiday season. To my mind, this just demonstrates that the US continues to be a young and undeveloped market for Champagne, and one hopes that in the coming years more wine lovers will start to cherish this region for its cellaring potential and not simply think of Champagne during the end of the year celebratory season. However, the less than ripe nature of the American Champagne market offers up opportunity for those savvy enough stateside to realize what is going on in the region these days and start to lay down bottles of bubbly in the cellar now, before the general market starts to better realize the potential for these wines in the cellar and the ensuing feeding frenzy commences. In many ways, the Champagne market here in the US today reminds me a bit of the Burgundy market here twenty years ago, when a fairly small percentage of wine lovers really knew and understood Burgundy beyond a few famous names and it was far easier in those days to track down one's favorite wines than is the case today! France remains the biggest and most important market for Champagne (perhaps reflecting the French peoples' understanding that every day is a good day for Champagne!), and while the continuing economic pessimism there drove Champagne sales a bit lower in the first half of this year, but I continue to see more and more well-selected Grower-Récoltant bottlings on the shelves and lists of French wine merchants, as well as a quite broad range of *Grandes Marques*, which indicates to me that the renaissance in this region is being well-noted in the French market. If this recognition spreads to the American market, it is going to get an awful lot harder to find one's favorite limited production wines (as so many of the top grower-récoltant bottlings reviewed here are made in the hundreds of cases, rather than the thousands!), so this is really a good time to start to devote a larger section of the cellar to the wines from Champagne. A good parallel for what could happen to the entire market might be the wines of Anselme Selosse of Champagne Jacques Selosse (whose wine are featured this year in this report), which have risen dramatically in price and become so rare in the last several years here in the US, now that wine lovers fully understand just how wonderful these wines are and how worthy they are of tucking away in the cellar. It is far from inconceivable that many other top, limited production Champagne bottlings could go the same way as the Selosse wines in the market in the years to come.

In terms of what is now entering the Champagne market, one is seeing the first examples of non-vintage wines that are primarily based on the high quality 2009 vintage, so there are some absolutely top notch examples of these non-vintage wines currently available and more will be emerging from cellars in the next several months. 2009 was a very, very good vintage in the Champagne region, with excellent ripeness and very high quality grapes, with most producers looking forward to offering 2009 vintage bottlings down the road, so the non-vintage wines based on this vintage are worthy of particular notice and in fact, as the notes below will attest, I have sampled some absolutely exemplary non-vintage bottlings in the preparation of this report that would make great additions to any well-stocked cellar. We are still a few years away from the release of most of the vintage-dated bottlings from this year (though I did actually taste one in preparation for this feature), but if the high quality of so many non-vintage bottlings that

include 2009 juice in their blends is any indication of what we are to expect, then there is going to be an awful lot of good bubbly coming down the pipeline in the not too distant future. The vintages of 2005 and 2006, though plenty ripe, generally did not possess the same potential for structural integrity as seems likely to be found in the 2009s when they are released, as both '05 and '06 had some difficult weather prior to lovely Septembers, but both of these two vintages certainly have their charms and I have tasted some very nice bottles from these two years already. With years such as these two, the wines that show the best spines of minerality and the brisker acids are the most pleasing from these two years, which in general will both offer up some very nice early drinking, but are not likely to make old bones.

The vintages of 2007 and 2008 were a bit atypical in both being pretty cool, wet and overcast through the mid-summer and only really reached solid ripeness with strong and sunny *fins de saisons*. In 2007, many growers picked soon after the good weather arrived at the end of August, and as a result, there were issues with some uneven ripeness in the vineyards for those who did not wait, so it seems unlikely that we will see a great many 2007 vintage-dated bottlings down the road. 2008 was another year in Champagne with wet and humid weather causing problems with potential mildew (which had also been a constant threat the previous year), but perhaps owing to the experience with the vintage before, many *vignerons* in the region in 2008 picked a bit later (mid-September) and the crop looked to be a bit better in overall potential than in 2007. Particularly of note when comparing the two vintages was that all three of the major grape varieties (chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier) were successful in 2008, whereas chardonnay generally fared better than the red grapes in 2007. I would expect that we will see quite a few examples of 2008 vintage-dated bottlings being released in the coming years, but with the superb 2009 vintage waiting in the wings, it will be interesting to see how the 2008s are received. I generally tend to be enamored of the leaner and racier vintage years in Champagne, which I find often age in exemplary fashion, so I continue to really like the examples from the 2004 vintage that I cross paths with, and my gut instinct is that this vintage is really going to age very well in the cellar and should not be ignored in the build-up of anticipation to the eventual release of the 2009s. As is also the case in Burgundy, the ripest vintages in Champagne always seem to generate the most early enthusiasm, but they are not always the years that produced the best wines for long-term aging.

The following notes are arranged in what has become my customary format for these large Champagne features. We start with a domaine profile- this time of Champagne Jacques Selosse in Avize- and then follow with tasting notes on recently tasted wines that are arranged by type of bubbly. First comes non-Champagne sparkling wines, followed by examples of Non-Vintage Extra Brut (as well as Brut Nature and Brut Zero), Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs, Non-Vintage Blanc de Noirs, Non-Vintage Brut, Non-Vintage Brut (or Extra Brut) Rosé, Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs, Vintage-Dated Brut and Vintage-Dated Brut Rosé. Within each non-vintage subsection, the wines are arranged alphabetically by producer, and for vintage-dated subsections, the wines are sorted first by age from youngest to oldest, and alphabetically by producer within each vintage-organized section. As I have done for the last few years, readers will find an index of wines covered in this large feature at the start of the article. It may become apparent that scores in general are pretty high for most of the wines covered in this feature, which I fully hope reflects both the very exciting quality of wines that are emerging these days from the Champagne region in particular and the overall increase in quality of so many sparkling

wines the world over, as well as the arrival of some pretty serious 2009 vintage juice in many of the non-vintage bottlings from the Champagne region. As I noted frequently in the introductory section, we are in the midst of a true golden age in the world of sparkling wine and we would all be wise to take this into consideration and put more of these wines away in our cellar today, as like most golden ages, there is no guarantee that this one will go on forever (just look what has happened to long-lived dry white wines in the era of premature oxidation!) and the opportunity is right now to lay down some of these magical wines for longer-term keeping in the cellar. I should note that a few of my perennial favorites are not covered in this article, such as the new releases from Pol Roger, Duval-Leroy, Marguet Père et Fils, Georges Laval, Bérêche et Fils and Jérôme Prévost. In the case of the La Closserie wines from Monsieur Prévost, they ship in tiny quantities in the late autumn, so the new releases are not yet here in the states (but will be reported upon in the next Champagne feature), while I forgot to keep in my files who the contact persons currently were for the Duval-Leroy, Bérêche et Fils, Marguet Père et Fils and Georges Laval wines (paying a very steep price for my sloppy bookkeeping with those wines!) and did not hear back from the folks at Frederick Wildman this year about my requests for samples of the Pol Roger wines. I will try again for the next installment on Champagne for all of these producers, as their beautifully made wines should certainly be covered in these pages.

As is always the case when I write about Champagne, it would improper to not single out the wines of Krug for special mention. I know that I have already written a full-length feature on the house a few years back and it might seem redundant to again select this small *Grande Marque* for accolades, but I continue to be simply amazed at the stunning quality of each and every bottle of Krug Champagne that I cross paths with over the course of the years. I am hardly a neophyte when it comes to Krug Champagnes, as I began drinking them very early on in my formative years in the wine trade (when they were presented to me- quite rightly- by older colleagues as amongst the most singularly brilliant wines produced from anywhere in the world) and have always found them to be a barometer of just *what is possible* in the world of wine, if a producer remains completely devoted to the concept of exceptional quality in every single bottle that wears its label. These days, we are awash in a great number of aspiring and self-anointed estates in the world of wine that are presented as “the best of the best” for their respective regions and wine types. The sad fact is that a very significant percentage of these wines are simply riding the wave of their hype and really are not what they are portrayed to be, but rather, have positioned themselves to be priced at a very exclusive level and trade upon a combination of very benevolent journalistic praise and a well-heeled clientele that does not always possess as much tasting experience as it does disposable income. In this rarefied world, it is invigorating to cross paths with the uncompromising quality of the wines of Krug. They are, of course, not inexpensive wines by any stretch of the imagination, but at least their higher price tags allows them to remain available throughout the wine world, rather than simply vanishing the moment they are released (like Christophe Roumier’s Musigny) to a tiny coterie of well-connected wine collectors or hoarded wine investment funds. Happily, Krug wines are out there in the market each and every day, and if one is predisposed to treat oneself to a very, very special bottle of wine, there simply is not a better choice in my experience than a bottle of Krug. Over the years, I have learned to not race through my bottles of Krug, but rather to take the time to concentrate and be swept away by the unfolding drama in the glass and savor the slowing of time that inevitably takes place with a Krug Champagne, for there is a transcendental quality to these wines that is utterly unique and could not be any more satisfying.



In past features, I have provided a roster of some of my very favorite grower-récoltants in the introductory section of the Champagne article. If readers revisit both Issues 34 and 40, they will find a listing of many of my favorite grower-récoltants who must be ranked amongst the very top Champagne producers in the region these days, with attendant background information on each estate. I should note that many of these small houses that I have listed in past issues have only improved as time has gone by, and with each passing year of new releases, I find that the sophistication and refinement of their wines continues to incrementally rise. One of these days, I will compile a more comprehensive list (to date) of who I find is making the very best wines amongst the small growers, but given the fact that this issue is already three weeks late in being released, we will have to wait until the next iteration of this report to put together that full listing. In the meantime, I thought I would add a few more names from amongst the exhilarating world of grower Champagne that really jumped out at me during the many weeks of tastings that I organized and the hundreds of bottles I waded through, as there were several producers whose wines really sang and who deserve to be added to the roster of the best small estates in the region (I will include short background information these producers in an upcoming article, but wanted to at least add the names of these estates to the list of top grower-récoltants). Some of these *vignerons* were completely new to me, while others delivered wines this year that really made me take notice of their quality and which dramatically altered my perception of the proper position of the estate in the firmament of grower bubbly. These include:

Côte des Bar

Champagne Marie Courtin (Polisot)

Jean Velut (Montgueux)

Vallée de la Marne

Didier-Ducos et Fils (St. Martin d'Ablois)

Bruno Gobillard (Pierry)

Gérard Lorient (Festigny)

Serveaux Fils (Passy-sur-Marne)

Côte des Blanc

J. L. Vergnon (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

Montagne de Reims

Vincent Carré (Trépail)

Barone Dauvergne (Bouzy)

Egly-Ouriet (Ambonnay)

I would also be remiss in not mentioning, that amongst the *Grandes Marques*, the quality of this year's samples from Piper-Heidsieck was the finest I have ever tasted from the estate (and they did not even send along their top of the line bottling of "Rare"), as Technical Director, Régis Camus has clearly settled in here at Piper (after years and years of crafting the brilliant wines over at Charles Heidsieck) and we are starting to see Piper wines on the market now that have been entirely produced under his tenure. Monsieur Camus has won multiple awards over the years as the finest winemaker in Champagne, and I have been a very long-time admirer of the magic he has woven in the past at the more boutique-sized *marque* of Charles Heidsieck, but I never imagined he would be able to realize the level of success that he has achieved with the wines at the much larger house of Piper-Heidsieck. For folks who have not tasted the wines from Piper-Heidsieck in a while, they are now exemplary in quality and currently offer up stunning value across the board. The bad old days at Piper of the 1990s and 2000s are now very firmly in the past and this *Grande Marque* is now back to the great quality of old- and one should remember that in the first half of the twentieth century, Piper-Heidsieck was one of the greatest names in the world of Champagne and produced a wide array of absolutely stellar wines. The resurgence at Piper in the last few years should be one of the most exciting and well-documented events in the world of wine, but it remains still very much an insider's secret, with the wines still veritable bargains, and I urge readers to take a few bottles of Piper out for a test drive in the near future and see for yourselves just how good these wines have become in the last few years. Knowing Monsieur Camus' reputation, I suspect that we are only at the very start of what promised to be a long and very exhilarating ride of exceptional quality at Piper-Heidsieck.

The other *Grande Marque* that really stood out in my tastings this summer was Philipponnat, and I will most assuredly be putting together a full-scale domaine profile of this house in the future. While Philipponnat has long been recognized for the superb quality of their great, single vineyard bottling of Clos des Goisses (which many Champagne *cognoscenti* will rank as amongst the greatest handful of vineyards in all of the region), what seems to have gone relatively unnoticed is just how good each and every cuvée from the house has been in the last

couple of years. As I went through a period of not tasting the wines of Philipponnat with great regularity, I do not really know when this surge in quality really took hold at this fine producer based in the village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, but today, these wines- up and down the hierarchy of cuvées- are amongst the very finest to be found in Champagne. I vividly recall selling their various bottlings in my later wine merchant days, back in the mid-1990s, and they were nowhere near the same quality then as they are today. How and when change arrived here will be an interesting theme for the future article on the wines of Philipponnat, but in the meantime, I urge subscribers to make an effort to taste their current releases and enjoy all of the positive movement at this fine house in the last several years, as there are some truly stunning current releases out on the market from this *Grande Marque*.

With the following notes, I have tried to provide (when available) information on the *cépages* of each bottling, as well as how long the wine has spent aging on its lees in the cellar prior to release, whether the wine (or some portion of the blend) went through malolactic fermentation and the date of disgorgement of the bottle that I am tasting. With non-vintage bottlings, if information was provided about the blend of different vintages included in the cuvée and the relative age of base wines and reserve wines, I have included that as well in the tasting note on the wine. I have also tried to include the village of origin for the producer, as this is usually fairly useful information for the smaller growers. With the bigger houses, who are often sourcing their grapes from a much wider geographic area, this is obviously of less utility, but for the small growers, even if they are sourcing grapes from a number of villages, one can reasonably assume that their vineyard sources are all within a fairly short distance of their own home village. I have also included notes on a few of the *Grandes Marques*' cuvées that I have tasted both here in the US and in France, as it used to be (and still is perhaps?) the case that the larger houses would have slightly different blends for different markets.

Champagne Jacques Selosse

At the end of May, the Rare Wine Company held the second of its series of Champagne Jacques Selosse dinners here in New York and I was extremely pleased to be home at that time and able to attend this seminal tasting. I have long admired the wines of Anselme Selosse, but having not yet had the pleasure of visiting the domaine, my tasting experience with his superb wines was not anywhere as deep as I would like it to be. However, this superb dinner tasting helped fill in quite a few holes and should assuage my thirst a bit until I have time to visit Monsieur Selosse in Champagne. For those who may not already be aware, Anselme Selosse has really been one of the architects of so many of the important changes that have been percolating along in Champagne over the last decade or two, with the pursuit of better and more sustainable viticulture, lower yields and less interventionist winemaking in the cellar all improvements that can be traced back to his arrival at the helm his father's domaine in 1980. Prior to returning to the family Champagne house, Anselme Selosse had trained in Burgundy- most notably at Domaine Leflaive and Domaine Coche-Dury- before taking over the family property, and he arrived back in Champagne committed to more natural vineyard husbandry and respect for terroir in the wines of his region- which heretofore had been a region that was really the bastion of the master blender. He immediately began putting his philosophy into practice, cutting back yields, eschewing chemical treatments for the vines, beginning to barrel ferment all of his base wines, using solely indigenous yeasts and aging the wines on their fine lees in cask for an extended period of time prior to bottling. He had been blessed in that his father already had

superb holdings in the Côte des Blancs grand cru villages of Avize, Cramant and Oger, so he had some great terroirs with which to get started on his project. Still, these were fairly revolutionary moves at the time in the region, and not a few of the Champenois thought he was completely off his rocker, but the quality of his wines began to speak for themselves and people soon began to take notice.

Monsieur Selosse was open to experimentation in those early days (and still is by all reports, though many of his methods have now been fine-tuned and some of the wilder stylistic swings of earlier days will likely not be repeated). I have to confess that I was not particularly impressed with the first wine I ever tasted from Anselme Selosse, which must be going back close to twenty years now, as the cuvée had been raised in used sherry barrels, and though there was a lovely bottle of bubbly under the sherry wood aromatics and flavors, it was my distinct impression that it was never destined to get out from under those sherry nuances and was more in the “interesting” camp than inspiring. A friend had gotten the bottle shipped in directly from Paris for this particular Champagne tasting, as the Selosse wines were not available in the US back then, and it was not quite up to expectations we all shared, as Anselme Selosse had already gotten quite a bit of “buzz” going for his methods in Paris. But, that was a long time ago and things have become far more refined in the cellars since then, with less new wood used for the wines these days (and happily no used sherry barrels)- the early releases from the estate could often be quite new oaky in style, with obviously superb quality, but still decidedly woody in personality. But things have continually been fine-tuned here over the years and those early wines really bear little resemblance to the consistently magical bottles that Anselme Selosse crafts today. Not that this is any secret, as the wines of Champagne Jacques Selosse are now greatly sought after and quite costly, with the wine world’s thirst for these exquisite bottlings far outstripping their availability. These days it is quite clear that Anselme Selosse is at the top of his game and one of the most exciting producers in the firmament of Champagne.

The Selosse lineup today starts with his Brut Initial cuvée which is a Blanc de Blancs bottling that always hails from vineyards in the three grand cru villages of Avize, Oger and Cramant. This bottling is comprised of three successive vintages, which are assembled and then aged on their fine lees for five years prior to disgorgement and preparation for shipping. The wine is all barrel fermented, mostly in a range of 225 liter to 600 liter barrels, and only ten percent of the wood is new these days for the Brut Initial bottling (which is down a bit from days of yore). Typically the grapes for this bottling come from the lower slopes of the Selosse vineyards in these villages, whereas he reserves the production for the upper slopes for a different non-vintage cuvée- the Brut Originale. As Monsieur Selosse’s philosophy is most interested in respecting his terroirs and allowing them to speak through his wines, he does not often produce vintage-dated bottlings, as he believes that the terroir is most truly found in the wine when it is allowed to crystallize through the prism of several different vintages in the blend. His top cuvée reflects this to the utmost, as it is called Cuvée Substance and has been made from the same two parcels of vines since 1986 in a solera system that still retains some of the wine from that first vintage of 1986! The “solera” for the Cuvée Substance bottling is refreshed each year, after approximately twenty-two percent of the contents are taken off for a new bottling, with vins clairs that have already received one year’s élevage in barrel prior to being added into the solera. These days, Monsieur Selosse keeps his Cuvée Substance solera aging in an old cement tank- the wine was previously held in an epoxy-lined stainless steel tank in his old

winery. The Cuvée Substance is aged for six years on the lees once a new cuvée is bottled off from the solera prior to its preparation for market. The wine continues still to be produced solely from the original two vineyard parcels in Avize that have been this wine's foundation since 1986.

In 2010, Monsieur Selosse began another series of bottlings to further expand his exploration of various great terroirs in Champagne, as he put together a six cuvée set of single vineyard bottlings from some of the greatest vineyards in grand cru villages in Champagne. All the bottlings are from a single vineyard, which are aged six years on their lees prior to disgorgement. In 2010, there were only a pair of the wines available (both from the 2003 vintage), but by September of 2012, all six were ready for release- this time from a base of the 2005 vintage. The six bottlings are split between three pinot noir-based cuvées and three chardonnay-based cuvées, each from a great lieu à dit in one of the top villages in the Champagne coterie of grand crus. These include La Côte Faron from Ay (pinot noir), Le Bout de Clos from Ambonnay (pinot noir), Sous le Mont from Mareuil-sur-Ay (pinot noir) and the chardonnay-based Blanc de Blancs bottlings of Le Chemin de Châlons (Cramant), Les Chantereines (Avize) and Les Carelles (Mesnil). These Lieux à Dits bottlings are made in extremely small quantities, but happily, the entire range from the base of the 2005 vintage was presented at the Rare Wine Company tasting. I should note that although several of these wines are primarily based on a single vintage, there is no indication on their labels that they are vintage-dated bottlings, with the only clue being the date of disgorgement (just deduct seven from the year of disgorgement to arrive at the vintage from which the base wine hails). Eventually, these wines too will all have their own soleras of reserve wines.



Anselme Selosse in his vineyards in Avize (photo courtesy of Roberto Petronio).

All six of the Lieux à Dits bottlings at our tasting were truly remarkable wines and seem a logical extension of Monsieur Selosse's championing of terroir in his Champagne. As I touched upon above, the first two releases of these bottlings were entirely from the 2003 vintage and hailed from the "La Côte Faron" vineyard in the village of Ay and the "Les Carelles" chardonnay vineyard in Mesnil-sur-Oger. The 2004 vintage saw these first two bottlings augmented by two more pinot noir-based cuvées: "Sous le Mont" from Mareuil-sur-Ay and "Le Bout de Clos" from Ambonnay. Additionally, the 2004 vintage saw the second production from the first two single vineyard bottlings of La Côte Faron and Les Carelles (presumably a blend of both 2003 and 2004 base wines, as Monsieur Selosse ultimately plans to have all of these wines made from dedicated solera-type cuvées as well in the spirit of his Cuvée Substance). In late 2004, additional parcels were purchased in Le Chemin de Châlons (Cramant) and Les Chantereines (Avize) to add two more chardonnay-based terroirs to the series of Lieux à Dits bottlings, so that in the following year of 2005, Monsieur Selosse brought the roster of terroir-dedicated bottlings up to its present day number of six. While I am not one hundred percent certain that this is the case, it would seem that the last two single vineyard bottlings (Le Chemin de Châlons and Les Chantereines) that we sampled at our tasting were solely from the 2005 vintage, while the Sous le Mont and Le Bout de Clos releases would have been comprised of a blend of 2004 and 2005 vintage vins clairs, and the original two bottlings of La Côte Faron and Les Carelles would have been made up of three vintages of vins clairs by this time ('03, '04 and '05). However, this assumption does not make any allowance for the size of each harvest, so it may be that there was not sufficient production in either 2003 or 2004 from the earlier cuvées to get the soleras started right out of the blocks. It remains to be seen if Anselme Selosse will be able to find a great terroir or two planted to pinot meunier to complete his range of Lieux à Dits bottlings in the future, but I for one would be very, very excited to see this come to pass, as this variety seems to be getting more and more interesting with each passing year in Champagne. As the notes below will attest, the Rare Wine Company event was a unique and very memorable evening that offered the rare possibility to sample so many different Champagne Jacques Selosse cuvées in a single sitting. Given the sad events of the robbery of Monsieur Selosse's cellar earlier this year (which many readers will already be aware), opportunities to taste so many Selosse wines together are going to be even harder to come by over the next several years, and may also be fraught with concerns of fraudulent bottles as well, as the thieves also got away with a fairly sizable batch of unused labels in addition to stocks of precious bottles.

Brut Initial NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse (disgorged 2012)

The Brut Initial bottling from Anselme Selosse is raised in about ten percent new oak these days, with the wine made from a blend of fruit from Avize, Oger and Mesnil. It is always comprised of a blend of three successive vintages, with the wine aged five years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, so this bottling is based on the vintages of 2005, 2006 and 2007. The new release offers up a beautiful and still quite youthful nose of pear, apple, orange peel, brioche, chalky minerality and just a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tight out of the blocks, with a good core of fruit, brisk acids, delicate *mousse* and very good, but not great length on the focused finish. This wine will be even better with a few years bottle age to allow the structure to blossom a bit. Fine juice. 2014-2025+. **92.**

Brut Initial NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse (disgorged 2011?)

I had the pleasure to run across this wine on a wine list in Nuits St. Georges in June, and it seemed to have been a bit longer in the cellar here than the bottle we tasted here in New York

in May- though I did not note the actual disgorgement date during our meal in Nuits. The lovely and complex nose really blossoms as the wine comes up a bit in temperature with time in the glass, eventually revealing a lovely blend of apple, pear, warm bread, a very complex base of minerality, lemon peel and that telltale smokiness of Selsosse in the upper register (which is what makes me think this has at least an additional year's worth of bottle age over the above wine). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very elegant, with a lovely core, crisp acids, fine *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the wide open and superb finish. A lovely bottle. 2013-2023. **92.**

Brut Initial NV- Champagne Jacques Selsosse (disgorged 2003)

This older version of Brut Initial would have been based on the vintages of 1996, 1997 and 1998 and was probably raised in a bit more new oak than the current release, as it has been Monsieur Selsosse's policy to back down a bit on the amount of new wood he uses for this bottling. This wine gives a wonderful picture of just how good the new release will be with a decade's worth of bottle age, as the wine is absolutely singing today. The nose is a lovely, mature blend of rye toast, baked apples and peaches, a lovely, complex base of chalky soil tones, smoke, almonds and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully mellowed by maturity, with a fine core of fruit, sound framing acids, still a wisp of *mousse* and really lovely length and grip on the poised and classy finish. This is probably getting towards the end of its fine plateau of maturity and would be best drunk up over the next five or six years. A very refined and complex bottle. 2013-2018+? **92.**

Brut Tradition NV- Champagne Jacques Selsosse (disgorged 2001)

Brut Tradition was the old name for the Brut Initial, so this is in essence the same cuvée as the two wines above, though with a bit more bottle age and hailing back to the vintages of 1994, 1995 and 1996 as its base wines. This too is drinking beautifully, wafting from the glass in a very classy blend of toasted almond, baked peaches, a touch of lavender, brioche, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with a fine core, impeccable focus and balance, gentle *mousse*, good acids and really lovely length and grip on the complex and *à point* finish. This seems to have a bit more spine of acidity to it than the Brut Initial disgorged in 2003 and I would expect this wine to keep a bit longer as a result. A superb bottle of mature bubbly. 2013-2020+. **93.**

Cuvée Substance Brut NV - Champagne Jacques Selsosse (disgorged 2011)

The current release of Cuvée Substance from Anselme Selsosse, which was disgorged in 2011, is absolutely superb, offering up a deep and pure nose of apple, tart pear, rye toast, gentle leesy overtones, a very complex base of chalky soil, a touch of summer truffles and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with lovely acids and mineral drive, delicate *mousse* and simply superb length and grip on the focused and racy finish. While, structurally, this is early days for this bottling, its unique solera system has also given the wine a lovely patina of maturity on both the nose and palate that already makes it very attractive for drinking today- though I would be very much inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for at least three or four more years and really let it blossom! Great juice. 2013-2030. **94+.**

Cuvée Substance Brut NV - Champagne Jacques Selsosse (disgorged 2001)

The Cuvée Substance disgorged back in 2001 has really developed lovely secondary layers of more mature elements on both the nose and palate with the additional decade of bottle age and is drinking at its apogee today. The gorgeous, mature bouquet offers up scents of apple, quince, a touch of hazelnut, salty soil tones, wheat toast, a dollop of white mushroom, nutskins and that signature Selsosse smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied, complex and *à point*, with fine mid-palate intensity, gentle, teasing *mousse*, and impressive focus and balance on the fully mature and very long finish. This wine is getting towards the far side of its plateau of maturity, and though it will continue to drink beautifully for many more years to come, its bubbles are starting to dissipate and for those who demand a fair bit of effervescence in their mature Champagne, I would plan to drink up this wine over the next handful of years. It will no doubt continue to drink well far beyond that point, but it will probably be almost a still wine at that point. For my palate, I would opt for drinking it up in the next six or seven years. 2013-2020+. **93.**

1999 Brut Millésime- Champagne Jacques Selosse (served from magnum)

Anselme Selosse really likes to make sure he harvests physiologically ripe fruit and picks later than most of his neighbors. In the 1999 vintage, this may have been a bit of a mixed blessing, as he certainly got his grapes ripe in this year, as he picked very, very late, but the result was that his 1999 Brut Millésime bottling came in at a rather remarkable (particularly for Champagne!) alcohol level of 14.2 percent. Additionally, he used no SO₂ during the *elevage* or bottling for this wine, which combined with the ripeness of the grapes would make one expect that it would not be a great candidate for the cellar, and yet the wine still has several years of life in it. That said, it is a touch heavy-handed in terms of ripeness, offering up a complex nose of peach, apple, beeswax, a touch of lavender, soil tones and a bit of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, but not particularly elegant, with a good core and soil drive, modest *mousse* and a long, but slightly plodding finish. This is just too ripe for my paradigm of Champagne, and while it is easy to respect this wine, there are a great many other Selosse bottlings that I love far more than this slightly heavy-handed wine. But, not all experiments can turn out swimmingly! It is still a perfectly acceptable bottle of bubbly, but in the rarefied air of Selosse Champagne, this is a bit of disappointment. All the grapes for this bottlings came from the family's Avize parcels in Les Chantereines and La Maladrine. 2013-2020. **88.**

Selosse Lieux à Dits Bottlings- Pinot Noir-Based

La Côte Faron Brut NV (Aÿ)- Champagne Jacques Selosse (disgorged 4/12)

La Côte Faron was one of the first two of the *lieux à dits* bottlings to be released by Anselme Selosse, as he first produced this wine from the 2003 vintage and released it in 2010. So this bottling, from the 2005 vintage, is the third in the series from La Côte Faron and it an absolutely beautiful bottle of bubbly. The *cépages* is one hundred percent pinot noir, and the wine was aged six years on its lees prior to disgorgement and release. The bouquet is a beautiful blend of white peach, smoke, bread dough, dried flowers and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and an utterly refined example of Aÿ fruit (wines from this village can sometimes be a bit more broad-shouldered in style, without quite this same elegance), with a lovely core of fruit, crisp acids, delicate *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the focused and beautifully complex finish. This is already drinking marvelously well, but should age long and gracefully. 2013-2030. **94.**

Le Bout du Clos Brut NV (Ambonnay)- Champagne Jacques Selosse (disgorged 4/12)

While the *lieu à dit* bottling from Ambonnay, the Le Bout du Clos is ostensibly a pinot noir cuvée, the parcel used by Monsieur Selosse actually includes ten percent chardonnay as well, which was vinified together with the pinot noir to produce this stunning wine. The brilliantly complex bouquet soars from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, a touch of tangerine, kaleidoscopic minerality, a touch of warm bread, and floral tones redolent of peonies.

On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly refined, with a great core, magical complexity, elegant *mousse* and a very, very long and stunning finish. This is one of the greatest wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Anselme Selosse! 2013-2030. **97.**

Sous Le Mont Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)- Champagne Jacques Selosse (disgorged 1/12)

The Sous Le Mont vineyard in the village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ is on the same hillside as Clos des Goisses, with Sous Le Mont on the east-facing side of the hill, where it receives the morning sun. There is a strong vein of magnesium in the soil here, which lends a nice sense of youthful reserve to the wine. The Selosse bottling is outstanding, offering up a nose that shows just a whisper of oak in its mélange of tart orange, quince, smoky overtones, a touch of lavender and a brilliant base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and the most powerfully-styled of these three pinot noir-based bottlings, with a superb core, crisp acids, delicate bubbles and outstanding length and grip on the focused finish. This really could use a few years'-worth of bottle age to blossom from behind its structural elements- it will be outstanding. 2015-2030+. **93.**



Budbreak in the chardonnay vines in Mesnil-sur-Oger.

Selosse Lieux à Dits Bottlings- Chardonnay-Based

Le Chemin de Châlons Brut NV (Cramant)- Champagne Jacques Selosse

Le Chemin de Châlons has a plain southerly exposition and this wine is absolutely lovely on both the nose and palate. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, apple,

chalky soil tones, *crème patissière*, a gently base of oak and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with a great core of fruit, stunning focus, nascent complexity, pinpoint bubbles and simply superb length and grip on the bright and highly-nuanced finish. This is another absolute showstopper, but give it a few years to unwind structurally before having at it in earnest. 2016-2030+. **94+**.

Les Chantereines Brut NV (Avize)- Champagne Jacques Selosse

The Selosse family has owned their parcel in the vineyard of Les Chantereines since 1960, so this is one of the oldest plots of vines in the family patrimony. The vineyard is very steep and has an easterly exposition and enjoys the morning sun. This particular bottling is showing a bit more new oaky on the nose than any of these other *lieux à dits*, offering up scents of pear, almond, warm bread, a complex, chalky base of soil, gentle smokiness and a youthful touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine *mousse*, lovely focus and balance, crisp acids and a nice touch of nuttiness adding dimension on the long finish. This is a lovely wine that only scores a tad lower than the above because of the extra touch of oak on the nose- though this may dissipate with bottle age. 2013-2025+. **93**.

Les Carelles Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)- Champagne Jacques Selosse

Les Carelles sweeps along a hillside, with its exposition swinging from due east to due south, so it gets a lovely blend of morning and afternoon sun over the course of the day. The Champagne Selosse bottling from this vineyard is absolutely stunning and my favorite of this series of chardonnay-based cuvées (by a small margin!), as it offers up a brilliant bouquet of pear, apple, a touch of walnut, plenty of smokiness, orange peel, wonderfully complex minerality, a bit of nutskin and a gentle base of buttery new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very soil-driven in personality, with a great core, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the focused and dancing finish. A gorgeous bottle of bubbly! 2013-2030+. **95**.

Non-Champagne Sparkling Wines

In this section I have tried to include all sparkling wines I have tasted recently from regions outside of Champagne, with the exception of the beautiful Cava bottlings I have tasted of late from members of the “Six Percent Club”. I will keep notes back on those wines for another feature on Cava in one of the upcoming issues, rather than add them in here- as this report is already rather “meaty” with its depth of tasting notes.

Parigot Blanc de Blancs Brut NV Crémant de Bourgogne

The new release of the Parigot Blanc de Blancs is comprised of a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and twenty percent aligoté, and offers up a very pretty and vibrant bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of warm bread, soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, young and snappy, with moderate-size bubbles, snappy acids and a bit of a grassy streak on the backend from the aligoté. Not bad, but will be even better with a year of bottle age to allow its youthful acidity to mellow out a bit. 2014-2018. **84+**.

Parigot Blanc Tradition Brut NV Crémant de Bourgogne

The “Blanc Tradition” bottling from Parigot relies on forty percent pinot noir in the blend, to go along with forty percent chardonnay and twenty percent Aligoté. The wine offers up a bit more aromatic complexity than the Parigot Blanc de Blancs, wafting from the glass in a mix of orange zest, apple, bread dough, stony minerality, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On

the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and youthfully brisk, with moderately-large bubbles, good focus and balance and pretty good length and grip on the finish. This is not overly complex on the palate, but the finish is a bit more elegant than in the Blanc de Blancs and this is already a good drink and does not cry out for more bottle age. Good, solid sparkler. 2013-2018. **86.**

Parigot Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Bourgogne

The Parigot Blanc Rosé Brut NV Crémant de Bourgogne is made up one hundred percent pinot noir and offers up a lovely color of bright salmon. The bouquet is a stylish blend of orange, strawberry, wheat toast, a touch of soil and a touch of smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and honest, with a good core, sound, if slightly coarse *mousse*, and good length and grip on the crisp and youthful backend. The wine is not totally precise on the finish, but there is good stuffing here and a nice bounciness. 2013-2017. **85.**

Parigot Bourgogne Tradition Rouge Brut NV Crémant de Bourgogne

This sparkling red wine is comprised entirely of pinot noir and is really a very pretty, black cherry color, with lovely, violet *mousse* drifting on the surface when one pours a flute. The nose is really quite fine, offering up scents of black cherries, a touch of cassis, smoke and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch four-square, but with good freshness and bounce, fine depth at the core, sound *mousse* and even a bit of tannin perking up on the finish. Ironically, this wine really needs a year or two of bottle age to let the tannin fall away, though it might make an interesting pairing with steaks on the grill on a really hot July evening. Intriguing juice. 2014-2018+? **85.**

Patrick Piuze “Non-Dosé” Brut Nature NV Crémant de Bourgogne

The current release of Patrick Piuze’s “Non-Dosé” Crémant de Bourgogne is a superb wine that transcends its appellation. The bright and complex nose offers up scents of pear, lemon, brioche, chalky minerality and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, reasonably refined *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. It is only in the quality of the *mousse* here that one realizes that we are not in Champagne, and perhaps the wine is not quite as long as it would be if hailing from Champagne. But, other than these two minor considerations, this is pretty convincing bubbly and I would certainly be delighted if somewhere down the line, Patrick tries his hand at true Champagne, as I think he might just do something really special. 2013-2020. **89.**

Roederer Estate Brut NV (Anderson Valley)

The current release of the non-vintage Brut from Roederer Estate is comprised of a blend of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir, sees virtually no malolactic fermentation and spent two years aging on the lees prior to disgorgement. Like the wines produced at the flagship estate in Reims, reserve wines for this blend are aged in older *foudres*. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a fine blend of apple, tart orange, a fair bit of toastiness (from a bit of *battonage*?), warm biscuits and a nice base of Mendocino soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles, fairly brisk acids and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. The acids here are a bit more piercing than in the Roederer versions from Champagne, and the closing notes on the finish are not quite as elegant, but the same *savoir-faire* is very much in evidence in this finely-crafted California sparkling wine. 2013-2018+. **88+.**

Roederer Estate Brut Rosé NV (Anderson Valley)

The *cépages* of the Roederer Estate Brut Rosé is the exact inverse of the non-Rosé bottling- sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, and the wine is also aged two years on the lees and sees no malo. The color is a lovely, pale salmon and the bouquet is a fine

blend of melon, white cherries, fresh-baked bread, a nice base of soil, a touch of spice tones and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a good core, quite elegant *mousse*, and lovely focus and grip on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is one of the best non-Kalin sparkling rosés I have ever tasted from California. 2013-2018+. **90.**

2004 Roederer Estate “l’Hermitage” Vintage Brut (Anderson Valley)

The 2004 Roederer Estate “l’Hermitage” Vintage Brut is truly a superb bottle of bubbly and certainly the equal of a great many well-made bottlings from Champagne proper. The 2004 vintage includes four percent reserve wine that had been aged for five and half years *sur lies* prior to inclusion to this cuvée, with the *cépages* this year fifty-two percent chardonnay and forty-eight percent pinot noir. I could not find any information on the amount of time this wine spent on the lees or what its *dosage* was this year, but it has clearly been aged for quite some time in the cellars prior to release. The bouquet is deep, complex and very sophisticated in its aromatic presentation of apple, pear, a touch of pastry cream, a lovely base of alluvial soil tones, brioche, gentle smokiness and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and very refined, with an excellent core, elegant *mousse*, crisp, beautifully integrated acids and stunning length and grip on the focused and classy finish. A paradigm of California sparkling wine. 2013-2025+. **93+.**

Scharffenberger “Brut Excellence” NV (Anderson Valley)

The Scharffenberger “Brut Excellence” is comprised of a blend of two-thirds chardonnay and one-third pinot noir and undergoes a full malolactic fermentation. The wine is aged for two years on its lees prior to disgorgement and preparation for the market. The new release offers up a fine nose of apple, tangerine, warm bread, a touch of hazelnut and a nice base of sandy soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully snappy, with a solid core, pretty good *mousse* and good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is not bad, but it seems to me that another year on the lees would really have helped this wine soften up a bit and made it more ready for the market. It is well-made and will drink well with a bit of bottle age, but it is rather young at the present time. 2015-2020+. **86.**

Scharffenberger “Brut Rosé Excellence” NV (Anderson Valley)

The Scharffenberger “Brut Rosé Excellence” is a blend of fifty-one percent pinot noir and forty-nine percent chardonnay, with three percent of the pinot noir included still wine. The wine is aged for two years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The current release is a very light salmon color and offers up a high-toned and vibrant nose of tart strawberries, tangerine, bread dough, sandy soil tones, orange peel and a very delicate whiff of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and youthfully high-strung, with a moderate core, rather coarse *mousse* and a reasonably long, rather simple finish. It has been a few years since I last tasted wines from Scharffenberger, but I remember them as superior to this bottling. 2013-2020. **84.**

Brut Nature, Brut Zero and Extra Brut

I continue to see more and more Extra Brut bottlings each year on the market from Champagne, and it is my impression that the quality of these wines is getting better with each passing year, as producers who did not previously focus much on these lower-dosage (or no dosage) bottlings begin to gain more experience with them. That said, this is still not my favorite style of Champagne, as I still find a good Brut bottling with a well-managed dosage slightly more to my tastes (this is not a defense for the overtly sweet dosage bottlings that we used to see

a lot more of a decade ago, where the sweetness was being used to try and cover up inferior, young and fairly green juice in the blends)- and, I continue to prefer Brut bottlings both early on, where I find the dosage does an admirable job of buffering some of the youthful acidity of bottles I choose to drink on the young side- and also, I continue to maintain a sense that dosage is one of the primary sources for perceptions of fruit in Champagnes that have been aged for extended periods of time (ten plus years). As I cellar a lot of Champagne and really do enjoy the combination of evolved fruit flavors with the other nutty and honeyed nuances that emerge (layered over beautifully complex soil tones) with long-term aging of Champagne, I continue to be a fan of Brut bottlings for most of my cellaring needs. It may well be that lower dosage bottlings will also have plenty of fruit aromatics and flavors at ten to twenty years of age- I have simply yet to have any examples where this is the case, as I am only now beginning to put Extra Brut bottles in the cellar and tracking how they evolve with longer-term aging. It is quite clear that my perception of the role of judicious dosage in the cellaring of Champagne may evolve as I have had a chance to follow these Extra Brut bottlings over the coming years, but today I simply do not have any first-hand positive experience on how these wines will age over the long haul that would have me leaning towards using more lower dosage bottlings for my own long-term aging needs. It will be interesting to see how the Extra Bruts in my cellar play out over time, but I get the strong sense that many of the strongest proponents for lower or no dosage in their bubbly are folks who tend to drink the wines on the early side in any case, rather than lay them down for extended periods of time. From the prism of my very modest experience with cellaring of Extra Bruts and the like, I continue to feel that most of the wines from this genre need a couple years out from release to allow the less well-buffered acids to relax a bit on the palate and the wines to fully blossom from behind their structural elements. But, from that point on, I do not today have any real sense of how long the wines will keep and at what point they may reach their summits, so projected drinking windows for these wines are even more speculative in nature than with other types of wines.

Champagne Marie Courtin “Résonance” Extra Brut NV (Polisot) Disgorged May 2013

Champagne Marie Courtin was founded in 2005 by Dominique Moreau (who named the house after her grandmother) and is located in the Côte des Bar. Madame Moreau’s vision is to produce single vineyard, single varietal wines that are also the product of a single vintage (though this does not appear on the label and one needs to infer this from the date of disgorgement, by deducting three years to see from what year the wine hails). All of Madame Moreau’s vineyards have been farmed *biodynamically* since 2007. The estate’s Résonance bottling is entirely pinot noir sourced from thirty-five to forty year old vines in Polisot, with the wine fermented in stainless steel tanks with indigenous yeasts. The new release (which hails from the 2010 vintage) is a young and very fine wine, but also bone dry and really crafted for non-*dosé* purists (at least out of the blocks). The bouquet is a refined and beautifully focused blend of apples, quince, gentle smokiness, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a touch of lime blossom and a gentle topnote of warm bread. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and a very long, nascently complex and snappy finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Extra Brut that will be even better with a couple of years of bottle age. 2013-2025. 93.

Champagne Marie-Courtin “Résonance” Extra Brut NV (Polisot) Disgorged March 2013

I believe that this version of Champagne Marie-Courtin’s “Résonance” bottling was based on the 2009 vintage, and was a later disgorgement of that cuvée, and the above tasting note

is the first release of this wine based on the 2010 vintage. This is a very well-balanced and classy bottle of Extra Brut, without any of the youthful structural severity that can sometimes plague wines at this level of *dosage*. The bouquet is a fine blend of lemon, tart pear, chalky soil, bread dough, a touch of fresh nutmeg, orange zest and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nicely focused, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, bright, well-integrated acids, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is cut in the style of a suave middleweight with plenty of complexity. Good juice that will continue to improve with further bottle age. 2013-2023+. **91+**.

Nathalie Falmet Brut Nature NV (Rouvres les Vignes) Disgorged February 2013

Nathalie Falmet is a young and clearly up and coming *vigneron* in the Côte des Bar, and her Brut Nature is produced entirely from pinot noir. The wine only spends two years on the lees, which makes it a pretty young puppy when it leaves the cellar and the current release is a young and promising wine that still needs a bit of cellaring to fully blossom. The vibrant nose offers up scents of sweet apples, quinine, stony minerality, bread dough, orange oil and an exotic topnote of bergamot. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and light on its feet, with a good core, racy acids, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. Understandably, this does not have a lot of lees-derived tones (having only spent two years awaiting disgorgement) to its aromatic or flavor profile, but it is long, balanced and should be very interesting with some bottle age to allow secondary layers to emerge. 2014-2025+. **89+**.

Pierre Gerbais “Prestige” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Celles-sur-Ource)

The Prestige Extra Brut from Champagne Pierre Gerbais is actually a Blanc de Blancs bottling, though this does not appear on the label. The wine offers up really lovely complexity on the nose, but is a touch austere out of the blocks on the backend of the palate. The fine bouquet is a mix of tart apple, a touch of pear, a lovely base of minerality, bread dough and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core and pinpoint bubbles, but also a bit of a brusque finish that seems to me to be crying out for just a touch more *dosage* (the wine received five grams per liter) to buffer the backend snippiness. This wine should blossom with a bit of bottle age and perhaps I am underestimating it a touch, but I really like the balance of their “Cuvée de Réserve” (please see below) decidedly better. 2014-2025. **87-89+?**

Pierre Gerbais “l’Audace” Brut Nature NV (Celles-sur-Ource)

These samples from Pierre Gerbais were my first experience with the estate, and while all the wines are very well-made, the Extra Brut and Brut Nature bottlings struck me as awfully austere and of most interest to absolute purists for the non-*dosage* style of bubbly. The bouquet on the l’Audace Brut Nature is truly exceptional, offering up scents of tangerine, warm bread, a very complex base of soil, apples and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very minerally in personality, with pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and core, but snappy cut really impinging on the pleasure quotient (at least for me) on the brusque, bracing finish. Perhaps some bottle age will mellow this wine’s backend out enough to calm its edginess, but today, it is really a wine for purists and to my palate would really have benefitted from a judicious touch of buffering *dosage* to calm its aggressive *nervosité* a bit. The raw materials here are exemplary, but will it ever really come together? 2015-2030+? **87-90+?**

Godmé Père et Fils Extra Brut NV (Verzenay)

The Godmé Père et Fils non-vintage bottling of Extra Brut is really a lovely wine that does a beautiful job of balancing all of its constituent components at its much lower level of *dosage*. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, lemon, stony minerality, a

gentle touch of smokiness, bread dough and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a rock solid core, very elegant *mousse*, snappy acids and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly focused and very classy finish. Like many Extra Bruts, this will certainly benefit from a couple of years in the cellar to allow its structure to relax a bit more. Most impressive. 2015-2030+. **92+**.

Huré Frères Extra Brut “Réserve” NV (Ludes)

The new release of the Huré Frères Extra Brut “Réserve” is a lovely wine that is bone dry, with three grams per liter of residual sweetness, but has its racy structure nicely ameliorated by thirty-six months of aging in the family domaine’s cellars prior to disgorgement and release. The *cépages* is a blend of fifteen percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot noir and forty-five percent pinot meunier. The bright and classy bouquet offers up a mélange of apple, pear, warm bread, complex soil tones and just a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core, bright and snappy acids, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the youthful, but already quite accessible finish. I tasted several new releases from Huré Frères in preparation for this article, and the non-vintage Extra Brut “Réserve” was clearly the most presentable to those interested in drinking the wine today. A very good Extra Brut. 2013-2025+. **90**.

Huré Frères “Mémoire” Extra Brut NV (Ludes)

The non-vintage Huré Frères “Mémoire” Extra Brut is produced from a blend of ten percent chardonnay and forty-five percent each pinot noir and pinot meunier, with all of the fruit hailing from vineyards on the Montagne de Reims. This is a special bottling that includes a “solera” of older vintages that stretch back more than thirty years, and are used as the reserve wines for this bottling. It is a fairly dry Extra Brut, with three grams per liter of sweetness, with the constituent components having spent one year in *foudre* prior to bottling. The nose is quite good on the wine, with a blend of apple, tart orange, stony minerality, a touch of warm bread and a topnote of citrus peel wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very young, with bracing acids (that perhaps call out for a bit more buffering from a higher *dosage*?), good mid-palate depth, pretty aggressive *mousse* and a young and snappy finish. A bit more bottle age will certainly tame this wine a bit, but there also seems to be a bit of coarseness here that will not ameliorate with further time in the bottle. There is plenty of complexity here, but I would love to see this wine a bit more refined and gentle on the palate. 2015-2025+? **86**.

Jacquesson Cuvée Number 736 Extra Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged November 2012

Jacquesson’s Cuvée 736 is comprised of a blend of fifty-three percent chardonnay, twenty-nine percent pinot noir and eighteen percent pinot meunier and received a very low *dosage* of 1.5 grams per liter. The blend is primarily from the very good 2008 vintage, and the wine is excellent. The bright and vibrant nose is composed of a blend of apple, toasted almond, pear, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with lovely mid-palate depth, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is impressively approachable for a young bottle of Extra Brut and speaks volumes of the skill set of the team in the cellars at Jacquesson. High class juice. 2013-2025+. **92**.

Benoit Lahaye “Violaine” Brut Zero (Bouzy)

The Benoit Lahaye “Violaine” is a zero *dosage*, zero sulfur bottling, but it does not note on the label that it is a Brut Zero cuvée. This particular bottle was based on the 2008 vintage, and seemed slightly dull to me on the nose from its zero sulfur regimen, as it offers up scents of quince, stony soil tones, quinine and leesy tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and a

touch flat, with very modest *mousse*, low acids and a short, clipped, albeit, vinous finish. This seems to be the triumph of form over function, as the wine already seems to be tiring to my palate, and for a wine from 2008, this is just inexcusable. 2013-2015? **85.**

Laherte Frères “Les Empreintes” Brut Nature NV (Chavot)

The Les Empreintes bottling from Laherte Frères includes a sizable percentage of the *Muscate* clone of chardonnay in its blend, which give the wine a very exotic, floral component on the nose. The *cépages* for the wine is forty percent chardonnay, twenty percent chardonnay “*Muscate*”, and twenty percent each pinot noir and pinot meunier, with a significant percentage of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented. The new release is very young, offering up a primary aromatic blend of lemon, quince, a complex base of minerality, orange peel, bread dough and a bit of butter oak influence. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really well-balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a very long, well-balanced and snappy finish. This needs a year or two in bottle to really allow the aromatic elements to blossom fully (there is none of the floral exotica in evidence in the bouquet today that was found in last year’s release, but this will surely come with a bit of bottle age), but the wine is so impeccably well-balanced that it is really already a very good drink on the palate. Fine, fine juice in the making. 2013-2025. **92+.**

Laherte Frères “Les 7” Extra Brut NV (Chavot)

As readers may recall from previous reviews of this bottling, which used to be called “Les Clos” after the vineyard it hails from, the Laherte Frères “Les 7” is comprised of a blend of all seven permitted grape varieties in Champagne: Fromenteau, Arbanne, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc and Petit Meslier. All the grapes are picked and vinified together, with a significant percentage barrel-fermented, and the wine is finished as an Extra Brut. The current release is stunning, offering up a beautifully complex and youthful nose of white peach, lemon, acacia blossoms, bread dough, a lovely base of soil, citrus peel and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core, very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a very long, poised and classy finish that shows a bit of roundness from the wood on the backend. Superb wine. 2013-2030. **93.**

Larmandier-Bernier “Latitude” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged December 2011)

The “Latitude” bottling is the new name for the former “Tradition” bottling from Larmandier-Bernier, with all of the grapes for this bottling hailing from vineyards south of the winery’s home base in Vertus. The new release is a very young wine and really will need some time in the bottle to blossom- except perhaps for Extra Brut purists who revel in the electric charge on the palate of very young, non-*dosé* bubbly. The bouquet is excellent, offering up scents of tart pear, stony minerality, warm bread, smoky overtones and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, snappy and still very young, with slightly coarse *mousse*, fine focus and good length and grip on a finish that closes with some youthful bitterness that will need to be waited out. This is a bit too austere today for my palate, but it could blossom nicely with three or four years of bottle age and may prove even better than my score once it has had a chance to relax a bit structurally. But, at least for now, I prefer the superior balance of the Longitude bottling from Larmandier-Bernier. 2016-2025+. **88+?**

Larmandier-Bernier “Longitude” Extra Brut NV (Disgorged December 2011)

Longitude is the new name for the old “Extra Brut Premier Cru” cuvée from Larmandier-Bernier, with all of the grapes for this bottling hailing either from Vertus or the grand cru villages of Cramant, Avize and Oger. Out of the blocks, the structural elements here seems better buffered than in the Latitude bottling and this wine is a very lovely glass of bubbly right from the

start, offering up an excellent bouquet of apple, pear, brioche, orange zest, chalky soil tones, a touch of *crème patissière* and a gentle topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a fine core, very elegant *mousse*, crisp, buffered acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. This will be even better with a year or two's worth of bottle age as well, but it is already drinking quite well and is an excellent example of Extra Brut. 2014-2025+. 91+.



Laurent-Perrier Ultra Brut NV (Tours-sur-Marne)

Laurent-Perrier's Ultra Brut bottling was the first low *dosage* cuvée that I saw regularly back in the US market, as I was very familiar selling this wine all the way back in the mid-1980s (man, I am getting old). The new release is lovely, offering up a complex and zesty nose of green apple, bread dough, quinine, chalky minerality, lemon peel and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, crisp, very well-integrated acids and fine length and grip on the focused finish. One of the earliest and still one of the best of the low *dosage* cuvées out there. 2013-2025. 91.

Champagne Marion-Bosser Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Premier Cru NV (Hautvillers)

The house of Marion-Bosser is run by the mother-daughter team of Bernadette and Elodie Marion, and their non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut was my first experience with their wines. The wine is very well-made and still a tad on the young side, wafting from the glass in a bright and zesty nose of apple, pear, chalky minerality, a touch of lemon zest, warm biscuits

and apple blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, brisk and focused, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the young and well-balanced finish. The acids here are beautifully buffered by the mid-palate depth, so that even though this is very low in *dosage*, the wine is a delight to drink right out of the blocks. Classy Extra Brut. 2013-2025. **90+**.

Philipponnat “Non-Dosé” Brut Zero NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

I am generally a big fan of the wines being produced at Philipponnat these days, but this bottling of “Non-Dosé” falls into the “good, but not great” camp. The wine offers up a fairly complex nose of green apple, tart orange, quinine, stony minerality and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex, but quite austere, with a good core and refined *mousse*, but a rather brusque personality and a rather bitter backend poking out on the admittedly long and focused finish. To my palate, this would have been an outstanding wine with a bit of buffering *dosage* (one can balance the wine better than this and still not let the *dosage* get in the way of the purity), but it is a bit too severe on the backend for my tastes. A bit of bottle age may help it relax a bit structurally. 2015-2030. **87+?**

Camille Savès Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Bouzy)

I have not yet seen this bottling from Camille Savès in the US market, but really enjoyed a bottle I crossed paths with in France, and I strongly recommend that US importers take a look at this cuvée for the American market. The wine is made up of a blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay- all from the village of Bouzy and is absolutely stellar in quality. The excellent bouquet is a mélange of apple, gently baked peaches, warm bread, a very complex base of soil, blossoming notes of hazelnut and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with lovely and very refined, pinpoint bubbles, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long and utterly poised finish. It is not easy to make a young Extra Brut bottling with this kind of charm and equilibrium right out of the blocks, as this wine is a joy to drink right now and shows all of the structural sophistication to also age with great aplomb. High class juice from this consistently excellent producer. 2013-2025+. **92+**.

Vazart-Coquart Extra Brut NV (Chouilly)

I really like the Extra Brut from Vazart-Coquart, but again, as much as I admire this extremely well-made bottle, I will be reaching for various bottles of their Brut cuvées from my own cellar in the future,, rather than this Extra Brut, as it is just a tad on the austere side for my gentle palate! The bouquet is outstanding, offering up a lovely blend of lemon, tart pear, chalky minerality, a touch of ocean breeze, bread dough and white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, young and snappy, with lovely focus and core, slightly coarse *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the bone-dry and bracing finish. The wine closes with a note of quinine and is in need of a couple of years’ worth of bottle age to soften up a bit on the backend. It is a very well-made example of Extra Brut that may really blossom with some cellaring, and my score could look decidedly conservative in three or four years! 2015-2030+. **89+**.

Jean Velut Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Montgueux)

Denis Velut is now the third generation to run Champagne Jean Velut in the village of Montgueux, which lies in the extreme southern section of the appellation just outside of the city of Troyes. This is a very unique *terroir* for chardonnay in the Côte des Bar, as it is the only place in Champagne where a pure and deep base of limestone is laced with flinty *silex* soils (like one finds in Pouilly-sur-Loire and certain sections of Sancerre). The new release of Monsieur Velut’s Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs is a very fine bottle, offering up a complex nose of pear, warm

bread, a lovely base of those *silex*-infused, chalky soils, a touch of fresh almond and a youthful topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced for Brut Nature, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2013-2025. **91.**

J. L. Vergnon “Eloquence” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The current release of Champagne J. L. Vergnon’s “Eloquence” bottling of Extra Brut was disgorged in May of 2012 and was showing very well at the time of my tastings. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, peach, warm bread, chalky soil tones, citrus zest and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and elegant, with a fine core, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. There is not a hint of austerity here and this wine will drink splendidly from the outset. 2013-2025. **92.**

Sec and Extra Dry Bottlings

Louis Roederer “Carte Blanche” Extra Dry NV (Reims)

This was the first time I had ever tasted the non-vintage Louis Roederer Extra Dry bottling, and I was very impressed with the focus and precision that this wine exudes in its higher level of *dosage*. The nose is a lovely blend of apple, peach, chalky soil tones, bread dough and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, and fine focus and balance on the crisp, moderately sweet finish. There is plenty of minerality and acidity here to frame the residual sweetness on the backend and keep the wine precise and bouncy. A very impressive bottle of Extra Dry. 2013-2020. **91.**

Taittinger “Nocturne” Sec NV (Reims)

Taittinger’s “Nocturne” Sec bottling is made up of a blend of forty percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier this year and was finished with a *dosage* of seventeen grams per liter. The current release was aged four years on the lees prior to disgorgement and offers up a truly lovely and complex bouquet of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, a lovely base of soil tones, a bit of smokiness and a gently musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with elegant *mousse*, a fine core and lovely length and grip on the crisp and gently sweet finish. I love how the acidity and minerality inherent here beautifully buffer the residual sweetness on the backend, so the overall impression is a wine of great harmony that only shows a whisper of fruitiness on the finish. This wine is meant for the close of an evening where Champagne has been served all night long, and where a touch of residual fruitiness will serve as a palate restorative. The current release may well be the finest yet of the Nocturne bottling, which has been consistently well-made since its inception. 2013-2020. **91.**

Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Épernay)

The current release of the Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Blancs is a high-toned and very elegant bottle of Blanc de Blancs. The pretty nose is a blend of lemon, apple, bread dough, a nice dollop of orange zest, chalky soil tones and a bit of youthful lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and zesty, with fine, nascent complexity, crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is very tasty today, but a year or two in the cellar should do wonders

in allowing the structure to relax a bit more and the wine to really blossom. A classic bottle of Blanc de Blancs in the making. 2014-2025. **90+**.

Vincent Carré Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru “Brut Réserve” NV (Trépail)

Vincent Carré’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut Réserve spends five years aging on the lees and the current release was disgorged in November of 2012. The wine is absolutely lovely, delivering a refined and toasty aromatic blend of apple, pear, wheat toast, chalky soil tones, just a whisper of pastry cream, gentle notes of orange zest and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already shows some nice secondary elements from its extended lees aging, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and balance and a long, complex and wide open finish. This is really a superb bottle that is in full bloom, but has the requisite structure to also continue to age very gracefully. Really an impressive bottle. 2013-2025+. **92+**.

A. Chauvet “Cachet Vert” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Tours-sur-Marne)

This was my first experience with the wines of Champagne Chauvet and I was very impressed with their non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. The bouquet is a fine blend of pear, a touch of melon, *crème patissière*, a fine base of gently chalky soil tones, a bit of fresh almond and warm bread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the wide open and elegant finish. I could not find any information on the house’s website about length of aging on the lees, *dosage* or date of disgorgement on this wine, but there is plenty of quality on display here. 2013-2022+. **91+**.

Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Oger)

Demièvre-Ansiot has been bottling wine on their own since the 1982 vintage, but Nicolas Demièvre’s grandfather started the family estate all the way back in the 1930s and for fifty years, this was one of the top suppliers to the *Grandes Marques* in the Côte des Blancs. The new release of the Demièvre-Ansiot non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pear, brioche, a touch of tangerine, *crème patissière*, chalky minerality and a lovely sense of toastiness that I would have guessed came from a bit of barrel fermentation for some of the *vins clairs* included in the blend, but the literature on the domaine states that everything is fermented in small, stainless steel tanks! On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, superb focus and grip, elegant *mousse*, and impressive length on the well-balanced and generous finish. Just a lovely bottle of Blanc de Blancs that is a touch more broad shouldered stylistically than its Oger stable-mate, the José Dhondt non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. 2013-2025+. **91**.

Champagne José Dhondt Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Oger)

The new release of José Dhondt’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling is lovely, offering up a refined and classic nose of pear, delicious apples, chalky soil tones, warm biscuits and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a wide open personality, a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced and zesty finish. A fine bottle of Brut NV. 2013-2025. **90+**.

Hervé Dubois Blanc de Blancs “Brut Réserve” Grand Cru NV (Avize)

The current release of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from Hervé Dubois is a lovely wine, with superb elegance in attendance on both the nose and palate. The wine spent five years on the lees prior to disgorgement in April 2013 and received a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The quite stylish and complex bouquet delivers a mix of apple, pear, spring flowers, bread dough, chalky minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and frothy, with that classic *aperitif* weight of Blanc de Blancs, fine complexity and mid-palate core

and a long, classy and wide open finish. The five years on the lees has really allowed the wine to hit the market with generosity and bounce. I really like this wine, as it shows lovely breed and polish. 2013-2025. **91.**

Gosset “Grand Blanc de Blancs” Brut NV (Épernay)

This was only the second release of Gosset “Grand Blanc de Blancs” that I have tasted and this new cuvée is quickly becoming one of my favorite bottlings of Blanc de Blancs. The beautiful nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, brioche, a wonderfully complex base of soil, gentle notes of pastry cream, incipient smokiness and an exotic topnote of *pain épice*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and complex, with a great core, utterly refined *mousse*, superb focus and grip and outstanding balance on the very long, zesty and elegant finish. Just another stellar cuvée from Gosset! 2013-2030+. **94.**

Henriot Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of Henriot’s consistently excellent non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is a very young wine, but it will be lovely with a bit of bottle age. The fine bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of tart apple, grapefruit, bread dough, chalky minerality, orange peel and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and still quite tight, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, and a long, focused and zesty finish. There is still a bit of backend, youthful bitterness in evidence on the finish that needs to be waited out, so give this wine a year or two in the cellar to soften up and blossom. Ultimately, my score may seem a bit conservative for this wine when it really starts to open up. 2015-2030. **90+.**

Legras & Haas Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Chouilly)

This was my first experience with the wines from the small Champagne house of Legras & Haas, which was created in 1991, with the estate having previously supplied grapes to several of the *Grandes Marques*. The family house is now run by the brothers, Rémi and Olivier Legras, who took over from their father, Lucien in the late 1990s. All of the wines go through malolactic fermentation. The current release of their non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is a very pretty wine that needs a couple of years in the cellar to blossom from behind its racy structural elements, but it will be a fine drink once it softens a bit. The nose delivers a classy mélange of delicious apples, pears, fresh nutmeg, bread dough and a fine base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and frothy, with a good core, brisk acids and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex and still very young finish. Give this wine a couple of years to come into its own, as it will be a lovely and quite classic middleweight once it has opened up a bit more. Good juice. 2015-2030. **90.**

Marcel Moineaux “Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Chouilly)

Marcel Moineaux’s “Cuvée de Réserve” bottling hails from a parcel of fifty year-old chardonnay vines that the family owns in Chouilly. The wine was disgorged in December of 2012, after having spent seven years aging on the lees. This bottling is a blend of fifty percent 2005 vintage fruit and fifty percent reserve wine from the 2004 vintage and received a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and shows lovely development in its mix of warm apple and pear, gently toasted almonds, warm bread, a lovely base of soil tones and a touch of pastry cream. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine acids, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the focused and nicely mature finish. This is at a beautiful place for current drinking, but will have no difficulties holding at least another decade. It is really nice to have a fully mature Grower Champagne available on the market! 2013-2023. **92+.**

Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet” Brut NV (disgorged 12/12)

As I have noted in the past, the Pierre Moncuit Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet is sourced from five hectares of vines that the family owns in Sézanne, rather than from the domaine’s parcels in Mesnil sur Oger. This cuvée undergoes complete malo, is raised entirely in stainless steel and has a *dosage of 9 grams/ per liter*, with the lovely current release based on the 2009 vintage. The wine offers up a superb nose this year, with scents of pear, delicious apples, complex, chalky soil tones, warm biscuits and spring flowers wafting from the flute. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very elegant, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and lovely focus and balance on the long and youthful finish. This is a good drink today, but as I often find with this bottling, a year or two in the cellar will really allow it to start hitting on all cylinders. 2014-2025+. **90+**.

Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger) disgorged 12/12

Pierre Moncuit’s Grand Cru bottling of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs, which all hails from the family’s parcels in Mesnil-sur-Oger, is outstanding and still quite youthful as well. The very pure and classy bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, lemon, chalky minerality, bread dough, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a lovely topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and sports excellent mid-palate depth, with very refined *mousse*, brisk acids and superb length and grip on the beautifully-focused and classy finish. All this beauty needs is a year or two in the cellar to fully unwind. 2014-2030. **91+**.

Serveaux Fils “Cuvée Pur Chardonnay” Brut NV (Passy-sur-Marne)

The new release of Serveaux Fils “Cuvée Pur Chardonnay” is comprised of a base wine of 2007, with twenty percent of the blend hailing from the previous year of 2006. The *dosage* is seven grams per liter for this wine, which offers up a simply superb nose of pear, pastry cream, apple blossoms, brioche and a wonderfully complex base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and rock solid at the core, with very refined *mousse*, brisk acids and simply stunning length and grip on the focused finish that closes with a youthful note of orange peel. I would give this young and superb wine a year or two in the cellar to fully blossom. Great juice. 2015-2030+. **92+**.

Champagne Charlotte De Sousa “Vieilles Vignes” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

Charlotte De Sousa is based in Avize and her old vine non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is excellent, offering up a complex and vibrant nose of pear, delicious apple, *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones, warm bread and a nice topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with youthful complexity, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. There is just a touch of backend bitterness here that will dissipate with a bit more bottle age and this wine should be a really outstanding glass of Blanc de Blancs with a year or two in the cellar. 2014-2025+. **91+**.

Michel Turgay “Réserve Sélection” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

From what I could glean from the internet, the Réserve Sélection bottling from Michel Turgay contains a significant percentage of older reserve wines, with Monsieur Turgay having wines in his cellar that date back thirty years. The current release of Réserve Sélection offers up a deep and toasty nose of apple, peach, fresh-baked biscuits, a lovely base of chalky soil, orange zest and hazelnuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, with a fine layer of mature flavors from the reserve wines, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is a fine bottle that is drinking great right out of the blocks. 2013-2025. **92**.

Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Chouilly)

I was quite surprised to see a lovely new label on this flagship bottling from Vazart-Coquart et Fils, but not surprised at all to see that the high quality here was still front and center. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex mix of pear, delicious apple, citrus peel, smoke, chalky soil tones and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, bright and absolutely rock solid at the core, with crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and very fine length and grip on the focused and classy finish. Another absolutely superb bottle of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs that is loaded with personality. 2013-2025. **91.**

J. L. Vergnon “Conversation” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

As I noted last year, the Vergnon cuvée “Conversation” is produced from the family’s holdings in the three grand cru villages of Avize, Oger and Mesnil-sur-Oger and does not undergo malolactic fermentation. The current release was disgorged in July of 2012 and is really drinking beautifully at the present time, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of apple, a touch of tangerine, brioche, a fine base of limestone minerality and citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and balance and a very long, refined finish that closes with impressive grip. A lovely wine cut from the more high-toned side of Blanc des Blancs. 2013-2025+. **92.**

Non-Vintage Blanc de Noirs Brut and Extra Brut

Egly-Ouriet Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged May 2012

This is the first time I have tasted a non-vintage Blanc de Noirs from Egly-Ouriet, which hails from a parcel of old vine pinot noir in the *lieu à dit* of Les Crayères in Ambonnay. The wine spent fifty-two months on its lees prior to disgorgement, and yet is still a very young wine. The bouquet seems to show some barrel fermentation influence in its aromatic constellation of pear, almonds, brioche, lovely soil tones and a nice touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite young and primary, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, snappy acids, nice mineral drive and a fair bit of oak showing up currently on the long finish. I am not sure how well this wood is going to integrate into the wine with bottle age, but it will need to do so to really get this wine up to the same quality level as the extraordinary Brut NV from Egly-Ouriet this year. It is funny, I find the barrel influence on the nose quite attractive, but on the backend, it is currently quite a distraction and cuts short the lovely minerality here. Time will tell just how good this wine can be. 2015-2030. **87-91+?**

Godmé Père et Fils Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut NV (Verzenay)

The Godmé Père et Fils Blanc de Noirs is made up entirely of pinot noir from the family’s vineyards in Verzenay and the current release is superb, offering up a deep and refined nose of apple, gentle notes of tangerine, wheat toast, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, a touch of hazelnut and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant and light on its feet, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the wide open and very complex finish. This is really a lovely bottle of bubbly. 2013-2020+. **92.**

D. Henriët-Bazin Blanc de Noirs “Grand Cru” Extra Brut NV (Villers-Marmery)

The current release of Henriët-Bazin’s Blanc de Noirs “Grand Cru” Extra Brut was disgorged in February of 2013 and is comprised entirely of pinot noir sourced from the two fine villages of Verzy and Verzenay. Thirty percent of the blend is made up of reserve wines and the cuvée was aged thirty months on the lees prior to disgorgement, so the lion’s share of this bottling hails from the 2010 vintage (unless my math is off). The wine is lovely, wafting from

the glass in a blend of apple, peach, sourdough, lovely soil tones, a nice touch of savory notes and an exotic touch of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good acids, slightly larger than ideal bubbles, and very fine length and grip on the youthful finish. This wine needs a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom, but it is very long on personality and the only thing that keeps its score down a touch is the larger *mousse*. 2015-2025+. **90+**.



Non-Vintage Brut

André Beaufort “Réserve Grand Cru Ambonnay” Brut NV Lot 94-A (disgorged 8-08)

The small house of André Beaufort makes two different bottlings of non-vintage Brut, with this one hailing from the family’s much smaller holdings in the village of Ambonnay. This is a beautiful wine on both the nose and palate, but with a fairly generous *dosage* that may be a tad too sweet for some tasters. The bouquet is deep and vibrant, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of peach, apple, a touch of passion fruit, brioche, stunningly complex minerality, orange blossoms and just a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and laser-like in its focus, with a superb core, utterly refined *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the very precise and mineral-driven finish. I would have loved to have seen this with a touch less *dosage*, but that said, the wine’s riveting complexity and its enormous backend energy still make it an absolute joy to drink. 2105-2035. **93**.

Ayala “Brut Majeur” NV

I really like the style of Ayala’s non-vintage wines, which offer up great purity and nascent complexity in a format that will clearly age well. The most recent release offers up a bright and classy nose of green apple, lemon, bread dough, lovely minerality and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with fine *mousse*, crisp acids and very good focus and grip on the long and youthful finish. This is already a classy bottle of bubbly for early drinking, but this will clearly blossom with a year or two in the cellar to let its structural elements relax a bit and secondary layers of complexity to emerge. A fine bottle. 2013-2025. **91.**

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut NV (Épernay)

The bottle I tasted of the new release of non-vintage Brut Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” seemed like it had just been recently disgorged and was still in a noticeably agitated state and had not yet snapped back into harmonious balance. As I have liked this wine very much in the past, I simply assumed that this wine was out of sorts from a fairly recent disgorgement and did not feel it would be fair to give the wine a score. I will look forward to tasting this wine again in a few months, when it has settled back in.

Billecart-Salmon Brut NV (Mareuil-sur- Aÿ) French Cuvée

I tasted this bottle in Bordeaux in April, and the wine seemed slightly different than the bottling we get here in the states, which would make sense, as most *Grandes Marques* still use slightly different *dosages* for different markets. In any event, this lovely wine offers up scents of green apple, lemon, stony minerality, bread dough and citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a bit drier personality than the US version (at least to my memory), a good core, bright acids, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice, but it comes across as just a touch leaner in style than the US version with (what I assume) its slightly lower *dosage*. 2013-2025+. **90.**

Billecart-Salmon “Sous Bois” Brut NV (Mareuil-sur- Aÿ)

As I noted back in January, this relatively new cuvée of “Sous Bois” from Billecart-Salmon is made up entirely of base wines which were barrel-fermented, though happily in seven or eight year-old barrels, so that the oak influence in the wine is quite subtle. Like the house’s Brut Réserve, the *cépage* here is essentially a one-third each split of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier. The new release of Sous Bois from Billecart is another beautifully made wine, wafting from the glass in a mélange of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, stony minerality and a touch of gently buttery new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, very refined *mousse*, crisp acids and superb length and grip on the gently woody finish. This seems a touch more marked by its oak than last year’s version did—but, I did taste last year’s release about four months later into the year, so perhaps it was just a function of the wine having a bit more time to better absorb its oak component. This is not overtly woody, but I would give it a bit of time in the cellar to allow the oak to become more subtle in its influence. It is a very well-made wine. 2014-2030+. **91+.**

Bollinger “Speciale Cuvée” Brut NV (Aÿ) French Cuvée

I bought this bottle along with the Billecart-Salmon Brut NV (noted above) while in Bordeaux in April of this year, as I was curious to see the difference between this bottling and the US version. This wine is quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a complex bouquet of apple, wheat toast, tart orange, stony minerality and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and youthful, with a good core of fruit, fine acids, elegant *mousse*, and a very long, bouncy and focused finish of unrepentant youth. This

really deserves a year or two in the cellar to blossom from behind its fine structural elements. Good juice. 2014-2030. **91+**.

Bollinger “Speciale Cuvée” Brut NV (Aÿ) American Cuvée

While I am not certain that there are still different bottlings of this wine for different markets, it was certainly the policy of the *Grandes Marques* up until very recently to have slightly different versions of their non-vintage Bruts for various locales. I am guessing that the bottling of Bollinger “Speciale Cuvée” for the American market still has a touch more *dosage* than the French bottling (the US almost always used to get sweeter versions of Brut than other markets), as this seemed to have its steely structural elements just a bit more buffered out of the blocks, and though the two wines are quite similar qualitatively, there is little doubt that for immediate drinking, this is the more pleasurable version than its French counterpart. The bouquet is excellent, offering up scents of apple, warm bread, a touch of orange zest, lovely minerality and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with refined *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and poised finish. To my palate, the *dosage* here is perfectly measured to seamlessly buffer the lovely acidity here and the wine just dances across the palate. High class non-vintage Brut. 2013-2025+. **91+**.

Bernard Brémont “Cuvée Prestige” Grand Cru Brut NV (Ambonnay)

Bernard Brémont’s new release of his “Cuvée Prestige” non-vintage Brut is outstanding, offering up a deep and youthful bouquet of green apple, tart pear, stony minerality, sourdough bread, smoke, a lovely touch of herb tones and a nice topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined, with excellent, nascent complexity, very elegant, pinpoint bubbles, superb focus and grip, zesty acids and a very long, pure and dancing finish. Since the first releases I have tasted from Monsieur Brémont, I have always thought that there was a wisp of Dom Perignon-like aromatics and flavors in this bottling that is very beguiling. This is very high class, utterly refined bubbly and a superb value. 2013-2030+. **93+**.

Le Brun Servenay “Brut Sélection” Grand Cru NV (Avize)

The current offering of “Brut Sélection” from Le Brun Servenay is really a beautiful and vibrant bottle of bubbly, wafting from the glass in a classy bouquet of lemon, tangerine, pear, chalky minerality, incipient notes of pastry cream, warm biscuits and orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully snappy, with a lovely core, superb minerality, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and very refined finish. This is still a young wine, and while it is not inaccessible right now, a year or two of bottle age will really let the structure relax and the wine to fully blossom. Lovely juice. 2014-2030+. **92**.

Vincent Carré Premier Cru Brut NV (Trépail) Disgorged November 2012

The current bottling of Vincent Carré’s non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot noir and was aged fully four years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The *dosage* on this cuvée is eight grams per liter and the wine undergoes full malo. The bouquet is deep, complex and distinctive in its mélange of apple, white peach, bread dough, a beautifully complex base of soil, lime peel and a nice topnote of discreet smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely defined by its *terroir*, with crisp acids, frothy *mousse*, impressive focus and balance and lovely grip on the long and refined finish. I often find Champagne from the Montagne de Reims village of Trépail to be quite understated and classy and this certainly applies to this lovely bottle of non-vintage Brut. This is quite approachable out of the blocks, but additional bottle age will allow this wine to deepen on the palate and unlock its secondary layers of complexity. Fine juice. 2013-2030. **91+**.

R. H. Coutier Grand Cru “Tradition Brut” NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged December 2012

The current release of Coutier’s non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, is primarily based on the 2008 vintage and received a *dosage* of six grams per liter. This has always been one of my favorite grower non-vintage Bruts, and the present version is a beautiful wine, offering up a deep and very refined nose of apple, warm peach, brioche, a nice touch of hazelnut and a very complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and a very long, focused and well-balanced finish. As is customary with this bottling, this is done in a more oxidative style (that harkens back a bit to the old style at Bollinger) and the wine is really lovely in this style. This is good juice that will be even better with a year or two in the cellar and should keep nicely for a decade and a half. It is not quite in the very top division this year, but it is classy and sophisticated juice nonetheless. 2014-2025+. **90+.**

Baron Dauvergne “Cuvée Privilège” Brut NV (Grand Cru- Bouzy)

The new release of Baron Dauvergne’s “Cuvée Privilège” Brut NV is an excellent and quite complex bottle of bubbly, delivering a deep and classy bouquet of apple, tart orange, stony minerality, bread dough, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite stylish, with a fine core, elegant, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, soil-driven and vibrant finish. This has the depth of Bouzy pinot noir very much in evidence in its blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, but stays light on its feet and very elegant at the same time. High class juice. 2013-2025. **92.**

Barone Dauvergne “Oiel de Perdrix” Brut NV (Grand Cru- Bouzy)

It seems pretty clear that when I tasted this wine last year, I caught the wine relatively soon after its disgorgement and before it had the opportunity to snap back totally into balance. This was not the case this year, as the wine was showing brilliant at the Selection Pas Mal tasting, offering up a lovely, very pale blush color and a first class bouquet of melon, white cherries, rye toast, chalky soil tones, orange peel and a floral combination in the upper register of both dried flowers and gentle notes of lilac. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very elegant, with a lovely core, classy *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and suave finish. A lovely wine. 2013-2025. **92.**

Champagne Deutz “Brut Classic” NV (Aÿ)

The new release of the Deutz Brut Classic is excellent, albeit, young, with impressive nascent complexity and fine structure and balance. The classy bouquet offers up a blend of apple, pear, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a nice topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a good core, crisp acids, pinpoint bubbles and fine length and grip on the youthful finish. This is quite tasty on the attack, but it could use another year or two in the bottle to allow the wine to really blossom on the fairly tight backend. Fine potential. 2014-2030. **91.**

Didier-Ducos et Fils “Absolu Meunier” Brut (St. Martin d’Ablois)

The “Absolu Meunier” bottling from Didier-Ducos et Fils is, as the name suggests, comprised of one hundred percent pinot meunier, and it is lovely. The wine was aged three years on the lees and disgorged in November of 2012, finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet on this fine bottle wafts from the glass in a mélange of apple, white peach, lovely floral tones redolent of lilac, warm biscuits, a fine, complex base of soil and a touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully detailed, with a fine core, very refined *mousse*, crisp, framing acids and lovely soil inflection on

the very long, poised and focused finish. This is the epitome of elegance and a terrific bottle of non-vintage Brut! 2013-2025+. **92+**.

Duval-Leroy Brut NV (Vertus)

While Duval-Leroy is based in Vertus, I am sure that they source their grapes from several vintages for their non-vintage Brut bottling. This most recent release was quite lovely on both the nose and palate, offering up a bouquet of apple, warm bread, lovely minerality, lemon zest and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with a sound core of fruit, pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and a long, wide open and crisp finish. This is very good juice, but I generally have a slight preference for the non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottlings from this very reliable house. 2013-2020+. **89**.

Egly-Ouriet “Brut Tradition” NV Grand Cru (Ambonnay) Disgorged November 2012

It had been several years since I last tasted any wines from Egly-Ouriet and I was very impressed with how these wines have improved to my palate in the interim. I remember this bottling from Egly-Ouriet as being a bit oxidative in style and, while certainly complex, the wines always seemed a bit tired to me and not in my top division of grower bubbly back in those days. This is certainly not the case today! This most recent release was a quantum step up in terms of freshness, cut, mineral drive and precision, and I was astonished at the change. The wine is composed entirely of fruit from the villages of Ambonnay, Bouzy and Verzenay and spent fifty-two months aging on the lees prior to its disgorgement. The superb nose soars from the glass in a blend of peach, apple, warm bread, a touch of hazelnut, a lovely and complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, toasty and very snappy, with a fine core, very elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a very long, classy and beautifully balanced finish. This is eminently drinkable today, but has the structure to cruise along well for many, many years to come. Great juice. 2013-2030. **92**.

Joël Falmet “Brut Tradition” NV (Rouvres-les-Vignes- Côte des Bar)

The current release of Joël Falmet’s “Brut Tradition” is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir, twenty percent pinot meunier and ten percent chardonnay. The wine is very pretty, young and high-toned in style, offering up a youthful nose of apple, quince, bread dough, spring flowers, lemon zest and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pretty in its youthful bounce, with a good core, slightly larger bubbles and impressive length and grip on the focused and snappy finish. This needs a couple of years to really soften up, but will be a fine glass of bubbly in the fullness of time. Its score is kept down just a touch because the *mousse* is a little on the larger side, but there is a lot to like here. 2015-2025. **89**.

Gatinois “Brut Tradition” NV (Grand Cru- Aÿ)

The new release of Gatinois “Brut Tradition” is another simply lovely bottle of wine. As I have noted in the past, the house style at Gatinois reminds me strongly of the older, toastier Bollinger style, and I had the good fortune to taste this new Gatinois Brut NV alongside that of the Bollinger this year. Interestingly, the Gatinois is a bit richer and toastier these days than the Bollinger. The *cépage* of this cuvée is eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, all from the family vineyards in Aÿ. The base wine here this year is from 2008, with the customary thirty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines. The wine is outstanding, with its pinot noir majority clearly evident in the superb bouquet of peach, warm biscuits, a touch of tangerine, a very complex base of soil tones, citrus peel and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine

core of fruit, crisp acids, lovely soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a very long, classy and youthfully complex finish. This is dynamite wine. 2013-2025+. **92+**.

Pierre Gerbais “Cuvée de Réserve” Brut NV (Celles-sur-Ource)

As I noted above, this was my first experience with the wines from Champagne Pierre Gerbais and I was quite impressed. The village of Celles-sur-Ource is in the Côte des Bar and the house is currently run by Pascal Gerbais, who is the third of four generations (his son, Aurélien has now joined him) of the Gerbais family to produce wines here. The current release of their Cuvée de Réserve is comprised of a blend of fifty percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot blanc *vrai*, with the wine undergoing full malo and receiving a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is complex and quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, orange, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, bread dough, gentle smokiness and a nice topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite refined, with a very good core, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the focused finish. A lovely bottle. 2013-2025. **91**.

Pierre Gerbais “Cuvée l’Originale” Brut NV (Celles-sur-Ource)

Pierre Gerbais’ “Cuvée l’Originale” is a bottling made entirely from old vine pinot blanc *vrai* planted in 1904. I really like the fact that the house has championed these old pinot blanc vines and singled them out for a special bottling, but the wine was not quite at the same league as their Cuvée de Réserve non-vintage Brut, which I tasted for this report. The nose is complex and youthful, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, peach, a touch of orange zest and a nice base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is not quite as complex as the nose promises, with its full-bodied format nicely balanced, but without a great core to rely on. The finish is long, the bubbles tiny, and the acids crisp and sound, but to my palate, the wine just lacks a bit of complexity and *gras* to rate outstanding. To be fair, I tasted this wine fairly soon after it was disgorged and perhaps it has blossomed now that it has a bit of distance out from its *dégorgement*. 2013-2025. **87+?**

Domaine Bruno Gobillard Brut NV (Pierry)

The new release of the non-vintage Brut from Bruno Gobillard offers a lot of promise on both the nose and palate, but it is still a puppy and really begs for a bit of bottle age to allow its structural elements to relax a bit and the wine to blossom on the palate. The *cépages* here is sixty percent chardonnay and twenty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The lovely bouquet offers up a mix of apple, pear, warm bread, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of orange peel and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wound fairly tight, with a good core, fine *mousse*, youthfully brisk acids and very good length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This bottling does not go through malolactic fermentation and was aged two years on the lees prior to disgorgement and release, so a bit of cellaring time will do a good job of buffering the snappy acidity of youth. Fine juice, but give it a couple of years to really come into its own. 2015-2035. **91**.

Domaine Bruno Gobillard “Vieilles Vignes 18th Century” Brut NV (Pierry)

The current release of the Gobillard “18th Century” Vieilles Vignes Brut is outstanding, but, like the non-vintage Brut, it too will need a few years in the cellar to fully blossom and come into its own. The wine is primarily from the 2009 vintage, with forty percent of the cuvée drawn from the preceding two vintages and the wine was aged four years on the lees. The blend is comprised of twenty percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot noir and fifty percent pinot meunier, with the average age of vines for this bottling more than seventy years of age! The current release was disgorged in late 2012. The superb bouquet is a blend of apple, pear,

complex, chalky minerality, musky floral tones, bread dough and a bright topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with frothy *mousse*, brisk, vibrant acids, superb focus and grip and a very long, youthfully complex and promising finish. I really like this wine's potential, and while it is drinkable today (due primarily to its exceptional balance), it is also clearly climbing in quality and giving it at least a few years in the cellar to allow it to blossom a bit from behind its structure will really pay dividends. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2035. **92+**.

Godmé Père et Fils Brut Grand Cru NV (Verzenay)

The current release of non-vintage Brut from Godmé Père et Fils is comprised of a blend of fifty-five percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir. This is a young and lovely bottle of Brut NV, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, tart orange, *pain grillé*, fine minerality, citrus zest and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with very elegant *mousse*, fine focus and very good length and grip. This is a lovely bottle that will even better with a year or two in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to more fully emerge. 2013-2025+. **90+**.

Godmé Père et Fils “Brut Intégral” Premier Cru NV (Verzenay)

I had not loved the last release of Godmé Père et Fils’ “Brut Intégral”, but, the new release is a lovely wine cut in a bone dry style, that probably could be labeled as Brut Nature and is certainly on the driest side of Brut. The bouquet is young and very fine, offering up scents of apple, tangerine, complex, very minerally soil tones, warm bread, lemon peel and a gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core, very refined *mousse*, snappy acids and excellent length and grip on the youthfully complex and very refined finish. This is a very dry version of Brut, and without the buffering of a bit higher *dosage*, it is really best for fans of Brut Nature today. A few years of bottle age should allow the fine spine of acidity to soften up a bit and for those who like a bit more textural generosity, and it will be even better at that time. But, the precision and complexity here are exemplary, and I had no difficulties drinking it today, despite the fact that I will like it even better when it has softened up a bit on the backend. 2015-2035. **93**.

Gosset “Brut Excellence” NV (Épernay)

I have always liked the Brut Excellence bottling from Gosset, which I do not see as much in the US market as its quality merits, but which I always find to be of outstanding quality. The new release is one of the younger examples of this cuvée that I have come across and really will be even better with another six months or a year of bottle age, but it is a very fine wine in the making. The bouquet offers up a superb blend of pear, lemon blossoms, a bit of apple skin, bread dough, a lovely base of soil and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and very well-focused, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. Like all of the Gosset wines, this is a principally a non-malo Champagne and it will age very well. There is still a bit of youthful, backend bitterness here today that needs to be waited out, so give this wine until Christmas time to start to unwind a bit structurally- it will be outstanding. 2014-2025+. **91**.

Gosset Grande Réserve Brut NV (Épernay)

The new release of Gosset Grande Réserve is a lovely wine, but unless my memory is playing tricks on me, it seems just a touch shorter on the finish than was the case with the bottling I tasted at the domaine last April. The bouquet is outstanding (as always), with the influence of plenty of reserve wines in the blend very much in evidence in its mélange of apple, peach, brioche, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a gentle vein of nuttiness and a nicely

smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely rock solid at the core, with very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and balance, crisp acids, but just a touch short on the classy finish. Whether or not my memory is correct in comparison of the relative lengths of the two most recent releases of this wine, this is a fine glass of Champagne by any measure! 2013-2025. **92.**

Charles Heidsieck “Brut Réserve” NV (Reims)

The current release of Charles Heidsieck’s “Brut Réserve” was laid down on its lees in the spring of 2008 and disgorged at the end of 2012. It is a dynamite wine, soaring from the glass in a complex aromatic constellation of apple, peach, leesy tones, warm biscuits, incipient notes of nuttiness, a complex base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and rock solid at the core, with bracing acids, laser-like focus, very elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the complex and sophisticated finish. As has been true for many years, this is one of the top non-vintage Brut bottlings out there on the market today. While the new release is quite approachable today, I would not hesitate to tuck it away in the cellar for three or four years and really let it develop its secondary layers of complexity and allow the snappy acids to peel back a bit. Great juice. 2013-2030. **93.**

D. Henriët-Bazin “Sélection des Parcelles” Premier Cru Brut NV (Villers-Marmery)

The Sélection des Parcelles cuvée from Henriët-Bazin is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir and was disgorged in January of 2013. This is an excellent wine that offers up a deep and vibrant bouquet of delicious apples, pears, chalky minerality, just a touch of pastry cream, brioche and lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and young, with impressive elegance, refined *mousse*, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the poised and snappy finish. This will need a year or two in the cellar to really come into its own, but it will be outstanding. 2014-2030. **91+.**

Henriot “Brut Souverain” NV (Reims)

The new release of the Henriët Brut Souverain is a young and very promising wine, wafting from the glass in a youthful mélange of apple, tart pear, spring flowers, warm bread, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and a nice synthesis of lemon peel and lemon blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and elegant, with a fine core, very refined *mousse*, brisk acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, young and snappy finish. There is still a bit of youthful austerity on the backend here that should be waited out with bottle age, as the constituent components here are outstanding, but the wine is not yet hitting on all cylinders. 2014-2030. **91.**

Huré Frères “Invitation” Brut Réserve NV (Ludes)

The new release of the non-vintage Huré Frères “Invitation” Brut Réserve is still a very young wine, but it is both complex and well-balanced and it will certainly reward a bit of cellaring with a fine bottle of bubbly. The *cépage* is fifty percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay and includes at least twenty-five percent reserve wines in the blend. The deep and vibrant nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, brioche, lovely soil tones, a touch of lemon zest and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with bracing, youthful acids, a fine core, vigorous *mousse* that is just a touch coarse, but very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Give this wine at least a couple of years to unwind, but it should prove to be a pretty tasty bottle once it has blossomed from behind its formidable wall of acids. 2016-2025+. **88.**



The old oak barrels used for fermentation at Krug waiting in the courtyard to be put away after racking.

Krug Grande Cuvée Brut NV (current release- ID # 112001)

I love that every bottle of Grande Cuvée that has left the Krug cellars in Reims since 2011 now comes with an ID number on the back label, so that one can go to the Krug website and track down which release of this wine they are fortunate enough to have in their hands. This bottle is the new release of Grande Cuvée, which is primarily based on the 2005 vintage (as it was disgorged in the winter of 2011/2012 and would have spent six years on its lees prior to disgorgement and preparation for market), with, of course the usual addition of reserve wines in the blend dating back to 1990! The wine is utterly superb, offering up a beautifully complex nose of apple, wheat toast, a lovely, complex base of soil, fresh quince, citrus peel, minerals and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very refined, with pinpoint bubbles, crisp, zesty acids, outstanding focus and balance and a very, very long finish that closes with great precision and grip. I know that many folks like to drink their Grande Cuvée right out of the blocks, but to my palate, this is still a baby and will really blossom if one can hold off gratification long enough to allow at least another four or five years of bottle age. As the notes below will attest, Krug Grande Cuvée is one of the greatest wines for the cellar produced in Champagne and there is emphatically no rush to start opening bottles of this wine when it is released, as the journey has just begun! A great wine. 2017-2040+. **95.**

Krug Grande Cuvée Brut NV (aged six years on the cork from release)

Did I ever mention that I absolutely love aged Grande Cuvée! This particular bottle of Grande Cuvée was based primarily on the 2001 vintage and was released from the cellars back in late 2007. It is a classic example of just why I am such a fan of cellaring Grande Cuvée, as this wine has blossomed beautifully with its additional bottle age and is now really drinking with great style and breed. The deeply refined nose wafts from the glass in a classic blend of peaches and apples, incipient notes of the nuttiness to come with further bottle age, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, brioche (still warm out of the oven), caraway seed, blossoming notes of custard, orange zest and a gentle touch of brown butter in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and into its apogee of peak drinkability, with a great core, ethereal *mousse*, crisp acids, a lovely vein of minerality driving the backend and stunning focus and grip on the very, very long, complex and utterly refined finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Grande Cuvée that still has decades of life ahead of it. 2013-2035+. **96.**

Krug Grande Cuvée Brut NV (aged ten years on the cork from release)

I had the pleasure to drink this superb bottle of older Grande Cuvée at Château Ducru-Beaucaillou this past spring and the wine was wide open and at its peak of drinkability. The gorgeous and maturing nose offers up a complex blend of apple, rye toast, a touch of orange peel, stony minerality, almonds and caraway seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open, with a rock solid core of fruit, crisp acids, very elegant *mousse* and simply outstanding length and grip on the bright, generous and utterly refined finish. Many thanks to Monsieur Bruno Borie for having the great taste to cellar his Krug Grande Cuvée for a decade and the laudable generosity to share it at his table with visiting Americans! This is shining example of why we all should age our Krug Grande Cuvée! I should note that this wine was tasted towards the tail end of my twenty-eight day, non-stop spring tasting trip through Germany, Burgundy and Bordeaux, and the possibility certainly exists that my circuits were a little rusty by this time and that this particular bottle was even better than my note attests. 2013-2025+. **94.**

Laherte Frères “Ultra Tradition” Brut NV (Chavot)

Ultra Tradition is the new name for the non-vintage cuvées of Brut and Brut Rosé from Laherte Frères, and though the name has changed, the quality remains as high as ever as this fine producer in the Vallée de la Marne. The blend is the same as it has been for this bottling over the last several years- sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir, and like all of the Laherte Frères bottlings of late, more and more of the *vins clairs* are being barrel fermented for this wine. The new release is absolutely lovely, offering up a complex nose of lemon, apple, bread dough, stony minerality, citrus zest and a topnote of white flowers (from the pinot meunier?). On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the crisp and focused finish. This is one high class bottle of non-vintage Brut! 2013-2025. **92.**

Laurent-Perrier Brut NV (Tours-sur-Marne)

I was very happy to have had a chance to taste this wine last year while in Beaune working on the new vintage in Burgundy, and this year the house kindly took note of my interest in their entire range of bottlings and sent the new release to me for inclusion in this article. This is a high class and still youthful bottle of non-vintage Brut that will clearly benefit from a bit of time in the cellar, as the wine offers up a primary bouquet of green apple, tart orange, bread dough, quinine, gentle smokiness and a first class base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and lovely

focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. I would be inclined to give this fine wine a year in the cellar to really let it blossom. 2014-2030. **91+**.

Laurent-Perrier “Grande Siècle” Brut NV (Tours-sur-Marne)

It had been a few years since I last tasted Laurent-Perrier’s flagship *Tête de Cuvée* of Grande Siècle and the new release is absolutely stunning. This is a big, powerful and exquisitely balanced wine that offers up a stunningly youthful nose of apple, a touch of grapefruit, bread dough, smoke, rye seed, a nice dollop of fresh almonds and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with utterly refined *mousse*, superb focus and balance and simply stunning backend mineral drive on the very, very long finish. Just a brilliant bottle of bubbly, the new release of Laurent-Perrier “Grande Siècle” is certainly approachable today, but its true apogee is at least a decade in the future! 2013-2040. **95**.

Légras & Haas Brut Tradition NV (Chouilly)

This was my first experience with the wines of Légras & Haas and I was quite impressed with this small family domaine based in Chouilly. The Brut Tradition bottling is made up of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with all of the wines undergoing malolactic fermentation and the wine is aged on the lees a minimum of three years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The current release of Brut Tradition offers up a bright and complex bouquet of pear, apple, warm bread, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, delicate notes of spring flowers and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent mineral drive on the long and focused finish. Despite the wine only being fifty percent chardonnay, there is a real elegance here from the Chouilly fruit that makes this an ideal *aperitif* weight Champagne. Impressive juice that should age very well and be even better with a year or two of bottle age. 2013-2030. **91+**.

Gérard Lorient Brut NV (Festigny) Disgorged Spring 2013

The new release of Champagne Gérard Lorient’s beautiful, old vine bottling of pinot meunier is as outstanding as always. Readers may recall that the family’s parcel of pinot meunier was planted entirely in the 1950s, so these vines are now in excess of fifty-five years of age and really produce a stellar wine that is one of the great bargains in the world of Champagne. The current release is outstanding, offering up a complex and perfumed nose of apple, gentle pinot meunier floral tones, a lovely base of soil, bread dough, smoke and a gentle topnote of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with excellent mid-palate depth, very elegant *mousse*, vibrant acids and laser-like focus on the long, complex and quite wide open finish. This is an extremely refined bottle of non-vintage Brut. 2013-2030. **93**.

Nicolas Maillart “Platine” Brut NV Premier Cru (Écueil)

Champagne Nicolas Maillart is located in the village of Écueil, on the Montagne de Reims and this is pinot noir territory. Consequently, the Platine bottling (the house’s non-vintage Brut) is a blend of eighty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay, with ten percent of the blend barrel-fermented. The wine is aged three year prior to disgorgement, which for the current release was in September of 2012. The wine offers up a very refined and vibrant bouquet of apple, lemon, warm bread, complex minerality, citrus zest, smoke and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and crisp, with frothy *mousse*, a fine core and excellent focus and grip on the long finish. This is a lovely bottle of non-vintage Brut. 2013-2025+. **92**.

Thierry Massin “Brut Réserve” NV (Ville Sur Arce) Disgorged February 2013

The new release of Thierry Massin “Brut Réserve” is made from a *cépages* of eighty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay and has a *dosage* of ten grams per liter. The blend here is made up of thirty percent 2010 fruit and seventy percent reserve wines from 2009 and 2008, so some of the generosity of the 2009 vintage is certainly in evidence here. The bouquet is a bright and classy blend of green apple, lime, bread dough, a very complex base of flinty minerality and citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a lovely core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, nice, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the young and classy finish. The similarities between the *terroirs* of Chablis and the Côte des Bar are very much in evidence here, and for fans of Chablis, this is one grower Champagne that you should check out! I would opt to give this fine wine another year or two in bottle to really blossom. Monsieur Massin remains one of my absolute favorite producers in the Côte des Bar. 2015-2030+. **91+**.

Marcel Moineaux Blanc de Blancs “Brut Tradition” Grand Cru NV (Chouilly)

The current release of Marcel Moineaux “Brut Tradition” is a beautiful bottle of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs that was disgorged in December of 2012, is made up of a blend of sixty percent 2008 vintage fruit and forty percent from 2007, and sports a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. Monsieur Moineaux has the benefit of old vines, with the average age of the parcels that go into this bottling fully fifty years of age, and the wine undergoes complete malolactic fermentation. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely and still youthful blend of pear, apple, chalky minerality, brioche, a nice touch of savory elements and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still snappy, with a lovely core of fruit, tiny, pinpoint bubbles, brisk acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and still fairly primary finish. This needs a few years to unwind, but will clearly be excellent once it has had a chance to blossom with a bit of bottle age. High class juice in the making here. 2015-2030+. **91**.

Moutard Père et Fils “Grande Cuvée” Brut NV (Buxeuil) Lot #LBR11.10613

With each passing year, I become more and more enamored of the wines from this superb Côte des Bar producer located in the village of Buxeuil. The new release of Moutard Grande Cuvée is a stunning bottle of non-vintage Brut, offering up a deep and complex nose of apple, warm bread, a very complex base of minerality, a touch of nutskin, gentle leesiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still quite youthful, with a rock solid core of fruit, very elegant, pinpoint bubbles, laser-like focus and great grip and elegance on the very long and perfectly-balanced finish. All this beauty needs is a few years in the cellar to really come into its own. Great juice. 2015-2035. **93**.

Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged February 2012

Bruno Paillard’s non-vintage Brut bottling, called Première Cuvée, is one of my absolute favorites in the market and a wine I look for regularly. The current release is outstanding, and probably still the cuvée I reported on last summer. The additional year’s-worth of bottle age has allowed the wine to blossom structurally into a superb drink, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of delicious apples, pears, brioche, a complex base of minerally soil tones, citrus zest, hints of the nuttiness to come and a just a touch of acacia blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a great core of fruit, bright acids, very refined *mousse*, outstanding focus and balance and a very long, refined and vibrant finish. This is just a beautiful bottle of bubbly that is really starting to stretch its wings, but will drink well for several decades to come. 2013-2030. **93**.

Pierre Paillard Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy) Disgorged April 2012

I liked the new release of Pierre Paillard's non-vintage Brut even better than last year's bottle, as the slight coarseness to the *mousse* that I found last year was nowhere to be found in the current release. The wine is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay and offers up an excellent bouquet of apple, tart orange, warm bread, a fine base of soil tones, gentle leesiness and a touch of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and impressively complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus, elegant *mousse* and very fine length and grip on the well-balanced and classy finish. Fine juice that should add a layer of additional complexity with further bottle age. 2013-2025. **91+**.

Piper-Heidsieck Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of Piper-Heidsieck non-vintage Brut is simply the finest I have tasted from the house in many years and firmly shows that Régis Camus has now brought Piper up to the same exalted level of quality of its stable-mate, Charles Heidsieck. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, tart orange, a lovely and complex base of soil tones, warm bread and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely precision, excellent mid-palate concentration, very elegant *mousse*, and superb balance and grip on the very long and crystal clear finish. This is rocking and has to be one of the best values in non-vintage Brut out there in the market today- it is high time folks started to rediscover Piper-Heidsieck! 2013-2025+. **92**.

Philipponnat "Royale Réserve" Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Disgorged February 2013

The new release of non-vintage Philipponnat "Royale Réserve" Brut is absolutely superb and has to be one of the best values for a non-vintage Brut from a *Grande Marque* on the market today! The outstanding bouquet offers up scents of apple, a touch of orange zest, warm bread, a fine base of soil, a gentle touch of nuttiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and gently leesy in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, crisp acids, very refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and elegant finish. Top flight bubbly! 2013-2030. **92**.

Ployez-Jacquemart "Extra Quality" Brut NV (Ludes)

The new release of Ployez-Jacquemart's non-vintage Brut is quite young and was still a touch reductive when I sampled it in mid-August, but the wine opens up very nicely in the glass and I am sure that this characteristic will pass in the next month or two as the wine settles in. After a bit of air, the wine offers up a really superb bouquet of apple, *pain grillé*, nectarine, a very complex base of soil and a lovely topnote of almonds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with an excellent core, crisp acids, fine focus and balance, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, pure and zesty finish. It is still very early days for this serious bottle of non-vintage Brut, which will age long and gracefully. As has been the case for many years, this is one of the best values out there in the world of Champagne! 2013-2030. **92+**.

Louis Roederer Brut Premier NV (Reims)

The current offering of Louis Roederer Brut Premier is an excellent wine on both the nose and palate, and though it is delicious right out of the blocks, a bit of bottle age will certainly be rewarded here. The youthfully pure bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, lemon, stony minerality, warm bread and citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and nascently complex, with a fine core, tiny, pinpoint bubbles, brisk acids and a very long, balanced finish that shows just a whisper of leesiness from *battonage*. Fine, fine juice that is going to age quite well and will be even better with a year or two in the cellar to allow the wine to fully blossom. 2014-2030. **91+**.

Camille Savès “Carte Blanche” Premier Cru Brut NV (Bouzy) Disgorged February 2013

The new release of Camille Savès’ Carte Blanche bottling is graced with a stylish new label. As is customary with this cuvée, the wine is a blend from the villages of Bouzy, Ambonnay, Tours-sur-Marne and Tauxières, with the latter village only entitled to premier cru status, so that is the reason this fine bottling is ranked as a premier cru (despite the inclusion of seventy-five percent grand cru grapes in the blend). The *cépages* is seventy-five percent pinot noir (from the grand cru villages) and twenty-five percent chardonnay from Tauxières, with the wine aged three years on the lees and receiving a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. Sixty percent of the blend is from the 2008 vintage in this release, with the balance from the previous vintage. The wine offers up a superb nose of apple, quince, bread dough, a complex base of chalky soil tones and a nice topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully delineated, with a fine core, crisp acids, lovely focus and balance, delicate *mousse* and fine grip on the long and classy finish. I have always loved this bottling and the new label only makes the wine even more aesthetically appealing. 2013-2025+. **91+**.

Camille Savès “Carte d’Or” Premier Cru Brut NV (Bouzy) Disgorged February 2012

The current release of Camille Savès’ Grand Cru bottling of Carte d’Or also has a very elegant new label to go along with its consistent excellence. The blend is comprised of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay, with all of the fruit hailing from the family’s vineyards in Bouzy. The base wine hails from the fine 2008 vintage, with twenty percent of the blend from the previous year, and the *dosage* is seven grams per liter. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows blossoming notes of secondary complexity in its blend of peach, apple, warm bread, a lovely base of soil, just a touch of almond paste and a gentle topnote of smokiness that will become more pervasive as the wine continues to age. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and beautifully focused, with plenty of complexity, a fine core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the vibrant finish. This offers up a beautiful synthesis of blossoming bottle age complexity and a wonderfully lively structure. 2013-2025+. **92+**.

Camille Savès “Cuvée Anaïs Jolicoeur” Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy)

The Camille Savès “Cuvée Anaïs Jolicoeur” is named for the founder of the house, Eugène Savès’ wife, Anaïs (*née* Jolicoeur), whose family were already grape growers in the village of Bouzy as far back as the fifteenth century. Much of the Savès family’s vineyard patrimony can still be traced back to vines that originated with the Jolicoeur family, and this bottling is produced only in top years and is made up of a blend of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay- all from vineyards in Bouzy. The wine is raised in older oak barrels. The new release is outstanding, offering up a deep and nascently complex nose of tart apple, lemon, stony minerality, orange peel, bread dough and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very, very minerally out of the blocks, with brisk acids, elegant *mousse* and truly outstanding length and grip on the focused and still very young finish. Give this superb wine a few years in the cellar to soften up a bit on the backend. 2016-2035. **93+**.

Camille Savès “Cuvée Prestige” Grand Cru Brut (Bouzy) Disgorged November 2012

The current version of Camille Savès’ “Cuvée Prestige” is comprised of a blend of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir (all from the family’s vineyards in Bouzy) and was aged fully five years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The wine is primarily based on the 2007 vintage, with forty percent of the blend hailing from reserve wines from 2006, the wine did not undergo malo and the *dosage* was seven grams per liter. The wine is absolutely superb on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a fine aromatic constellation of apple,

fresh-baked bread, warm peach, a great, complex base of soil tones, a touch of orange zest and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids, superb focus and balance, very refined *mousse* and outstanding mineral drive on the long and pure finish. This is a great bottle of bubbly in the making, which I would still tuck away in the cellar for at least another couple of years and really let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. 2015-2035. **93+**.

Serveaux Fils “Carte Noire” Brut NV (Passy-sur-Marne) Disgorged February 2013

The Serveaux Fils “Carte Noire” bottling of non-vintage Brut has been made from a rather unique blend of sixty-five percent pinot meunier and thirty-five percent pinot noir and spent three and a half years on the lees prior to *dégorgement*. The wine is lovely on the nose, offering up a bright and high-toned mélange of lemon, quince, stony minerality, bread dough and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and snappy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, elegant *mousse*, and excellent length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. I would give this lovely wine another year in the cellar to really blossom- it should age extremely well. 2014-2025+. **91+**.

Serveaux Fils “Cuvée Pinot Meunier” Brut NV (Passy-sur-Marne) Disgorged Feb. 2013

The new release of the Serveaux Fils “Cuvée Pinot Meunier” is a beautiful bottle of wine in the making. The wine was aged three and a half years on its lees prior to disgorgement and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a superb and very vibrant bouquet of apple, white peach, stony minerality, orange zest, warm bread and a potpourri of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays superb mid-palate depth, with very elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and stunningly length and grip on the still very youthful finish. This is a dynamite bottle in the making, but I would tuck this wine away in the cellar for at least another couple of years to allow its girdle of acidity to relax a bit and allow the wine’s secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Great juice! 2015-2030. **92+**.

Taittinger Brut “La Française” NV (Reims)

The new release of Taittinger’s Brut “La Française” is a lovely wine that seems to me to be a touch drier in *dosage* than has been the case in the last few years, and is even better out of the blocks as a result. The lovely nose is a blend of green apple, lemon, bread dough, stony minerality and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and zesty, with a fine core, very elegant *mousse* and excellent mineral drive on the long, clean and focused finish. I really like the new version of Brut la Française, which should age very well and offer up quite sophisticated drinking right from the outset. High class non-vintage Brut. 2013-2030. **91+**.

Taittinger Prélude “Grands Crus” Brut NV

Taittinger’s “Prélude” bottling continues to be one of the truly remarkable multi-vintage cuvées on the market and I find it still surprising that this wine is not more highly sought after here in the states. The current release is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir and, like all of its predecessors, the wine is beautifully structured and built to age. The deep, young and brilliantly complex nose offers up a mix of apple, orange zest, brioche, an exotic touch of lavender, a wonderful base of minerality and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with refined *mousse*, outstanding focus, crisp acids and great poise and complexity on the very, very long and intensely flavored finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Champagne that is so well-balanced that it is eminently approachable today, but is really made for long-term cellaring and will be at its apogee in another six to ten years. A great wine. 2013-2040. **94**.

Jean Velut “Brut Tradition” NV (Montgueux)

The flint-laced, chalky *terroirs* of Montgueux are very much in evidence in Denis Velut’s non-vintage bottling as well. The new release of Brut Tradition from Monsieur Velut is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot noir and it is outstanding, offering up a superb nose of pear, white peach, brioche, lemon zest, gently musky floral tones and a complex base of flinty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with a fine core, small, but not overly fine *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the very classy finish. Last year, I downgraded this bottling a touch because its bubbles were a touch more coarse than the very top non-vintage Bruts that I tasted, but I think that was a mistake, as this wine has such a lovely level of complexity and depth that I have no trouble living with slightly more aggressive *mousse* found here. Fine juice. 2013-2025+. 92.



Brut and Extra Brut Rosé

Ayala “Brut Majeur” Rosé NV (Disgorged February 2013)

The current release of the non-vintage Ayala “Brut Majeur” Rosé is a lovely wine that offers up plenty of pleasure in the glass already, but is still on the young side and will be even better with a year or two’s worth of bottle age. The wine offers up a really lovely, pale pink color and a fine, high-toned bouquet of white cherries, tangerine, chalky minerality, bread dough and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with pinpoint bubbles, snappy acids and fine focus and grip on the long and

zesty finish. I had absolutely no trouble finishing the bottle up now, but in a perfect world, I would love to tuck this wine in the cellar for a few years and really let it blossom! Ayala is really making good wines these days! 2014-2020+. **90+**.

André Beaufort “Grand Cru Ambonnay” Brut Rosé NV (Lot 06R- disgorged 3-10)

This most recent bottle of André Beaufort’s non-vintage Brut Rosé was marred by a bit too high a level of volatile acidity, which kept its score down a bit. This is the same wine that I had been blown away by in the last few years, but this particular bottle (out of my cellar) never really was ever to completely shake off its touch of volatility and was a tad less enjoyable as a result. Underneath the acetic acid is still a wine of stunning personality and complexity, offering up notes of cherries, orange zest, cloves and a myriad of other spice tones, rye toast, a beautifully complex base of soil and perhaps just a whisper of wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with lovely focus and balance (beyond the volatile acidity), pinpoint bubbles and excellent length and grip on the refined finish. I am hoping the volatility here was just a single bottle, as it would be disappointing to see this wine start to go permanently volatile when it has such superb structure to continue to age! I still have higher hopes for this wine, but this particular bottle would rate: 2013-2020. **92**.

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Rosé NV (Épernay)

As I noted last year, Besserat de Bellefon’s Cuvée des Moines bottlings are done in a Crémant style, which has a bit lower pressure and more delicate bubbles as a result. The Brut Rosé bottling in the Cuvée des Moines lineup is a blend of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, and is one of the more delicately-colored Rosés out there. The new release offers up a fine nose of tart orange, cranberry, rye bread, a lovely base of soil and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite delicately styled, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and fine focus and balance on the long and complex finish. I really like this bottling, which is a bit less “winey” than many Rosés, but which offers up plenty of breed and complexity. 2013-2025. **91**.

Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé NV (French Cuvée)

The current release in France of the non-vintage Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé is a lovely wine, offering up a complex bouquet of *fraises du bois*, blood orange, chalky minerality, warm bread and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pure, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and bouncy finish. This seems just a touch drier than the bottling available in the US, but I am not tasting the two cuvées side by side, so this may just be my imagination. Lovely wine. 2013-2023+. **91**.

Bollinger Brut Rosé NV (Aÿ)

The current release of Bollinger non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of sixty-two percent pinot noir, twenty-four percent chardonnay and fourteen percent pinot meunier and received a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine is relatively deep in color for a Brut Rosé and offers up a deep and smoky bouquet of black cherries, rye toast, a lovely base of soil, orange peel and the aforementioned smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with very sophisticated *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and impressive grip on the very long and classy finish. Just a beautiful bottle of wine right out of the blocks, but certainly with the structural integrity to also age well for quite some time. 2013-2025. **92**.

Vincent Carré Premier Cru “Brut Rosé” NV (Trépail)

Vincent Carré’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay and was aged fully four years on the lees prior to disgorgement in November of 2012. This is pretty extraordinary for a non-vintage Rosé, which

often will only be aged two years on the lees. The bouquet is lovely on the wine, wafting from the glass in a mix of wild strawberries, a touch of blood orange, lovely soil tones, warm bread, dried roses and just a whisper of spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a fairly long, minerally and still quite youthful finish. The *dosage* here is eight grams per liter, but the wine seems drier than that, as the minerality and zesty acidity devour the *dosage*. Good juice that could still use a year or two in the cellar to fully blossom. 2014-2025. **90+**.

R. H. Coutier “Brut Rosé” Grand Cru NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged July 2012

This year’s version of the Coutier “Brut Rosé” is comprised of a blend of fifty-five percent chardonnay and forty-five percent pinot noir, with a touch more than half of the pinot added as still wine to give this outstanding bottling its deep cherry color and very winery personality. The bouquet is deep, pure and utterly captivating, wafting from the glass in a classy mélange of strawberries, cherries, brioche, gentle notes of cinnamon, a superbly complex base of soil and a touch of high end smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with frothy *mousse*, outstanding focus and balance and a very long, complex and snappy finish. This beautiful bottle of Rosé really deserves at least another year of bottle age to allow its secondary layers to start to stir and for its girdle of acidity to relax a bit. This is a stunning wine! 2014-2025+. **93+**.

Champagne José Dhondt “Rosé de Saignée” Brut NV (Oger)

The José Dhondt “Rosé de Saignée” is comprised of a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir and the new release is a lovely bottle. The color is bright cherry red and the bouquet is a stylish and quite vibrant mélange of blood orange, cherries, a touch of cinnamon stick, rye toast, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried roses. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused and well-balanced finish that is definitely “winery” in style. A lovely food bubbly. 2013-2023. **90**.

Nathalie Falmet “Tentation Rosée” Brut NV (Rouvres les Vignes)

The new release of Nathalie Falmet’s “Tentation Rosée” was disgorged at the end of August of 2012. I am assuming that this is a Brut bottling, but close examination of the labels shows that Madame Falmet has not marked this on either the front or the back. The wine has a lovely, deep cherry red color to it and delivers a superb bouquet of pomegranate, a touch of rhubarb, wheat bread, a fine base of soil, dried roses and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite winery in style, with crisp acids, very refined *mousse*, excellent mid-palate depth and a long, focused and youthful finish. I love this wine’s combination of a very winery personality from the addition of still pinot noir and its very light on its feet personality on the backend. Lovely juice that will be even better with another year or two in the cellar. 2014-2025. **91+**.

Gatinois Brut Rosé Grand Cru (Aÿ) Disgorged December 2012

The new release of Gatinois’ Brut Rosé is stunning. As has been the case in previous iterations of this fine bottling, the *cépages* is ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay, with the wine aged three years on the lees prior to disgorgement. About seven percent of the blend is from still pinot noir, which the family takes from a small parcel of more than sixty year-old vines. The beautifully elegant bouquet on this wine delivers a blend of cherries, tangerine, gentle notes of cinnamon, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, caraway seed and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and complex, with a superb core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, brisk acids and simply outstanding

length and grip on the focused and still fairly young finish. I have had many great examples of the Gatinois Brut Rosé, but the current release may well be the finest I have yet had the pleasure to taste and you can rest assured that some of this beautiful wine will be going into my cellar. I would give this superb wine at least another year of bottle age to really let it develop its secondary layers of complexity- it should prove to be very long-lived and stunning down the road. 2014-2030. **93+**.

Bruno Gobillard “Mademoiselle Sophie” Brut Rosé NV (Pierry)

Champagne Bruno Gobillard is located in the village of Pierry, which is about three kilometers due south of Épernay and a bit more than that due west of Chouilly. The house's lovely Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of fifty percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot meunier and includes about fifteen percent still pinot noir to give the wine its lovely raspberry color. The bouquet is absolutely superb, offering up notes of blood orange, melon, complex, chalky minerality, warm bread and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and simply superb length and grip on the focused and quite complex finish. This is just a really well-made and succulent example of Brut Rosé. 2013-2030+. **92**.

Godmé Père et Fils Brut Rosé NV (Verzenay)

The new release of non-vintage Godmé Père et Fils Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay and spent four years on the lees prior to disgorgement in January of 2013. The wine is outstanding, offering up a deep and vibrant bouquet of blood orange, wild strawberries, brioche, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, gentle notes of woodsmoke, rose petals and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully light on its feet, with excellent focus and balance, very elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. The current release of the Godmé Père et Fils Brut Rosé is drinking beautifully out of the blocks, but will have no trouble aging ten to fifteen years and may well be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age. Fine, fine juice and one of the best non-vintage Brut Rosés out there! 2013-2025+. **93**.

Gosset “Grande Rosé” Brut NV (Épernay)

The new release of Gosset's non-vintage Grande Rosé is as lovely as it seems to be every year. The very refined and complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of tart cherries, rhubarb, blood orange, wheat toast, lovely, chalky soil tones and a whiff of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with very elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a very long, poised and extremely well-balanced finish. This is already a delicious bottle of Brut Rosé, but as has been the case with this wine over the years, a short stay in the cellar will reward one with a wine even more complex and alive with secondary layers of complexity and a more wide open palate impression. High class juice. 2013-2030. **92+**.

Henri Goutorbe Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV (Aÿ)

This was my first experience with the wines of Champagne Henri Goutorbe in Aÿ, and I was quite impressed with the quality of their non-vintage Brut Rosé. The family estate, started by Henri (born in 1922) was based on a vine nursery business started by his father, is now run by Henri's great-grandchildren, Elisabeth and Etienne Goutorbe. Their non-vintage Brut Rosé is a blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay, with fifteen percent of the blend still pinot noir to give the wine its lovely salmon color. The bouquet is a lovely and vibrant blend of strawberries, a touch of tangerine, wheat bread, superb minerality and a nice

dollop of caraway seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2013-2025. **91.**

Charles Heidsieck “Rosé Réserve” Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of the non-vintage Charles Heidsieck “Rosé Réserve” spent thirty-six months on the lees prior to disgorgement and preparation for the market. The blend includes twenty percent reserve wines this year. The wine offers up a stunningly pure and complex bouquet of white cherries, peaches, rye toast, smoke, dried rose petals and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a rock solid core of fruit, great focus and balance, tiny pinpoint bubbles, a love signature of soil and outstanding length and grip on the crisp and very refined finish. This is already a fine drink, but it is very clearly early days for this beauty and its true apogee is probably still a decade away. An utterly great bottle of Brut Rosé. 2013-2035. **94+.**

Henriot Brut Rosé NV (Reims)

The current release of Henriot’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is quite pale in color, with a gentle tinge of salmon. The bouquet is quite lovely, offering up a youthful blend of tangerine, wheat toast, plenty of smokiness, orange peel and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with fine, pinpoint bubbles, bright, well-integrated acids and excellent length and grip on the high-toned and elegant finish. Fine juice. 2013-2020+. **90.**

Huré Frères “l’Insouciance” Cuvée Rosé Brut NV (Ludes)

This is one of two non-vintage Brut Rosé bottlings from Huré Frères, with the “l’Insouciance” bottling being comprised eighteen percent chardonnay, forty-two percent pinot meunier and forty percent pinot noir. The wine is a lovely color of pale salmon and offers up a bright and youthfully complex nose of cherries, melon, rye toast, stony minerality, orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite young, with snappy acids, fine focus and grip, good mid-palate depth, reasonably fine *mousse* and a long, primary and still rather brisk finish. With another year or two of bottle age, this will be lovely, but I get the feeling that this has just been recently disgorged, as the *dosage* is still not completely woven into the body of the wine. This will certainly be a lovely bottle of Rosé with another year or two worth’s of bottle age, but it is still really a bit too young to be drunk with great pleasure today. 2015-2030+. **89+.**

Krug Brut Rosé NV (Reims) ID # 212020

This particular bottle of Krug Brut Rosé was disgorged in the spring of 2012, making it a blend primarily of the 2006 vintage and older reserve wines, as the wine spends fully five years on its lees prior to *dégorgement*. As the notes in this article will convey, there is no shortage of pleasure involved in preparing this feature and tasting so many beautiful bottles of Champagne, but drinking this bottle of Krug Brut Rosé was an absolute high water mark of this year’s experience. Rather than working through this bottle with a number of other Champagnes, I simply chose to reserve a day to only taste this wine and planned an appropriate pair of courses to go with the bottle. It was a great way to fully enjoy the unfolding drama of Krug Rosé in the glass (for this wine blossoms dramatically over time), and I was really struck how the wine’s complexity emerged again after each pour when the temperature had mounted just a touch- so do not serve it too chilled! The brilliantly complex nose really blossoms as the wine comes up in temperature a bit in the glass, offering up a magically refined blend of tangerine, peach, caraway seed, gentle smokiness, rye bread, orange zest and a potpourri of subtle and exotic spice tones in

the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and simply effortless in the mouth, with seamless acids, a great core, extremely elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the supremely elegant finish. Krug Rosé is the embodiment of refined elegance, but it requires one to focus quite intently on the wine to capture all of its inner beauties, as it is so wonderfully understated that it is possible to just sip the wine and miss the opportunity to ponder the magical, multi-faceted complexity that lies discreetly behind its ethereal bubbles. It is emphatically not a wine I would serve to a crowd! 2013-2030+. **97.**

Laherte Frères “Ultra Tradition” Brut Rosé NV (Chavot)

The new release of Laherte Frères “Ultra Tradition” non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay. The wine has a nice, cherry red color and jumps from the glass in a vibrant aromatic constellation of cherries, cinnamon stick, orange zest, rye toast and a fine base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and snappy, with excellent depth at the core, brisk acids, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the young and primary finish. This is a very promising bottle, but it needs a bit of bottle age to soften and blossom. It should prove to be lovely with a bit of bottle age. 2016-2030. **89+.**

Larmandier-Bernier “Rosé de Saignée” Premier Cru Extra Brut NV (RM 2591301)

The current release of the Larmandier-Bernier Rosé de Saignée is a lovely wine. The color, as is typical with this bottling, is quite dark for a Rosé Champagne, and offers up a deep and beautifully spicy nose of cherries, blood orange, cinnamon, wheat toast, stony minerality and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with lovely mid-palate concentration, very elegant *mousse*, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and perfectly refined finish. Larmandier-Bernier’s Extra Brut bottlings can sometimes be a touch austere out of the blocks, but the new release of their Rosé de Saignée is drinking beautifully from the outset and really is a superb bottle of bubbly. 2013-2023+. **92.**

Laurent-Perrier Brut Rosé NV (Tours-sur-Marne) American Cuvée

I am not sure that there is any difference between cuvées for this bottling on each side of the Atlantic, but as there has been some history of this being the case with several *Grandes Marques*, I figured that I would post notes on examples tasted both here and in France. As readers may already be aware, Laurent-Perrier’s Brut Rosé is made up entirely of pinot noir and is produced in the *saignée* method, where the wine’s color is produced by a short maceration period on the skins- in this case from forty-eight to seventy-two hours. The new release here in the states is superb, offering up a beautifully vibrant nose of cherries, strawberries, rye bread, a very complex base of soil, rose petals and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very refined, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused finish. I do love this bottling! 2013-2025+. **93.**

Laurent-Perrier Brut Rosé NV (Tours-sur-Marne) French Cuvée- served from magnum

The non-vintage Laurent-Perrier Brut Rosé out of magnum was drinking very well indeed on my last visit to Burgundy in June, offering up a deep and soil-driven personality on both the nose and palate that works best with food, rather than served as an *aperitif*. The bouquet is a fine and complex blend of cherries, blood orange, rye toast, a classy base of soil, citrus peel and an overtly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and a very long, transparent and refined finish. Given that this wine was in magnum, the odds are pretty good that this is the previous release of the non-vintage Brut Rosé from Laurent-Perrier, so I am not sure if the slightly different showings of

the two examples are indicative of slightly different wines for the American and French markets, or if this is simply a function of two different releases. In any case, this is extremely good juice. 2013-2023. **92.**

Moutard Père et Fils Brut Rosé NV (Buxeuil) Disgorged October 2012

The current release of the Moutard Père et Fils non-vintage Brut Rosé is a lovely wine that is quite deep, cherry red in color and offers up a superb nose of blood orange, cherries, a touch of cinnamon, rye toast, a complex base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and wide open, with a lovely core of fruit, very elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and fine focus and balance on the stylish and complex finish. My only (very minor) complaint with this wine this year is that it is not quite as long on the finish as the non-vintage Grande Cuvée from the house, but other than that, this is really a delicious bottle of non-vintage Brut Rosé. Moutard Père et Fils is one of my favorite producers in the Côte des Bar and this is a wine that is all too easy to drink. 2013-2020. **90.**

Jean Moutardier “Cuvée Rosée” Brut NV (Breuil)

This was my first experience with the wines of Champagne Jean Moutardier (please note that the label simply states Moutardier as the name of the house) and I was very impressed with this lovely wine. While the family can trace their roots as *vignerons* in the region back to the eighteenth century, the domaine has been run since 1987 by Elisabeth Moutardier, who in recent years has been joined by her son, William. The family owns eighteen hectares of vines here, of which, fourteen are planted to pinot meunier, which thrives in this section of the *Valle de la Marne*, and two hectares each planted to chardonnay and pinot noir. The Moutardiers also purchase grapes from an additional twelve hectares of vines from neighbors to augment their own vineyard production. The Cuvée Rosée is comprised of a blend of eighty percent pinot meunier (eighteen percent of this is still red wine) and twenty percent chardonnay and the current release offers up a superb and refined nose of tart cherries, strawberries, a touch of orange peel, lovely minerality, rye toast and a nice touch of cinnamon stick in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, very elegant *mousse*, fine focus and a long, crisp and classy finish. Very impressive juice. 2013-2025+. **92.**

Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” Brut Rosé NV (Reims) Disgorged November 2012

Bruno Paillard’s current release of Brut Rosé is still on the young side, having only been disgorged eight months ago, and it will be even better with a year or two of bottle age under its belt. The bouquet is pure, refined and classy, as it offers up a youthful mélange of orange zest, melon, white cherries, chalky minerality and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and complex, with a fine core of fruit, crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and still a bit of youthful austerity showing on the long and snappy finish. Given how much the Paillard Brut non-vintage regular bottle has blossomed over the course of the last year, I would be strongly inclined to tuck this fine bottle away in the cellar for a year or two and really let it blossom. 2015-2030+. **91.**

Philipponnat “Réserve Rosée” Brut NV (Mareuil sur Aÿ) Disgorged November 2011

The current release of the Philipponnat Réserve Rosée is really a stunning bottle and has to be one of the best-kept secrets amongst the Rosés of the *Grandes Marques*. The deep and utterly refined nose wafts from the glass is a sophisticated mix of tangerine, *fraises du bois*, warm bread, a complex base of chalky soil tones, orange peel and a delicate topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with very refined *mousse*, crisp, beautifully integrated acids, superb focus and balance and a very long,

complex and dancing finish. This wine is drinking beautifully today, but also has the structural integrity to age gracefully for many years to come and may well be better three or four years down the road. Great juice from a totally underrated, top flight house. 2013-2030. **92.**

Piper-Heidsieck Rosé Sauvage Brut NV (Reims)

As I noted last year, I have enjoyed the rather unique style of the Piper-Heidsieck Rosé Sauvage, as the very high percentage of still pinot noir added to the blend makes this bottling a fine partner at the table. The current release is again lovely, with its bright cherry color and its deep and “winey” nose of blood orange, cherries, cinnamon stick, rye toast and fine base of minerality wafting from the glass with distinction. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still quite youthful, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, brisk acids and fine length and grip on the focused and still quite primary finish. I would love to see this wine given a year’s worth of bottle age to really unwind structurally, as the potential here is superb, and today it is still a tad on the young side. Another testament to just how fine the wines are at Piper today! 2014-2025. **90+.**

Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Rosé NV (Ludes)

Like several of the new releases from Ployez-Jacquemart that I tasted in preparation for this report, their Extra Brut Rosé was just a touch reduced when I first poured it and took a few minutes in the glass to blossom. But once it had done so, the wine was absolutely superb. The *cépages* of this bottling is very similar to that of the house’s Extra Quality Brut, with forty percent chardonnay and the remainder a blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier (which the Ployez family does not detail on their website). A small percentage of the pinot noir is added as still wine, and the family lowers the *dosage* for this bottling under the philosophy that the still pinot noir in the blend will bring a perception of fruitiness already to the *cuvée*. The wine is a pale salmon in color and offers up a very fine nose of white cherries, blood orange, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones, warm bread and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with very refined *mousse*, crisp acids and superb length and grip on the focused and dancing finish. This really needs a year or two of bottle age for the acids to relax a bit and the wine to come into full bloom, and it will be well worth that small bit of patience! 2014-2030. **92+.**

Camille Savès Brut Rosé NV (Bouzy)

The new release of the non-vintage Camille Savès Brut Rosé is sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir and was disgorged in September of 2012. The bouquet is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex and spicy blend of cherries, blood orange, cloves, cinnamon, rye toast, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced and classy finish. As always, a fine bottle. 2013-2025. **92.**

Serveaux Fils “Rosé de Saignée” Brut NV (Passy-sur-Marne) Disgorged February 2013

The Serveaux Fils “Rosé de Saignée” that is currently on the market is a really lovely, fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier which was aged three years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The wine is finished with a *dosage* of 6.5 grams per liter and does not go through malolactic fermentation. The base wine here is primarily from the fine 2009 vintage, but this is still a young wine in need of at least a year or two of bottle age to really blossom structurally. The youthful and quite lovely bouquet is a blend of cherries, dried strawberries, rye toast, orange peel, stony minerality and a nice touch of gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and zesty, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a very long,

but still quite tight, finish. Give this beauty a year of bottle age and watch the sparks fly! 2014-2025. **90+**.

Taittinger “Prestige Rosé” Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of the non-vintage Prestige Rosé from Taittinger is another lovely version of this consistently excellent bottling, but it is on the young side and will continue to blossom over the next few years as it gets a chance to relax a bit structurally. The bouquet is deep and vibrant, showing quite a bit of chardonnay influence in its fine blend of white cherries, tangerine, warm bread, a complex base of soil and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with snappy acids, lovely soil signature, very refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. Six months will let this wine really start to open up, but I would love to be pulling bottles of this very strong release of Prestige Rosé out of my cellar five years down the road! 2013-2025+. **92**.



Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs (Brut and Extra Brut)

2008 Demièrre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Grand Cru (Oger)

The 2008 Demièrre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs was only disgorged in December of 2012, and it was just starting to settle in again when I tasted it at the end of March of 2013. I should note that I retasted this wine in New York in early September and it is still young, but is quite fine. The nose is young, vibrant and shows good potential, offering up notes of apple, pear, warm

bread, chalky soil tones, a touch of smokiness and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite tight, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and fine focus and grip on the long and snappy finish. The *dosage* here has not fully been integrated again into the structure of the wine after the disgorgement, so there is a touch of misplaced sweetness on the backend today that is just a passing phenomenon (the *dosage* is only seven grams per liter, but with its racy acids, so this is a dry bottle of Brut!), so I would not touch a bottle for another several months. This is a very good bottle that should really start to drink well with a couple of years of bottle age, and may prove to be even better than my score, as it is a bit hard to judge right now in its tightly-knit youth. 2015-2035. **91+**.

2008 Champagne José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Oger)

The José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes” is an excellent wine in the making, and perhaps the finest example I have tasted of this lovely cuvée since the 2002 (though I tend to like this wine every year and the spread between vintages is really quite minimal). The bouquet on the 2008 is excellent, jumping from the glass in a vibrant mélange of apple, pear, lemon, chalky soil tones, a touch of smokiness, warm bread and a stylish topnote of almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nicely ripe and quite generous out of the blocks for this bottling, with a fine core, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and superb length and grip on the focused and quite complex finish. Really a lovely bottle that will drink well immediately, but have no difficulties aging for a couple of decades. 2013-2030. **94**.

2008 Larmandier-Bernier “Terre de Vertus” Blanc de Blancs 1er Cru Brut Nature

The 2008 Larmandier-Bernier “Terre de Vertus” is a lovely example of the vintage, but it is still a young puppy and needs some bottle age to soften and blossom. The deep, complex and youthful nose offers up scents of green apple, quinine, stony minerality, bread dough, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and soil signature, brusque acids, reasonably refined *mousse* and a very long, bone dry and very minerally finish. This is borderline austere right now, but a couple of years in the cellar may make it a bit easier going on the palate. There is no doubt that the underlying wine here is excellent and the potential here is self-evident, but this is pretty tough going in its youth and really needs a bit of bottle age to come into harmony. 2016-2030. **91+**.

2007 Champagne Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The 2007 Blanc de Blancs from Deutz has really opened up nicely on the nose since I last tasted it in the summer of 2012, and now is delivering on the aromatic promise it showed at that time. The superb bouquet is a blend of white peach, apple, chalky minerality, warm bread, a touch of *crème patissière* and a fine topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with blossoming generosity on the attack, a fine core, elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a long, crisp and still quite youthful finish. This wine is moving forward very nicely in terms of its structural blossoming, but I would still give this another couple of years in the cellar to allow the backend of the palate to catch up with the lovely evolution now being shown on the nose and attack. A fine bottle in the making. 2015-2030+. **91+**.

2007 Champagne José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Oger)

In the year since I last crossed paths with a bottle of the 2007 José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes”, the wine has begun to blossom a bit and show some very pretty, secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate, while retaining its attractive raciness in the mouth. The fine nose is a blend of apple, brioche, almonds, a complex base of *terres blanches* soil tones,

orange zest and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still pretty tightly-knit, with a rock solid core of fruit, pinpoint bubbles, excellent focus and grip and a very long, well-balanced and still pretty youthful finish. I would opt for giving this fine bottle at least another year to more fully blossom on the palate, and drink the 2008 before the 2007 version. Fine juice and it seems that I underrated this wine just a touch last year in its tighter and racier first blush of youth. 2014-2030+. **93.**

2007 Marcel Moineaux Blanc de Blancs “Brut Millésime” Grand Cru (Chouilly)

The Moineaux family first began estate bottling some of their production in 1942 and continue to only produce wines under their label in what they consider top vintages, with lesser years seeing their vineyard production sold off to *Grandes Marques*. The 2007 Brut Millésime is still on the young side and in need of a few more years in the cellar, but it shows lovely potential and will be an excellent wine once it has fully blossomed. The young nose offers up a very refined mix of apple, orange zest, warm bread, fine minerality, a touch of vanilla bean and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tight and youthful, with a good core, fine cut and *mousse*, and a long, focused and zesty finish that is still quite reserved and asking for more bottle age. Three years from now this wine should be singing and it should age very well for another fifteen to twenty years out from that point. A lovely bottle in the making. 2016-2030+. **91+.**

2007 Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut (Reims)

The 2007 vintage is strongest for the chardonnay grape and there are going to be an awful lot of well-made, vintage-dated Blanc de Blancs from this year emerging on the market over the next twelve months. The 2007 Roederer Blanc de Blancs is outstanding, offering up a beautifully youthful nose of pear, tangerine, brioche, chalky soil tones, a touch of lilac and *crème patissière*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very, very youthful, with its fine core carried by bracing acids, excellent purity and focus, pinpoint bubbles and superb length and grip on the snappy and well-balanced finish. This needs time to really blossom, but with a little patience, this is going to be a stunning glass of Blanc de Blancs! 2016-2035. **93.**

2007 Vazart-Coquart et Fils “Grand Bouquet” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Millésime

The newest release of Grand Bouquet from the Vazart family is this superb 2007. The wine is crisp and sprightly, with its nine grams per liter of *dosage* seamlessly woven into the zesty chassis of acidity in this lovely wine. The young and exceptional nose wafts from the glass in a refined mélange of delicious apples, pears, chalky minerality, bread dough, orange peel and that lovely Vazart topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse*, a lovely spine of acid and superb focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This will need three or four years to really unwind, but it will be a stunning wine. It may be my imagination, but I am finding the *mousse* in the newest releases from Vazart-Coquart more and more sophisticated with each passing vintage. High class juice that only needs a bit of patience. 2016-2035. **93.**

2006 Hervé Dubois Blanc de Blanc “Brut Millésime” Grand Cru (Avize)

Hervé Dubois is fortunate to have almost entirely old vines to work with in his 8.85 hectares of vineyards, with one hectare having been planted in 1955 and the remainder in the late 1960s and early 1970s. His first estate bottled wine was produced in 1979, so he is one grower-récoltant who now has plenty of experience with his *métier*, and prefers that his wines never go through malolactic fermentation. The 2006 Brut Millésime is a superb bottle, wafting from the glass in a complex and generous nose of ripe pears, delicious apples, tangerine, warm biscuits, a

lovely base of soil and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with very elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and very well-balanced finish. Superb juice, I would opt for giving the 2006 Brut Millésime from Monsieur Dubois another year or two in the cellar to fully allow it to blossom. It should age very well indeed. 2015-2035. **93.**

2006 Didier-Ducos et Fils Brut Millésime (St. Martin d'Ablois) Disgorged October 2012

I had not tasted any wines from Didier-Ducos et Fils in a couple of years and was very happy to cross paths with this example of their 2006 Brut Millésime. The house is located in the village of St. Martin d'Ablois (southwest of Épernay) in the Vallée de la Marne. The *cépages* on the 2006 is a blend of fifty-five percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot noir and fifteen percent pinot meunier and the wine spent fully five years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The wine delivers an excellent nose of apple, tart orange, lovely minerality, warm biscuits, gentle smokiness and a nice touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, crisp, framing acids and lovely mineral drive on the long and classy finish. Like some 2006s, this is quite open out of the blocks and is really drinking with great style, but it seems to have the requisite structural integrity to also keep quite well. Impressive juice. 2013-2030. **92+.**

2006 D. Henriët-Bazin "Cuvée Marie-Amélie" Blanc de Blancs Brut (Villers-Marmery)

The 2006 Cuvée Marie-Amélie from Henriët-Bazin is a lovely wine on both the nose and palate, with only slightly larger bubbles keeping the score down a touch, as the complexity here is very impressive. The superb bouquet is a ripe and pure blend of pear, peach, brioche, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, hazelnuts and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, the aforementioned (ever so slightly) larger bubbles, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the blossoming finish. Structurally, this wine could use a year or two more in the cellar to really unwind fully, but the aromatics and flavors are already starting to show some lovely secondary layers of complexity that makes it very approachable already. 2014-2025+. **90.**

2006 Huré Frères Blanc de Blancs "l'Inattendue" Brut Millésime (Ludes)

The 2006 Huré Frères Blanc de Blancs is a young and promising example of the vintage, but this is still too tight for primetime drinking and really needs a few years of bottle age to round into form. The nose is deep, bright and shows lovely potential in its blend of pear, delicious apple, lemon peel, bread dough and chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very youthful, with a fine core, elegant, pinpoint bubbles, brisk acids and excellent length and grip on the focused, nascently complex and still very youthful finish. Though this wine is labeled as Brut, this is really dry, with only four grams per liter of *dosage*, and with this level of dryness, it really needs some bottle age to soften the piercingly sharp edges. It will be excellent once it has had some cellaring to blossom, but today, it is really very young and snappy and is pretty tough to drink today. Give it time, as there is excellent potential here. 2016-2035. **91+.**

2006 Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs "Special Club" Grand Cru Brut (Chouilly)

The 2006 Special Club bottling from Vazart-Coquart is a very lovely wine, with a youthful girdle of acidity that will demand a few years in the cellar to really start to drink with some generosity. The young and classic nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, lemon, bread dough, chalky minerality and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tight and rock solid at the core, with a high-toned personality, refined *mousse*, and excellent focus and grip on the long, snappy finish. It may just be a function of its relative youth, but the 2006

Special Club does not seem quite as long on the backend as several other of these fine vintage Vazart bottlings tasted alongside of it at this event- including the 2007 and the 2004 Grand Bouquet bottlings and the 2005 Special Club. It would not surprise me if this is only a moment in the wines youth and my score will seem conservative when it has had a chance to fully blossom, but for now, I have to score the 2006 just a shade behind these other superb Vazart wines for this reason. That said, this is still lovely juice. 2016-2030+. **90+**.

2005 Ayala Blanc de Blancs “Brut Millésimé” (Aÿ) Disgorged February 2013

The 2005 Ayala Blanc de Blancs “Brut Millésimé” is really a lovely wine that is cut from the high-toned and elegant side of chardonnay-based bubbly and is drinking beautifully right out of the blocks. All of the grapes for this cuvée come from the grand cru villages of Mesnil-sur-Oger, Avize and Chouilly and was aged just over six years on the lees prior to disgorgement and preparation for the market. The bright and vibrant nose offers up a complex constellation of delicious apples, peach, warm bread, a dollop of fresh nutmeg, a very fine base of minerality and a bit of almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really quite nicely structured for this riper vintage, with a lovely core, zesty acids, refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the focused, complex and dancing finish. Just a very classy bottle of vintage-dated Blanc de Blancs that will age effortlessly, but is already very tempting. 2013-2030+. **92+**.

2005 Vazart-Coquart et Fils Blanc de Blancs “Special Club” Grand Cru Brut (Chouilly)

The relative ripeness of the 2005 vintage is manifested in how much this wine has come forward in the year since I last tasted it, as the wine seemed a bit too tight for primetime drinking last September and was absolutely singing at the recent Selection Pas Mal tasting here in New York right after the Labor Day weekend. The bouquet is deep, ripe and wide open, jumping from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, warm biscuits, chalky soil tones, lemon peel and that classic smoky topnote found in so many Vazart wines. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and wearing its heart on its sleeve, with an excellent core of fruit, elegant, pinpoint bubbles, crisp, framing acids and a very long, complex and classy finish that closes with lovely soil drive and grip. There is plenty of structure here for extended aging, but this wine is already drinking splendidly well, and of all the recent vintage-dated bottlings from Vazart-Coquart, the 2005 Special Club is the one I would be reaching for first today! 2013-2030. **93**.

2004 Michel Turgay Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Grand Cru (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

This is the first wine I have had the pleasure to taste from Michel Turgay and I was quite impressed with it. The wine offers up a maturing and nicely toasty nose of apple, peach, wheat toast, a nice base of soil, a touch of almond paste, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, crisp acids, reasonably refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. The nose here suggests that this wine is starting to blossom nicely, but it is still on the young side on the palate and could use another year or two of bottle age. This is not the most elegant of grower Champagnes, but it certainly is long on personality. 2014-2030. **90+**.

2004 Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs NV (Ludes)

While I have certainly enjoyed the 2000 and the 2002 vintages of this bottling from Ployez-Jacquemart, my gut instincts tell me that the Ployez family has really begun to master their Extra Brut cuvée, as the 2004 Blanc de Blancs strikes me as a decided step up from the two previous years that I have tasted of this bottling. The deep and complex nose on the 2004 simply

jumps from the glass in a blend of tart apple, lemon, bread dough, plenty of smokiness, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a lovely topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, outstanding soil inflection, very elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the high class and very refined finish. While this wine is eminently approachable today, I would be strongly inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for at least a year and really let it come into full bloom. It is a stunning bottle of Extra Brut that should age quite brilliantly and is perhaps one of the finest bottlings from this *genre* that I have had the pleasure to taste. 2014-2035+. **93.**

2004 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut (Reims)

The new release of Taittinger's beautiful Comtes de Champagne is stunning, offering up a deep and youthful nose of pear, apple, brioche, a very complex base of chalky minerality, *crème patissière*, a touch of iodine and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and crisp, with great focus and mid-palate concentration, very elegant *mousse*, laser-like focus and simply stunning length and grip on the utterly refined and youthful finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it is already a superb glass of bubbly, but I would try to keep it tucked away in the cellar for at least five or six years to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge, as this is going to be a brilliant vintage of Comtes de Champagne for long-term cellaring. 2018-2050. **96+.**

2004 Vazart-Coquart et Fils "Grand Bouquet" Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru (Chouilly) Brut Millésime (served from magnum)

As I have mentioned the last couple of years, Monsieur Vazart does not like the style and shape of the Special Club magnums, so he refuses to bottle his version of Special Club in the required mags and instead releases them in his own, traditionally-shaped magnums and designates them on the label as "Grand Bouquet", though for all intents and purposes, this is the 2004 Vazart Special Club bottling in magnum. This wine has evolved gently and gracefully since I last saw it in mag a year ago, offering up a lovely bouquet that is now beginning to show some secondary layers to its blend of pear, almonds, *crème patissière*, a touch of tangerine, lovely, chalky minerality, wheat toast and a nice touch of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very nicely concentrated at the core, with brisk acids, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. The 2004 Grand Bouquet remains a few years away from primetime drinking, but it is moving forward very nicely and really is a superb wine. 2016-2035+. **93+.**

2002 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut (Reims)

It had been a year since I last tasted the 2002 Comtes de Champagne, but Klaus-Peter Keller cracked a bottle after we had waded through his magical 2012ers during my last visit to the estate in March of this year and it served as a perfect bridge between those glorious wines and getting back on the autobahn! The 2002 Comtes de Champagne is a brilliant example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a very deep and refined aromatic constellation of delicious apples, pears, brioche, complex, chalky minerality, lemon zest and a lovely topnote of spring flowers. The hint of wood char that this wine showed out of the blocks has absolutely vanished with a year's worth of bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely seamless, with stunning mid-palate depth, crisp acids, laser-like focus, superb structural integrity, refined *mousse* and a very, very long, perfectly balanced finish. Champagne does not get much better than this! 2016-2040. **97+.**



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

The 2000 Clos du Mesnil is evolving brilliantly and it really seems to me that I have underrated this wine a tad the last couple of times I tasted. The stunning nose offers up a young and very complex nose that is almost the spitting image of Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet fruit tones with classic Blanc de Blancs signature elements. The aromatic mélange is a pure and magical blend of fresh apricot, pear, passion fruit, brioche, very complex, chalky minerality, incipient notes of almond paste, citrus zest and a topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and exquisitely balanced, with a great core, laser-like focus, very elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the seamless and magically refined finish. A great, great wine. The 2000 Clos du Mesnil is beginning to nicely blossom from behind its structural elements, and with its superb balance it is already a great glass of bubbly, but it is really still a very young wine and only beginning its long evolution in bottle, so I would try hard to keep my hands off of this wine for at least a handful more years and allow its secondary layers of complexity to fully emerge. 2016-2040. **98.**

1998 Claude Cazals Blanc de Blancs “Clos Cazals” Brut

The 1998 Clos Cazals is a fine follow-up to their lovely 1996 version. The wine wafts from the glass in a very stylish and mature mélange of apple, bread dough, orange zest, very pretty minerality and suave, gently nutty overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite refined, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused and *à point* finish. This is a lovely bottle for near-term drinking. 2013-2020. **90.**

1993 Saint-Charnant “Cuvée Royale” Blanc de Blancs (Chouilly) served from magnum

This was my first encounter with Champagne Saint-Charment’s “Cuvée Royale” bottling and the wine was absolutely lovely out of magnum. The wine offers up a fine and mature bouquet of apple, wheat toast, a lovely base of chalky minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely focused, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and lovely balance on the long and classy finish. I really like the elegance of this wine, which makes in an ideal *aperitif* bubbly. Fine juice at its apogee, but with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2013-2025. **91+**.

1989 Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (served from magnum)

The 1989 Deutz Blanc de Blancs is a classic, high-toned example that is drinking splendidly out of magnum at age twenty-four and shows no signs of slowing down any time soon. The bouquet is a fine blend of tart pear, lemon, bread dough, a bit of caraway seed, stony minerality and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and light on its feet, with bright acids, fine soil inflection, frothy *mousse* and fine length and grip on the zesty finish. This will always be a bit lean in style, which works very well as an *aperitif*. Good juice with plenty of life still ahead of it- particularly in magnum. 2013-2025+. **90**.

Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut

2009 Lamiable “Cuvée Héliades” Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Tours-sur-Marne)

Cuvée Héliades is a new bottling from Lamiable that seems awfully young to be on the market, as 2009 was only four and a half years ago, and this seems like rather a short stay in the cellar for a vintage bottling. Perhaps the reputation for high quality of the 2009 vintage was a temptation to hustle this wine out into the market? In any case, the wine is here and it is really quite nice, offering up a deep and complex nose that shows beautifully ripe fruit tones of apple, white peach, warm bread, a touch of nuttiness, a stylish base of soil and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with bright acids, elegant *mousse*, lovely mid-palate concentration and fine length and grip on the complex, focused and zesty finish. This is the best wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Lamiable, and despite my reservations about how young it might be, the wine is already drinking very well indeed. 2013-2025+. **92**.

2007 Pierre Brigandat “Dentelles et Crinolines” Extra Brut Millésime (Channes)

The 2007 Pierre Brigandat “Dentelles et Crinolines” Extra Brut Millésime is a lovely example of the vintage, with depth, structure and good focus and balance. I could not find any information on the *cépages* or aging regimen on the internet. The bouquet is a deep and complex blend of peach, apple, warm biscuits, almonds, a fine base of soil and just a touch of barrel fermentation in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with superb focus and grip, plenty of mid-palate concentration, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is a very well-balanced Extra Brut that could use a couple of years to really blossom from behind its structure, but which will provide plenty of enjoyment once it has fully emerged from behind its structure. 2015-2030. **92**.

2007 D. Henriët-Bazin “Millésime Carte d’Or” Premier Cru Brut (Villers-Marmery)

The 2007 Millésime Carte d’Or from Henriët-Bazin is composed of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. This wine is not bad, but it is one of the weaker bottlings from this house that I tasted for this report. The bouquet offers up scents of apple, walnuts, orange peel, warm bread and a nice base of soil, with the walnut tones definitely in

ascendency at the present time. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and not particularly complex out of the blocks, with a good core and elegant *mousse*, but not a whole lot of precision on the reasonably long finish. Perhaps I just caught this wine too early (or too soon after its *dégorgement*?) and it is not on its best behavior. Not that it is bad, but it is not in the league of the other cuvées I sampled from this producer. 2013-2020. **88+?**

2007 Laherte Frères “Les Vignes d’Autrefois” Extra Brut NV (Chavot)

The Les Vignes d’Autrefois bottling from Laherte Frères is made entirely from pinot meunier, with much of the *vins clairs* also barrel-fermented, and in this case, I wonder if a bit of the delicacy and perfume of pinot meunier is lost from the barrel fermentation. Not that this wine is not very good indeed, but it seems to lack just a bit of the length and core of the other top Laherte bottlings this year, and does not possess the same perfumed complexity of the very best bottlings from other houses that are also one hundred percent pinot meunier. The bouquet is a lovely blend of apple, peach, warm bread, citrus peel, stony minerality and a deft touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, elegant *mousse* and pretty good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. I do not mean to sound overly critical of this cuvée, as the wine is still very good, but this is the one bottling from Laherte Frères where I might reconsider the wood regimen (if it were up to me). 2013-2025. **90.**

2007 Lamiable “Cuvée Phéerie” Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Tours-sur-Marne)

The Cuvée Phéerie is another new bottling from Lamiable that was rushed to me right before my (already long overdue) deadline to be squeezed into this feature. The wine has plenty of depth, but is done in a rather forceful style that is a bit far removed from the elegant side of Champagne. The bouquet is a fairly leesy blend of peach, toasted almonds, yeasty tones, a nice base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rather four-square, with a good core, refined *mousse*, bright acids and good length and grip on the slightly chunky finish. This is a wine that has some nice facets, but seems to try too hard and ends up missing a bit of the elegance and complexity that are the hallmarks of high-quality Champagne. 2013-2020+. **87.**

2007 Lanson Brut Millésime (Reims)

While my samples of Lanson for this article took a while to reach me in New York, due to the fact that I tried to organize them for a visit out to California (which is where their importer is now based and where I thought it might be easier for them to ship the wines) and was not able to connect with the wines prior to my departure back east, I did have a chance to taste the fine 2007 Lanson Brut Millésime here in New York, as it was served as the *aperitif* wine for the Gentaz-Dervieux dinner. This is a young and very good example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a stylish blend of apple, leesy tones, orange peel, a lovely base of soil and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and focused, with a very good core, lovely balance and grip, very elegant *mousse* and a long, snappy finish. As Lanson is one of those *Grandes Marques* that does not let its wines go through malo, this is built to age and will be best with a few more years bottle age. Fine potential. 2016-2035. **91+.**

2007 Camille Savès Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Bouzy) Disgorged November 2012

The 2007 Camille Savès Brut Millésime is comprised of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with all of the grapes for the vintage bottling hailing from vineyards that are a minimum of thirty-five years of age. This vintage did not go through malolactic fermentation and spent five years aging on the lees prior to disgorgement, with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. My tech sheets on this bottling do not indicate that any of the

vins clairs for this wine were barrel fermented, but I do seem to catch a bit of oak influence here on the nose that is really well done and captivating. The bouquet is stunning, jumping from the glass in a complex and vibrant blend of peach, apple, a touch of almond paste, a beautifully classy base of soil, a touch of fresh nutmeg, brioche and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and youthfully complex, with a rock solid core, outstanding focus and balance, very refined *mousse*, brisk acids and superb focus and grip on the very long and racy finish. 2007 is supposed to be a vintage that favors chardonnay, but apparently the old vine pinot in Bouzy did not get the memo! A gorgeous bottle of wine that deserves a few years in the cellar to fully blossom. 2016-2035+. **93+**.

2006 Champagne Deutz Brut Millésimé (Aÿ)

The 2006 Deutz Brut Millésimé is a lovely bottle that has blossomed nicely over the year since I last tasted it and now offers up impressive complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is bright, suave and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, apple, warm bread, chalky minerality, orange blossoms and a lovely, delicate touch of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant, with lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids, refined *mousse* and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. At age seven this wine is really drinking well, and though it has the balance and structure still to age for many years to come, this is already hitting on all cylinders. A superb bottle. 2013-2030+. **92**.

2006 Michel Lorient “Pinot Meunier Vieilles Vignes” Brut Millésime (Festigny)

It had been a year since I last tasted the 2006 old vine bottling of pinot meunier from Michel Lorient, and the additional year’s-worth of bottle age has certainly worked its magic on this lovely wine, as it is now wide open and really drinking with great beauty. The wine now offers up a simply stunning nose of apple, fresh almond, white peach, brioche, beautifully complex minerality, smokiness, notes of dried violets and still that faint savory note redolent of spices meats. On the palate the wine is still snappy and mineral-driven, with its full-bodied format taught and precise. The wine has outstanding focus and balance, a rock solid core, very refined *mousse* and superb, youthful complexity on the very, very long and exquisitely refined finish. This is a brilliant bottle of Champagne that is still climbing in quality, but is even better than it was a year ago! If you prize elegance and intensity of flavor, search out this wine! 2014-2030. **93+**.

2006 Thierry Massin Brut Millésime (Ville Sur Arce) Disgorged February 2013

The 2006 Thierry Massin Brut Millésime is a youthful and very refined example of the vintage, having been produced from a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, receiving a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and spending fully six years on the lees prior to disgorgement and preparation for market. The wine offers up a deep and classy nose of apple, lemon, plenty of smokiness, a great base of minerality, just a touch of sourdough bread, a bit of caraway seed and a delicate topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with youthful acids, lovely *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and most impressive mineral drive on the long, nascently complex and very promising finish. Once again, I am really struck by the singular mineral signatures of Monsieur Massin’s fine Côte des Bar bottlings, which keeps the riper side of the 2006 vintage firmly on the racy side in this example. This is high class bubbly that is approachable already, but which promises to be even better with a few more years of bottle age. Fine juice. 2013-2030+. **92**.

2005 Pierre Brigandat et Fils Brut Millésime (Channes- Côte des Bar)

The 2005 Pierre Brigandat et Fils Brut Millésime is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a complex and quite smoky bouquet of apple, warm bread, a complex base of chalky minerality, a touch of lavender, orange zest and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and crisp, with lovely focus and balance, a fine core, very elegant, pinpoint bubbles and outstanding cut and mineral drive on the backend to perfectly cradle the ripeness of the 2005 vintage. This is a high class bottle of bubbly that I would give a couple of years in the cellar to really allow it to blossom fully. 2015-2035. **92.**

2005 Godmé Père et Fils “Les Champs St. Martin” Brut (Verzenay)

This is one of the new, single vineyard, single varietal cuvées from Godmé Père et Fils, which were first introduced with the 2004 vintage. The Les Champs St. Martin is located in the village of Verzenay and is produced entirely from pinot noir. The original plan had been to raise the wine entirely in two year-old barrels, but I am not sure if a little new wood did not creep into the regimen for the 2005 vintage, as this wine is showing a lot of wood out of the blocks. I had been looking forward to trying them since I visited the estate back in the spring of 2008, but was surprised to find the 2005 release of Les Champs St. Martin so marked by its wood component out of the blocks. The wine is notably golden in color and offers up a deep and classy nose of pear, wheat toast, a complex base of minerality, orange peel and a fairly generous dose of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and snappy, with a fine core, lovely focus, elegant *mousse* and a long, crisp and complex finish. This is still a young wine and needs some time in the cellar to really blossom. For my palate, the real issue here is how well the wood will eventually integrate with further bottle age, as I find it a bit obtrusive right now. If it is subsumed into the other (stellar) elements of the wine with bottle age, look for it to place at the high end of the range. 2018-2035+. **87-92?**

2005 Godmé Père et Fils “Les Alouettes Sant Bets” Brut (Verzenay)

The vineyard of Les Alouettes lies in the premier cru village of Villers-Marmery and this bottling is comprised entirely of chardonnay. I like the integration of the wood with the chardonnay here better out of the blocks than in the above, and I do not have any concern about this wine eventually absorbing its wood component completely with bottle age. The nose is still a bit marked by its wood at the outset, but also offers up a fine blend of pear, brioche, a touch of *crème patissière*, chalky minerality and a fair bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and snappy, with very refined *mousse*, lovely mineral drive, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and youthful finish. Give this wine a few years to fully eat up its wood, as it should prove to be outstanding once this has occurred- the more fully the wood fades into the background here, the better the wine will prove to be! 2016-2035. **90-92+.**

2005 Godmé Père et Fils “Les Romaines” Brut (Verzenay)

The 2005 single vineyard Les Romaines bottling from Hugues Godmé is comprised entirely of pinot meunier from the village of Villedommange, and surprisingly, this wine has integrated its wood component the best (by quite a wide margin) of these three special bottlings. Now, of course, it may be that the barrel regimen for all three of these single vineyard, single varietal cuvées is different, so that may account for the differences in oak influence out of the blocks. In any case, this is an absolutely superb wine right out of the blocks, offering up a deep and very classy bouquet of apple, brioche, touches of violet, a lovely base of complex soil tones, orange peel, a very discreet framing of oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, snappy and complex, with a fine core of fruit, very elegant *mousse*,

outstanding focus and great length and grip on the poised and perfectly balanced finish. The other two single vineyard bottlings from the 2005 vintage may catch up with this wine with bottle age, but this wine is the pick of the litter at this point in time and one does not have to cross one's fingers and hope that the wood fully integrates, as the balance here is impeccable. 2015-2035. **92+**.

2005 Laherte Frères “Brut Millésime”(Chavot)

The 2005 Laherte Frères “Brut Millésime” is a fine bottle of wine that will need some time in the cellar to fully blossom, but which has excellent promise. The bright and youthful nose offers up scents of apple, lemon, stony minerality, bread dough, leesy tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and still quite primary finish. All this lovely wine needs is a little patience. 2016-2035. **92**.

2005 Nicolas Maillart “Brut Millésime Premier Cru (Écueil)

The 2005 Nicolas Maillart “Brut Millésime” is made up of a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and chardonnay and was aged five years on the lees prior to disgorgement in August of 2011. This is a lovely wine, offering up a refined, youthful and very precise nose of apple, tart orange, complex minerality, bread dough, a touch of quinine and just a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still quite primary, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, and fine focus and grip on the long and snappy finish. Give this a few years to blossom, as it is still on the young side, but it will be lovely once it opens up. 2015-2035. **92**.

2005 Philipponnat “Cuvée 1522” Brut Millésime Premier Cru (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2005 Philipponnat “Cuvée 1522” is actually an Extra Brut, as its *dosage* is only four grams per liter, but it is labeled simply as a Brut. A significant percentage of the *vins clairs* for this bottling was barrel fermented, and there is indeed just a touch of wood influence here on both the nose and palate. The wine was disgorged in October of 2011 and offers up a superbly complex nose of apple, tangerine, brioche, a lovely base of soil, almond paste and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very elegant, with a fine core, tiny, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and outstanding focus and balance on the youthful and impressively complex finish. This is a dynamite example of the vintage. 2015-2035. **93+**.

2005 Piper-Heidsieck Vintage Brut (Reims)

The 2005 Vintage Brut from Piper-Heidsieck is a young and quite broad-shouldered example of the vintage, with plenty of leesy complexity to be found on both the nose and palate and plenty of potential for long-term cellaring. The deep and classy nose is a blend of apple, wheat toast, leesy nuances, quince, smoke, lovely soil tones and a nice dollop of other savory elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and rock solid at the core, with very elegant *mousse*, vibrant acids, excellent focus and balance and a very long, young and precise finish. This is still very early days for this fine wine, but with three or four more years in the cellar, it will be a lovely glass of bubbly. 2016-2035+. **92+**.

2005 Taittinger Brut Millésimé (Reims)

The 2005 Taittinger Brut Millésimé is young and fine, offering up an impressively complex nose of apple, pear, a touch of creosote, lovely notes of brioche, smoke, a fine base of soil tones and a dollop of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, crisp acids, very elegant *mousse*, and outstanding length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. There is still a touch of youthful backend bitterness here that should be waited out, but this will be a lovely wine in a few years' time. 2015-2030+. **92+**.

2004 Bérèche Père et Fils “Vieilles Vignes Sélectionée” Brut (Ludes) Disgorged Feb. 2012

Having misplaced the importer contact information for the wines of Bérèche Père et Fils, I was absolutely thrilled that a friend brought a bottle of this wine to a Champagne tasting this past month, as I sadly do not have any of this great wine in my cellar. The wine's *dosage* is a modest six grams per liter, by the way. The 2004 Bérèche Père et Fils “Vieilles Vignes Sélectionée” is a great wine that is still a year or two away from its apogee. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy mélange of apple, smoke, brioche, a lovely base of gentle savory elements such as wild fennel (or perhaps seaweed?), very complex minerality and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still youthfully brisk, with outstanding focus and balance, a rock solid core, brisk acids, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and still quite youthful finish. A beautiful wine. 2014-2035. **93+**.

2004 Laurent-Perrier Brut Millésime (Tours-sur-Marne)

The 2004 Laurent-Perrier Brut Millésime is a very young and very promising example of the vintage. The young and vibrant nose offers up a blend of lemon, green apple, bread dough, a fine and complex base of soil, a touch of citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very tightly-knit, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, bracing acids and very good focus and grip on the long and still quite primary finish. The racy side of the 2004 vintage will keep this wine cruising along for decades, and while this wine is approachable today, I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for at least a few years and let some of its secondary layers emerge from behind its girdle of acidity. 2015-2030+. **91+**.

2004 Lebrun Servenay “Exhilerante” Vieilles Vignes Brut Millésime (Avize)

(I initially posted this note back in Issue 43 as hailing from the 2007 vintage, but the wine is in fact a 2004 and I reprint the note here with the correct vintage attached- which may make the wine a little easier to find in the market, as the 2007 has not yet been released!) The 2004 Lebrun Servenay “Exhilerante” old vine bottling is still a very, very young Champagne and really is in need of at least a few years of bottle age to start to open up. The bouquet is young, complex and fairly marked by its yeast autolysis aromatics at the present time, but with notes of apple, grapefruit peel, stony soil tones and bread dough underneath. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully coarse, with bracing acids, young and elegant *mousse*, fine focus and impressive length and grip on the still very primary finish. I have little doubt that this will be a lovely wine in the fullness of time, but it is pretty tough sledding on the palate right now and really needs at least a couple of years to relax its snappy structure and start to show some generosity on the palate. 2014-2025+. **90+**.

2004 Lebrun Servenay “Exhilerante” Vieilles Vignes Brut Millésime (Avize)

The importer kindly pointed out to me that I had reviewed the 2004 as the 2007 in my previous article on Champagne (please see above), and then kindly sent me another sample of this wine at the start of September that had been disgorged a bit later than the bottle I tasted previously. The wine is a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and ten percent each pinot noir and pinot meunier, and received a *dosage* of five grams per liter. This sample spent eight years on its lees prior to disgorgement in April 2013 and offers up a youthful blend of apple, tart orange, brioche, chalky minerality, a touch of toasted almond and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is still a young puppy, with its full-bodied format still tight and racy from the bracing acids of this vintage, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, excellent structure and still a bit of youthful leanness that needs to be worked through- not to mention plenty of acid! This is long and will be

a very good bottle, but the combination of some leesiness that has not yet been submerged into the wine and bracing acidity demands this wine spend a little time alone in a corner of the cellar. This bottle is every bit as young and structured as the one reported on above and will be a fine wine in the fullness of time. 2016-2030+. **91.**

2004 Lebrun Servenay Vieilles Vignes Brut Millésime (Avize) Disgorged February 2013

The primary difference between the old vine Brut Millésime from Lebrun Servenay and their Exhilarante bottling is that this wine is entirely chardonnay-based from their grand cru holdings in Avize, Cramant and Oger, whereas the Exhilarante contains a bit of pinot noir and pinot meunier in the cuvée. The vines here are old- forty to eighty years of age- and the wine offers up a deep and complex nose of apple, pear, bread dough, a bit of nutskin and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered, with a rock solid core of fruit, brisk acids, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. There is an awful lot of depth here, but this has not yet settled into a particularly elegant profile, and it will be interesting to follow it over the years and see just how much breed emerges with bottle age. It will certainly be very, very good at a minimum, but I have a sense that cellaring may unlock its inner beauty and make this wine really special down the road. 2016-2030+. **90-92+?**

2004 Champagne Marion-Bosser Brut Millésime Premier Cru (Hautvillers)

The 2004 Marion-Bosser Brut Millésime is a young and very good example of this vintage. I do not know what the *cépages* is for this bottling, but the wine seems to show a goodly amount of pinot noir on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a youthful mélange of apple, white peach, brioche, a lovely base of stony soil tones and a touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and brisk, with the vintage's cut and mineral drive nicely displayed. The core of the wine is just fine, the focus and balance are very good, the *mousse* reasonably fine and the length and grip on the finish excellent. This needs another couple of years to really blossom, but it has lovely constituent components and only needs a bit more bottle age to really start to drink with great style. 2015-2030. **91+.**

2002 Jacquesson Brut Millésime (Dizy) Disgorged November 2012

The 2002 Jacquesson Brut Millésime is comprised of a blend of forty-three percent chardonnay and fifty-seven percent pinot noir, with all of the grapes sourced from grand cru villages, and the wine was finished with a very low *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and stunning, delivering a classy blend of apple, sweet quince, warm bread, a complex base of minerality, smoke and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite youthful, with a lovely core, crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip. This is a superb example of the vintage in the making, but it is still on the young side and needs a bit more cellaring to really blossom. 2016-2035+. **92+.**

2002 Pierre Paillard Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Bouzy) Disgorged September 2012

I tasted this wine a year ago, from an earlier disgorged example, and it showed equally fine as this current release in the market. I really like this wine's complexity on both the nose and palate, and my only (minimal) complaint with the wine is that its bubbles are a bit on the large side. The bouquet is deep, complex and fairly leesy in its mix of baked apples, tangerine, smoke, citrus peel, warm bread and leesy overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with the aforementioned larger bubbles, crisp acids and good focus and balance on the long and wide open finish. This is good juice for drinking over the remainder

of the decade, and my score this year should come with the same caveat that if you value aromatic and flavor complexity over the refinement of the *mousse* in your Grower's Champagne, then my score will seem a bit conservative, as there is a lot of good things going on here in the glass. 2013-2020. **90.**

2002 Philipponnat “Clos des Goisses” Brut (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

It had been a year since I last crossed paths with a bottle of the brilliant 2002 Clos des Goisses from Philipponnat, and time seems not to have touched this wine at all. The bouquet remains deep, pure and stunning in its youthful bliss of apple, incipient notes of the nuttiness to come, orange peel, caraway seed, fresh-baked bread, very complex minerality, a bit of smokiness and citrus zest in the upper register. With air this gets more and more floral in a low key and subtly musky manner that is totally enchanting. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and rock solid at the core, with totally refined *mousse*, a youthful chassis of acid, brilliant focus and balance and a very long, young and intensely flavored finish that will be pure magic when the wine finally apogees in another five to ten years. As I said last year, this remains a brilliant synthesis of a top vintage and one of Champagne's most profound *terroirs* and as fine a young vintage of Clos des Goisses as I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2018-2045. **95+.**

2001 S. Coquillettte Brut Millésime (Chouilly)

Although the house of S. Coquillettte is based in the village of Chouilly in the Côte des Blancs, this particularly cuvée is made up of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay from this village and fifty percent pinot noir from Aÿ. The wine is young and very promising, offering up a complex bouquet of green apple, tart orange, bread dough, complex minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and very mineral in personality, with a fine core of fruit, refined, pinpoint bubbles and impressive length and grip on the focused and snappy finish. While this wine is already accessible, I would be inclined to give it a couple more years in the cellar to allow some of its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Impressive juice. 2013-2025+. **92+.**

2000 Champagne Deutz “Cuvée William Deutz” Brut (Aÿ)

The 2000 Cuvée William Deutz is a deep, young and powerfully-built wine with superb depth and structure for long-term aging. The bouquet is really quite fine, offering up a deep and classy nose of apple, wheat toast, tangerine, some gentle leesy tones, a lovely base of soil, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the crisp and complex finish. This is a very classy bottle of bubbly that is already drinking very well and which will continue to age gracefully for a couple of decades. 2013-2035. **93.**

2000 Charles Heidsieck Brut Millésime (Reims)

A year of bottle age has certainly allowed the youthful 2000 Charles Heidsieck to settle in and the wine was showing beautifully this summer, whereas last summer it was still a bit bound up in its youthful structural elements and looking to integrate its constituent components. Today the wine is stunningly on form, soaring from the glass in a complex mix of apple, toast, a touch of walnut, a gorgeous base of complex soil tones, a touch of the honeycomb to come, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, laser-like focus and superb length and grip on the utterly refined finish. This is really starting to drink well today, but has years and

years of life still ahead of it and there is emphatically no rush to start opening bottles! 2013-2035+. **94.**

2000 Huré Frères “Terre Natale” Brut Millésime (Ludes)

The Terre Natale from Huré Frères is the house’s top of the line bottling, which is only produced in top vintages and is aged *sur lies* for fully ten years prior to disgorgement and preparation for release. It is comprised of a blend of forty percent chardonnay, twenty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent pinot meunier, with all of the grapes hailing from the family’s vineyards in the Montagne de Reims village of Ludes. The 2000 Terre Natale is excellent, delivering a complex and vibrant nose of pear, brioche, apple, lovely soil tones, a nice touch of smokiness, almonds and a bit of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely mature, with bright acids, elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and complexity and a long, classy finish. This wine is wide open and drinking beautifully, but also possesses fine structure and will have no troubles cruising along for several decades to come. Good juice! 2013-2030+. **92.**

2000 Krug Vintage Brut (Reims)

Another year of bottle age has certainly not taken any of the luster off the brilliant 2000 vintage of Krug, and if this beautiful wine continues to improve each time I re-visit it, then I am soon going to run out of points! This most recent showing indicates that I definitely have underestimated this superb vintage of Krug by a bit the last couple of times I have tasted it, as it is now blossoming into a young and utterly classic Krug in the making. The magical and still very youthful bouquet soars from the glass in a blend of apple, tart orange, brioche, caraway seed, a magically complex base of soil tones, fresh almonds and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with superb focus and grip, refined, elegant *mousse*, a great core, crisp acids and simply stunning length and grip on the flawless and dancing finish. The snappy acids of a year ago are now seamlessly integrated into the body of the wine, providing an underlying current of electricity that sharpens each and every nuance here on the palate. Just a brilliant wine in the making! 2020-2075. **96+.**

1999 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 1999 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart” is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, and a small percentage of the *vins clairs* here was barrel-fermented. Not all of the *vins clairs* that were used for this bottling went through malolactic fermentation in 1999. Interestingly, the team at Billecart-Salmon chose to release the 2000 vintage of this cuvée ahead of the 1999, so that this lovely wine is the current release—despite it already closing in on its fifteenth birthday. The 1999 Cuvée Nicolas François is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a deep and sophisticated aromatic blend of apple, clementine, a very complex base of soil tones, sourdough bread, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with great purity and focus, a rock solid core, very elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and lovely mineral drive on the very long and perfectly balanced finish. The bouquet here is just starting to show the first hints of secondary complexity, but structurally the wine remains quite young and full of promise and I would not be tempted to open a bottle for at least another three to five years, for as good as this wine is to drink today, there is so much more to come with bottle age! A truly stunning wine. 2017-2040. **94+.**

1998 Krug Vintage Brut (Reims)

The 1998 Krug Vintage is a brilliant wine in the making, and while it is still probably several years away from its peak of maturity, the structural elements are starting to peel back a bit at age fifteen and the wine is really starting to drink with style and grace. 1998 is a rare vintage Krug in that it contains more than fifty percent chardonnay in the blend, as the summer of '98 favored this grape over the pinots in Champagne. The brilliant bouquet wafts from the glass in a deep and pure blend of apple, tart orange, rye bread, a beautifully complex base of minerality, smoke, a touch of citrus peel and a distinctive topnote of raw almonds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly sophisticated, with a rock solid core, crisp acids and simply stunning length and grip on the seamless and refined finish. I have loved this vintage of Krug since the first time I have tasted it and it continues to age beautifully. 2013-2050+. **95.**



1998 Krug “Clos d’Ambonnay” Brut (Reims)

I had only had the good fortune to taste the '98 Clos d'Ambonnay bottling from Krug during my visit to the estate back in the summer of 2011, and it was probably not the most propitious of circumstances for savoring this wine, as we were in the kitchen of Reims' greatest culinary destination and meeting with its Michelin-two-starred chef (by the way, when is that overdue third star going to be bestowed on *l'Assiette de Champenoise* and its extremely talented chef, Arnaud Lallement?). Happily, this bottle was drunk under more ideal circumstances in

terms of temperature (if not in terms of *bonhomie* and elegant surroundings!) and I fully had the opportunity to reflect upon the multi-faceted brilliance of this magically elegant and refined wine over an extended period of time. The 1998 Clos d'Ambonnay remains a youthful wine that is still years away from its apogee, but offers up a superbly elegant bouquet of melon, wild strawberries, nectarine, kaleidoscopic minerality, gentle notes of bread dough, plenty of smokiness and a gentle topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly flawless, with a brilliant vein of minerality running down the center, perfect focus and balance, very refined *mousse*, zesty acids and simply stunning length and grip on the endless, supremely elegant and still fairly adolescent finish. Another seven or eight years of bottle age will see the 1998 Clos d'Ambonnay really blossom, but in truth, its zenith of peak drinkability is still probably fifteen to twenty years away! I frankly thought this wine was perfect, but as it is the only vintage of Clos d'Ambonnay I have ever tasted, I had to leave just a little room with the score in case another vintage is even a hair better! A remarkable wine in every way conceivable, the 1998 Clos d'Ambonnay is a rare *Tête de Cuvée* that far exceeds (admittedly very, very high) expectations and simply stops the march of time while a glass is in one's hand. Pure magic. 2020-2060+. **99+**.

1998 Ployez-Jacquemart “Liesse d'Harbonville” Brut (Ludes)

Ployez-Jacquemart's “Liesse d'Harbonville” (their *Tête de Cuvée*), is one of the very best values out there for top of the line bubbly. The 1998 showed beautifully a year ago and is even better today, as this non-malo bottling has seamlessly integrated its structural elements over the last twelve months and was absolutely singing at the time of my tasting. The stunningly complex nose offers up a deep and classy blend of pear, a touch of passion fruit, brioche, minerally soil tones, gentle nuttiness, a touch of orange peel and lovely smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and rock solid at the core, with great focus and balance, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and superb cut and grip on the very, very long and stunning finish. This wine is currently drinking brilliantly and it seems that I underestimated it a year ago. 2013-2035+. **95**.

1996 R. L. Legras “Cuvée St. Vincent” Brut Millésime

The 1996 R. L. Legras “Cuvée St. Vincent” is a lovely example of this vintage that is already reaching full maturity and will probably be at its best over the remaining years of this decade. The lovely and complex nose is a blend of apple, sourdough bread, gentle leesy tones, a lovely and quite refined base of soil and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and wide open on the attack, with a fine core, elegant, albeit rather gentle *mousse*, good acids and very good length and grip on the *à point* and stylish finish. This is a bit more forward than I might have expected from this racy vintage, but it is a lovely wine for relatively near-term drinking. 2013-2020+? **91**.

1989 Krug Collection Brut

The 1989 Krug Collection is absolutely brilliant Champagne and one of the best bottles of wine I have had the pleasure to taste this year. The totally *à point* nose soars from the glass in a regal blend of baked apple, buttered almonds, a touch of *crème patissière*, a beautiful base of minerality, brioche and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and magical on the attack, with a great core of fruit, flawless focus and balance, refined *mousse*, brilliant complexity and a very, very long, crisp and vibrant finish. This wine is fully mature aromatically and flavor-wise, but still retains the structural bounce and grip of a relatively young Champagne and still has decades and decades of profound drinking ahead of it. A great, great wine at its magical summit. 2013-2040+. **96**.

1961 Krug Vintage (served from magnum)

This was not a Krug Collection bottling, but rather one of the originals released probably in the early 1970s. My friend who served it had purchased it sometime in the early 1980s at auction and cellared it ever since. Sadly, the cork was just a touch on the loose side, and though the wine was still marvelous to drink, by gut instinct tells me that we did not quite see everything this magical wine could have offered with a perfect cork. The bouquet is deep, complex and mature, offering up scents of apple, oranges, brioche, nutty tones redolent of walnuts, a lovely base of minerality and a bit of almond paste in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with an excellent core, sound acids, fairly gentle *mousse* and very fine length and grip on the focused and refined finish. I have only had this wine on one previous occasion (from a bottle I bought at auction in the mid-1990s) and that bottle was also not totally pristine, so my grail quest for a perfect bottle of the 1961 Krug continues. That said, despite this magnum having a slightly loose cork, this was still awfully good bubbly! 2013-2025. **93.**

Vintage-Date Brut Rosé

2008 Champagne Deutz Brut Millésimé Rosé NV (Aÿ)

The new release of the vintage-dated 2008 Deutz Brut Rosé is a fairly young and quite promising bottle of Rosé. The current example is pale salmon in color and a very refined bottle of Rosé that seems to include plenty of chardonnay in its *cépages*. The pure and complex nose wafts from the glass in an elegant blend of strawberries, white cherries, chalky soil tones, warm biscuits, gentle smokiness and a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and nicely focused, with a fine core, crisp, well-integrated acids, fine complexity and *mousse* and a long, poised and elegant finish. A very fine bottle of Vintage Brut Rosé that could use a year or two in the cellar to really blossom. 2015-2030. **91.**

2008 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé (Reims)

The 2008 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of one-third chardonnay and two-thirds pinot noir and spends four years aging on the lees prior to disgorgement. The wine does not go through malolactic. The color of the 2008 is that classic, very pale salmon color that one finds in all of the Roederer Rosé bottlings and offers up a young and superb bouquet of delicate tangerine, white cherries, wheat bread, chalky soil tones and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and impressively elegant, with a lovely core, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the youthful finish. I would give this superb Brut Rosé at least a couple of years of bottle age to really blossom. 2015-2030. **92+.**

2005 André Beaufort “Brut Millésime Rosé” (Ambonnay) Lot 05-R (disgorged 1-11)

The 2005 André Beaufort “Brut Millésime Rosé” is an absolutely stunning bottle, soaring from the glass in an utterly refined nose of cherries, blood orange, rye toast, gentle notes of clove, orange peel, a very refined and complex base of soil tones and just a whisper of spicy wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seamlessly complex, with a great core, very elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a very long, refined and dancing finish that just exudes charm and personality. A brilliant bottle of Rosé, with a more suave and sophisticated personality than the house’s exuberant non-vintage Rosé bottling. 2013-2025+. **95.**

2004 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Brut Rosé

The 2004 Comtes de Champagne Rosé has blossomed beautifully over the year that has passed since the last time I had the pleasure to taste this great wine, and it is now wide open on both the nose and palate, while still retaining the bounce and cut found in the very best examples of the racy 2004 vintage. The stunning bouquet offers up a superb blend of cherries, strawberries, a nice touch of orange zest, gentle smokiness, a beautifully complex base of chalky soil tones, wheat toast and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a lovely, wide open personality, a great core of fruit and simply flawless balance. This is just an exquisite bottle of Rosé, with utterly refined *mousse*, laser-like focus and great cut and grip on the very complex and boundless finish. A year ago I thought this wine was still a touch tight and in need of a bit of bottle age to fully blossom, but one year on, the structure here has unfolded superbly and this wine is simply a joy to drink today. The seamless structure here will carry this beauty a long way into the future, but this wine is so good right now that it borders on irresistible. The 2004 will go down as one of the greatest recent vintages of Comtes de Champagne Rosé. 2013-2035+. **96+**.