

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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THE 1998 RED BURGUNDY VINTAGE: STILL YOUNG AND A BIT GRUMPY AND CHEWY AT AGE SIXTEEN



I started tasting several of the 1998 red Burgundies last year, in preparation for this report on the vintage as it crossed the fifteen year mark in its evolutionary arc. I had bought and cellared a lot of 1998 reds when they were first released, and drank quite a few village wines and more gently-structured premier crus in their first seven or eight years with great satisfaction, but I had been very good in not touching the more serious premier crus and grand crus in my cellar, as I fully expected them to need at least a good dozen years of bottle age prior to starting to really blossom. Therefore, I had not really tasted several of these wines since soon after release, and was quite surprised to find how shut down and chewy many of the wines were when I started to pull corks on some of the upper level appellations and taste with *vignerons* in the cellars in Burgundy at the end of 2013 and again in the spring of 2014. For the 1998 red Burgundies that I drank with great pleasure back in the time period from 2002 to 2009 were very stylish, relatively young wines that showed off lovely balance and excellent signatures of soil, with the vintage's sturdy tannins nicely buffered by sweet fruit and perfectly integrated into the other structural elements in each wine and they were really drinking quite well in that time period. Today, this is generally not the impression that the wines give (though there are still some very accessible exceptions!), as the fruit has evolved a bit, and the tannins seem quite a bit more prominent today

than was the case over the first decade of the vintage's life in bottle. There is a sturdiness to the tannins today in a great many 1998s that really makes them a bit difficult for current consumption, and though there still seems to be plenty of fruit in the cores of most wines to carry these tannins, I have the impression that the vintage in general is in a shutdown phase where the tannins are in ascendency and the fruit a bit submerged, so a great many of the wines are pretty tough and chewy at the present time and it is really not a great moment to be drinking the vintage. But, as the notes below will attest, there are exceptions to this rule and there are several wines from the vintage that are still quite open and drinking very well indeed.

I remember well my first visit to taste the 1998 red Burgundy vintage in the spring of 2000, as Pierre-Antoine Rovani was still reviewing Burgundies for The Wine Advocate and his nearly total dislike for this vintage really had some *vignerons* questioning their relative fondness for this sturdy and soil-driven year of classy middleweights. In cellar after cellar that I visited (I was just starting my trip to taste the 1998s as Monsieur Rovani was finishing up his), the Burgundians seemed genuinely surprised that I liked their '98 wines, which I found out of the blocks to have outstanding expressions of *terroir*, lovely purity of fruit, middleweight personalities and plenty of structure that would require some extended cellaring to come to fruition. But, the potential of the vintage as a good to very good year seemed quite evident at the time, and it is interesting to see how the wines have evolved over the fourteen years that have elapsed since I tasted these wines for the first time out of barrel. During the first several years after the wines were released, the 1998s seemed to be another classic "sleeper" vintage, with the wines' underlying structures nicely subsumed into their very lovely fruit tones and many 1998s showing very well early on in their lives- in fact, far better than I would have initially thought they would show in their collective youths- at least based on how they had shown out of barrel. However, around age ten, the vintage started to close down pretty noticeably, with their rather formidable tannins again starting to get the upper hand in the wines for a period of time, and they have turned decidedly less user-friendly at this point in their evolutions and generally have stayed that way since their tenth birthdays. However, despite their quite shut down personalities today, they have not lost their really lovely signatures of soil- one very good friend who is an experienced Burgundy taster used to opine about the 1998s that "one has to love a vintage that has this much dirt (i.e. *terroir*) in it at such an early age"- and at age sixteen, the vintage in general seems to be on the cusp of starting to transition back towards the lovely equilibrium that it showed in the first five or six years after bottling.

The 1998 vintage for red Burgundy is the product of an inconsistent and at times, what was a quite difficult growing season. The spring was perhaps a harbinger of things to come for the Burgundians, as frost damage around Easter caused problems for almost all of the villages in the Côte d'Or, with premier crus and grand crus more severely afflicted than the less well-positioned vineyards, so that yields were going to be a bit limited from the outset. However, in comparison to the severe hail damage that has hit certain villages in the Côte de Beaune like clockwork in the last three years, the frost damage of the spring of 1998 does not look particularly stressful, as it cut back yields about ten percent on average in the vineyards where it was most severe, which is a lot better than the fifty to eighty percent of the crop that has been lost recently in villages like Volnay! In 1998, the *floraison* occurred under good conditions, as May and the first two weeks of June were sunny and warm, but then the temperatures fell and rain was a problem over the ensuing month and a half in the Côte d'Or, and shot berries in the

clusters were not uncommon. In the classic feast or famine Burgundy weather style, after the chill and damp of July, August's weather was torrid and the vines suffered from hydric stress a fair bit during this month, so that ripeness did not catch up as much as one might have hoped for during this month-long hot spell. Probably the chewy, slightly dry-edged tannins found in many 1998 reds today are a result of the hydric stress of August. September was again rather patchy, with rain falling at times (welcome at first after the heat and drought of August, but not so endearing as it continued damp and overcast later into the month), and the pinot noir crop was brought in towards the end of September during a dry spell (there was no rain during the ten day stretch from September 16th to the 26th, though most pinot noir was not yet optimally ready for picking on the 16th), before the customary autumn rains arrived in earnest in October and the year descended into winter.

In many ways, the Côte de Beaune reds had a bit of an advantage in 1998 over their counterparts in the Côte de Nuits, as the pinot noir tends to ripen close to a week sooner in the south, and *vignerons* here were able to pick their fruit before the threat of rain again started to cause worries at the end of September. In the Côte de Nuits, one has to imagine that domaines were faced with the necessity to start picking a bit earlier than what would have been ideal in 1998, as the weather forecast was for extended periods of rain as October arrived. Not that the 1998s from either Côte lack for fruit, as this has always been a vintage about tannin management and tannin ripeness, and now sixteen years on, it seems that there are certainly some wines that will never shed all of their tannins, while others will be long-lived and very classy middleweights. The 1998 crop size ended up fairly similar to the 1995 vintage, decidedly smaller than 1996 for the red wines and nearly twenty-five percent less than the huge and lovely crop of 1999 that would follow a year later and make a great many Burgundy lovers forget all about the 1998 reds. Earlier on, I found this vintage a bit more consistent amongst my favorite domaines than I do today, as more than fifteen years out from the harvest, it is pretty clear now that there are some wines which are not likely to ever fully resolve their tannins. However, I would not say that this is even a significant minority of the wines that I have tasted recently from 1998, and there remain an awful lot of really quite fine red wines to be found from this vintage.

That said, several of the more structured and serious crus from 1998 remain in a stubbornly chewy stage at the present time, with their still fairly youthful tannins currently having the upper hand in the equation, but still with good fruit in reserves here and the wines seemingly only in need of more time in the cellar to start to emerge once again into a fine stage of drinkability. Certainly, a great many of the 1998 reds that I tasted for this report are offering up truly superb aromatic profiles (there are some that are currently in a reductive phase that makes them less aromatically accessible, but this is a fairly small minority), with plenty of fruit now merged into wonderful signatures of soil and plenty of secondary elements of aromatic complexity coming to the fore as blossoming elements of *sous bois* and truffley overtones-adding, in many cases, to the wines' aromatic allure. As red Burgundy so often ages in a cyclical, rather than linear, fashion, with the wines opening and closing several times over the course of their long lives in bottle, I am not particularly concerned about their current phase of hibernation evident on the palate of so many '98s, and I feel a bit more certain about the ultimate size and shape of the top 1998 reds than I currently am with the more enigmatic 1996 red Burgundies at the present time. For, though the 1998s generally remain a pretty sturdy and chewy lot and in need of more cellaring at the present time, they have not shown any of the "rusty pipe" aromatics

that plague some of the 1996 reds at the present time, and structurally, the integrity of the chassis of the majority of the wines I tasted- even today's chewiest 1998 reds- can seem sounder than many of the 1996 reds today. Time will tell which of these two vintages will blossom first, but I am betting that the currently closed phase of the 1998 reds will be relatively short-lived and the most successful wines will begin to drink again quite well within a handful more years of cellaring.

As the 1998 vintage for red Burgundy already possessed plenty of skin tannins from the drought conditions of August and the uneven nature of the growing season in general, it obviously was a year where a light touch with the new oak was to be well-rewarded. In any case, amongst Burgundian estates that use a high percentage of new wood, I do not generally gravitate towards those that are less than sophisticated with their use of new oak, and there are not a lot of tasting notes in the report that follows that hail from producers who are known to have particularly oaky wines, so it may well be that those who have traditionally used lots of new wood for their wines have made more of a mess of the vintage than the producers whose wines I regularly buy and cellar. The domaines who traditionally use a high percentage of new wood and where I taste and buy most often would include folks such as the Mugneret sisters in Vosne-Romanée or Domaine Dujac in Morey St. Denis, and I have always felt that producers such as these are amongst the most suave and sophisticated in their use of new oak and that they fully understand how to maintain the balance in their wines at higher percentages of new wood. I have never had any issues with their wines struggling to carry their allotment of new oak in any vintage, and this was once again the case with the 1998s that I tasted from both these estates, but I can well imagine that there are some really quite over-oaked and dry red Burgundies out there from the 1998 vintage, where wood tannins have leached out of the new barrels and added to wines that emphatically needed no extra tannin to start with and have seen their potential compromised in the process.

I have not written a comprehensive report on the 1998 red Burgundy vintage in a long time, as the last time I really tried a large number of wines from this vintage was all the way back in 2004, when the wines were still young and many were still drinking surprisingly well. As I noted in the introduction, this was a vintage that I bought in pretty good depth for my own cellar and happily drank a great many of the lower level wines in the period between their fifth and tenth birthdays, when the vintage was still a bit on the young side, but in one of its "open" cycles and really most of the wines at that point provided a lot of enjoyment. Today, most wines from *villages* all the way up to Grand Cru are currently quite closed and most are also fairly chewy, so the best thing to do with one's 1998 red Burgundies in the cellar is to let them continue to snooze away and give them time to reopen structurally. This is not to say that there are not many 1998s out there that cannot provide pleasure today, but in general terms, this is currently a moment in the vintage's evolution where more wines are closed than open, and one would be well-served to look at other vintages for current consumption (like 2000 or 2007) and let the 1998s hibernate a bit longer. The following notes are arranged geographically from north to south, with the wines grouped by appellation from village wine level through premier cru and then up to grand cru in each commune. Within certain appellations (where wines from the same vineyard were tasted from multiple producers), I have listed the wines alphabetically by producer.

Gevrey-Chambertin

1998 Gevrey-Chambertin “la Justice”- Domaine Antonin Guyon

The Domaine Guyon la Justice is a lovely wine that is still a couple of years away from primetime drinking. The pure and very transparent nose offers up scents of cherries, plums, grilled meats, a touch of mocha, a fine base of soil and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, a fine signature of *terroir* and still a slightly dry edge to its remaining tannins- demanding just a few more years of patience to allow the wine to more fully blossom texturally on the long finish. This will be a lovely wine, but it is still a bit chewy and should be kept in the cellar two or three more years. 2015-2030+. **89+**.

1998 Gevrey-Chambertin “Champs-Chenys”- Domaine Joseph Roty

The 1998 Champs-Chenys from Domaine Roty is quite closed down today, but it has retained its nice sense of balance between fruit, soil and tannin and still seems likely to offer up some very fine drinking down the road. The reticent bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, venison, *sous bois*, a touch of acorn, mustard seed, a nice base of smoky new wood and just a whisper of rusty pipe-like tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, focused and youthful finish. This is going to be a very fine village wine, but give it another four or five years to blossom. 2018-2040. **89+**.

1998 Gevrey-Chambertin “la Perrière”- Domaine Harmand-Geoffroy

The 1998 Gevrey-Chambertin “la Perrière” from Domaine Harmand-Geoffroy is really a lovely example of the vintage that is just starting to come into its plateau of peak maturity, but still has just a touch of dusty tannin remaining on the backend that suggests that another few years of cellaring would not be wasted on this lovely wine. The superb bouquet is a blend of red and black cherries, grilled meat, French roast, incipient notes of *sous bois*, a touch of venison and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open on the attack, with a good core of fruit, a lovely signature of soil and a very long, gently tannic finish. Fine juice that is just starting to hit its peak and should continue on nicely for a couple of decades. 2013-2030+. **91**.

1998 Gevrey-Chambertin “aux Combottes”- Domaine Dujac (375 ml.)

The 1998 vintage of Dujac Combottes was another wine that I drank in its burst of succulent puppy fat, and I had consumed my customary six pack of the wine within the first three or four years after its release. The strong soil signature that is prevalent in so many of the 1998s made this wine really stunning early on, as one was able to revel in the supple beauty of the youthful fruit and still get a very serious dollop of *terroir* at the same time- a dangerous combination if one has aspirations of allowing this wine to evolve with bottle age! Fortunately, one of my favorite restaurants in all of Burgundy, La Cabotte in Nuits St. Georges, had a goodly supply of half bottles of the '98 Combottes in their cellar, so I have been able to drink this wine with some frequency over the last few years while dining at this excellent restaurant. The most recent note hails from a half consumed at La Cabotte a year or so ago, and accurately reflects the style of the full bottle we had at the domaine as well during our vertical tasting. The 1998 Combottes is developing beautifully and is a poised and classic example of the vintage. The bouquet offers up a complex and blossoming mélange of sappy plums, cherries, milk chocolate, complex soil tones, violets and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined on the palate, with lovely focus and grip, modest tannins and a very

long, tangy and quite classic finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Combottes that is just about ready for primetime drinking. 2010-2030+. **92+**.

1998 Gevrey-Chambertin “Lavaux St. Jacques”- Domaine Harmand-Geoffroy

Not surprisingly, the 1998 Lavaux St. Jacques from the Harmands is a bit less evolved today than their lovely la Perrière, but it too shows lovely potential. The still fairly youthful nose is a blend of coffee, roasted meats, black cherries, dark berries, a bit of charred wood, black soil tones and incipient notes of the summer truffles to come with more bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still chewy, with a bit more of the dry edge to its tannic backbone than the la Perrière, and not quite the same bounce on the attack as that wine. However, the finish is long, focused and nicely tangy and bright, with some tannins still to resolve and fine length and grip. This was only the third vintage for the Lavaux bottling *chez* Harmand, and perhaps the wine was not quite as polished in these early days as it is today at the domaine. Good juice in need of a few more years of bottle age, but it seems likely that this will always be just a touch rustic in comparison to the lovely '98 la Perrière bottling. 2015-2035. **90+**.

1998 Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos St. Jacques”- Domaine Fourrier

Jean-Marie Fourrier's 1998 Clos St. Jacques is a beautiful and thoughtfully evocative reflection of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a pure and exceptionally elegant bouquet of red and black cherries, gentle notes of grilled meats, mustard seed, a superb base of soil, raw cocoa, *sous bois* and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, fine-grained tannins (in the context of the 1998 vintage), fine focus and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish. An emotionally and intellectually satisfying bottle of Clos St. Jacques, the 1998 from Monsieur Fourrier could really do with just a few more years in the cellar to more fully come out from behind its remaining structural elements, but it is getting close! 2018-2040. **94**.

1998 Charmes-Chambertin- Maison Pierre Bourée

I really like the 1998 Charmes from Maison Pierre Bourée, which is starting to drink well, but still shows a bit of backend tannin that would suggest that a few more years of bottle age would not be wasted on this lovely wine. The deep, complex and spicy nose offers up scents of desiccated cherries, mustard seed, cinnamon, orange zest, woodsmoke, forest floor, game and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off lovely mid-palate concentration, with good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, still slightly chewy finish. Like a lot of top 1998s, this is still just a touch youthful on the backed and a few more years bottle age are warranted. Good juice. 2015-2035. **90**.

1998 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Dujac

I seem to remember 1998 as the year where the Seysses family started to change how they pruned their vines in Charmes-Chambertin, as these plants had always seemed a bit too exuberantly vigorous to meet the domaine's high standards. Whether this was indeed the year where changes were made in the vineyard here, the wine acquitted itself quite well at our most recent '98 tasting, offering up a deep and complex nose of cherries, red plums, grilled meat, nutskins, a great base of soil, cocoa powder and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and delivers lovely mid-palate concentration, with tangy acids, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, pure and well-balanced finish. This is a beautiful wine that still deserves a few more years of bottle age to fully blossom. 2018-2040+. **92+**.

1998 Mazis-Chambertin- Domaine Harmand-Geoffroy

The 1998 Mazis-Chambertin from Monsieur Harmand is a superb example of the vintage, offering up a deep and very complex nose of roasted meats, black cherries, black truffles, a lovely vein of savory elements from Mazis' unique *terroir*, black minerality, mustard seed and a nice base of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off a lovely core of sweet fruit, with a very soil-driven personality, good acids, still a fair bit of chewy tannin and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. This will be stunning, but give it a few more years. 2016-2040+. **93+**.

1998 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg

The 1998 Ruchottes from the Mugneret sisters is a very good example of the vintage, but it is showing a slightly roasted side to its personality at the present time and I would be inclined to give it a bit more bottle age before having at it in earnest, as it is a bit more closed down today than it was a few years ago and seems to be going one of those closed phases. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up notes of roasted black cherries, hung game, violets, dark soil tones, lavender and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite hunkered down at the present time, with a good core, fine soil signature, chewy tannins and a long, closed and slightly sullen finish. Only a couple of years ago I had bottles of this wine that really seemed to be drinking well, so I have little doubt that this wine will be excellent again with a bit more bottle age, but this is not the best time to be opening up bottles! 2020-2040+. **92+**.

1998 Ruchottes-Chambertin- Christophe Roumier

The 1998 Ruchottes from Christophe Roumier is really a superb example of this vintage that is still a few years away from primetime drinking, but blossoming nicely and shows more elegance than some of the other grands crus that I tasted in preparation for this report. The deep and classy nose wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, dark chocolate, venison, herb tones, incipient notes of forest floor, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a gentle topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with a fine core, ripe tannins and lovely length and grip on the tangy and focused finish. This is going to be a lovely wine. 2018-2040+. **92+**.

1998 Chambertin "Clos de Bèze"- Maison Louis Jadot

The 1998 Clos de Bèze from Maison Jadot is an excellent wine that is still many years away from its apogee of peak drinkability, but is very well-balanced today and its eventual shape and superb quality are already very easy to appreciate. The wine wafts from the glass in a pure and complex mélange of cassis, black cherries, a superb base of dark soil tones, a bit of fresh thyme, dark chocolate, a touch of mint and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, moderate tannins, great focus and a very long, youthfully complex and soil-driven finish. This is still very early days for this lovely wine, but there is no doubting just how good this bottle will be in the fullness of time. 2022-2075+. **94+**.

1998 Chambertin "Clos de Bèze"- Domaine Armand Rousseau

In contrast to the 1998 Jadot Clos de Bèze that was served alongside of it, the 1998 Rousseau version was much more shut down and in a grumpy, slightly reductive phase that made it rather unappreciative of the interruption in its planned slumber in the cellar. The wine is going to be excellent, but it needs time to cycle back around from its currently closed down phase, which reluctantly offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, grilled venison, *sous bois*, a bit of iron-infused soil tones, nutskins and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied,

nascently complex and moody, with a rock solid core, outstanding soil signature, firm, chewy tannins and a long, tangy and firmly closed finish. This was terrific in its youth and has not lost any of its potential, but it is shut down today and the pleasure quotient if one is intrepid enough to open up a bottle today is not particularly high. 2022-2060. 93+?



Chambolle-Musigny

1998 Chambolle-Musigny- Domaine Dujac

I drank up a solid case of this wine in the first four or five years after its release, with every bottle performing beautifully and showing classic Chambolle character and Domaine Dujac elegance. Consequently, I was very surprised to cross paths with this bottle, which a friend served blind to start off the last of the series of tastings I organized for this report, as the wood component seemed to have gotten the upper hand on the wine since I last saw a bottle. The bouquet is quite new oaky at the present time (and far more so than was the case when this wine was still in the blush of relative youth), offering up scents of red and black cherries, roasted gamebird, lovely soil tones, *sous bois* and a fair bit of smoky, spicy oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and a bit chewy from wood tannins, with a good core, fine focus and very good length and grip on the tangy finish. Most of the time, when I drink up a wine in the bloom of youth, I have regrets at not having left at least a handful of bottles for more long-term evolution, but in this case, I have the gut feeling that it was the right course with the '98 Dujac Chambolle *villages*. Today, I have the sense that the wood tannins here are not going to fade at

the same rate as the fruit here, and I would be inclined to drink this wine over the near-term, before the balance gets away. 2014-2020+? **87.**

1998 Chambolle-Musigny “Clos du Village”- Domaine Antonin Guyon

Like so many of the 1998 red Burgundies today, the '98 Clos du Village from Domaine Guyon is currently just a touch dry-edged and in need of a bit more bottle age to soften up. Today, the wine shows superb promise in its bouquet of red and black cherries, a nice touch of *ceps*, a complex base of soil, gamebirds and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a good core and soil signature, lovely complexity and a long, slightly dusty finish. The tannins here need three or four more years to soften, but the wine has plenty of life ahead of it and should offer a fifteen to twenty year plateau of drinkability once the tannins have softened up a bit more. 2016-2030+. **89.**

1998 Chambolle-Musigny- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 1998 Chambolle *villages* from Christophe Roumier is a lovely wine that is still a few years away from primetime drinking, as this is a pretty structured example. The bouquet is deep and quite promising in its mélange of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of venison, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite black fruity in personality, with a fine core, still some moderately firm tannins, a fine soil signature and a long, focused and still youthful finish. Good juice in the making, but give it a few more years. 2017-2035+. **90.**

1998 Chambolle-Musigny “Combe d’Orveau”- Domaine Bruno Clavelier

The 1998 Combe d’Orveau from Bruno Clavelier is already quite tertiary on the nose, but still has a bit of dusty tannin to resolve before it will really reach its apogee. The lovely and mature nose offers up scents of black fruit, cigar smoke, deep minerality, a touch of venison, *sous bois*, coffee and a hint of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still a touch bound up in its structure, with fine focus, tangy acids and a long, autumnal and still moderately tannic finish. This is a good bottle, but not quite as polished as the wines that Monsieur Clavelier is crafting these days. 2016-2035. **89.**

1998 Chambolle-Musigny “les Gruenchers”- Domaine Dujac

I have had the pleasure of drinking up most of my case of the '98 Dujac Gruenchers over the last five years, and like many 1998s, the wine is now a bit more closed than was the case three or four years ago, as the tannins have come up just a bit and play a more prominent role in the equation of the wine today than they did previously. But, that said, this is still one of the best 1998s for drinking today, offering up a deep, complex and very classy nose of cherries, red plums, a touch of pomegranate, cocoa, roses, a suave base of soil, cinnamon, smoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very velvety on the attack, with a fine core, modest tannins, tangy acids and a long, focused and refined finish. One did not notice the remaining tannins at all three or four years ago, but today, they show just a bit on the backend. This is a truly superb example of the vintage. 2013-2035+. **93.**

1998 Chambolle-Musigny “les Gruenchers”- Domaine Fourrier

The 1998 Gruenchers from Jean-Marie Fourrier is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a complex nose of cherries, blood orange, bonfires, roses, incipient notes of *sous bois* and mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and intensely flavored, with a nice little core of sappy fruit, gentle tannins, good acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is really drinking well and shows classic Chambolle elegance in this vintage that has gotten slightly rustic as time has gone by. A fine example. 2013-2030. **92.**

1998 Chambolle-Musigny “les Feusselottes”- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg

The 1998 Feusselottes from the Mugneret sisters is a lovely bottle that has gone through the typical iterations of the vintage, having closed down for a bit at around age nine or ten and is now beginning to once again open up and just starting to drink well. I have tasted this wine a couple of times out of bottle and once out of magnum in the last two years, with the magnum less shut down than the regular bottles. This note is from the magnum. The wine offers up a deep, complex and quite stylish nose of red and black cherries, coffee, fresh herb tones, rose petals, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil, cedar and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core, a bit of ripe tannin still in need of resolution, lovely focus and grip and a long, soil-driven and fairly youthful finish. Fine juice, but give it more time. 2016-2040+. **92+**.

1998 Chambolle-Musigny “les Fuées”- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

The 1998 les Fuées from Domaine Mugnier is a lovely example of the vintage that is very soil-driven in personality and still a touch chewy from the vintage’s structure. The excellent bouquet is a blend of red berries, raw cocoa, blood orange, coffee, fresh herb tones and a fine base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, tightly-knit and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with impressive complexity and transparency, good acids and still some modest tannin perking up the finish and suggesting that a bit more bottle age is still called for. Good juice in the making. 2015-2035+. **91**.

1998 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Georges Roumier

The ’98 Amoureuses from Christophe Roumier is a superb young example of the vintage, with a brilliantly complex nose beginning to really come into its own in a mix of red and black cherries, a touch of juniper, heather, vinesmoke, a very complex base of chalky soil tones, incipient notes of gamebird and a nice touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and shows off nice “cool” fruit tones at the core, with fine-grained tannins, outstanding focus and balance and a very long, youthful and complex finish. I would still give this stunning wine at least another few years to really start to blossom. 2016-2040. **95**.

1998 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bart

The 1998 Bonnes-Mares from Domaine Bart is a really outstanding bottle of this great *terroir*, offering up a complex and blossoming nose of backed black cherries and plums, roasted meats, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and a topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beginning to turn nicely autumnal, with a fine core, melting tannins and very fine length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is a lovely wine that is just starting to drink well today, but has decades of life still ahead of it. Its balance is far more suave than is typical of so many 1998s at this point in time and augurs extremely well for its future evolution. Fine juice. 2013-2035+. **92+**.

Nuits St. Georges

1998 Nuits St. Georges “Vaucrains”- Domaine Robert Chevillon

The 1998 Vaucrains from the Chevillon family is one of the more approachable examples of the vintage for current drinking, but this does not mean that there are not still several layers of complexity still to unfold here, and it remains early days for peak drinking of this beautiful wine. The deep and utterly refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of plums, black cherries, venison, nutskin, fresh herb tones, blossoming notes of forest floor and a discreet framing of

vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with lovely mid-palate depth, ripe, beautifully-integrated and chewy tannins, excellent focus and grip and impressive balance on the very long and soil-driven finish. Approachable today, I would be inclined to still give this wine another three or four years of bottle age and really let it get comfortably up into its plateau of maturity. Though I did not taste them for this report, I would think that the normally more forward (in the context of classic Nuits, mind you!) premier crus from the domaine, such as Chaignots and Bousselots, would be better candidates for current drinking, while the Cailles, Vaucrains and Les St. Georges here from 1998 are allowed a few more years of slumber in the cellar. This is a superb example of the vintage. 2017-2040. **93.**

1998 Nuits St. Georges “Vaucrains”- Domaine Henri Gouges

The 1998 Vaucrains from Domaine Gouges does not possess quite the same buffering layers of fruit as the 1999, so despite it being closer to its period of maturity, it is a bit less forthcoming on the palate today than the 1999. The nose is deep, young and still a tad adolescent, as it offers up scents of dark berries, black cherries, a bit of gaminess, bitter chocolate, soil tones and a touch of leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerfully built for the vintage, with excellent soil inflection, ripe tannins, good acidity and fine focus and grip on the long, still fairly chewy finish. I would not touch another bottle of this for at least another four or five years, as its future is very promising and it would be a waste to start pulling corks on this wine until it has really had a chance to blossom. It would not surprise me at all to see my score seem ridiculously conservative for this wine a decade down the road. 2020-2045+. **91+.**

Aloxe-Corton

1998 Corton “Maréchaudes”- Domaine Chandon de Briailles

The '98 Corton “Maréchaudes” is a lovely and still youthful example of the vintage, and happily, this is one 1998 red Burgundy that is still fairly open and has not hunkered down into a period of hibernation. The deep and classy bouquet offers up a fine constellation of cherries, orange peel, a complex base of soil tones, coffee, incipient notes of *sous bois* and a nice dollop of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, still a fair bit of tannin to resolve, good acids and a long, focused and soil-driven finish. This will be a lovely wine with a bit more time in the cellar. 2015-2035+. **91.**

1998 Corton “Bressandes”- Domaine Antonin Guyon

The 1998 Corton “Bressandes” from Domaine Antonin Guyon is still a fairly young example of the vintage and at least five years away from fully blossoming on the palate- though the bouquet is already lovely. The nose is a fine blend of red and black cherries, venison, woodsmoke, *sous bois*, and a lovely dustiness of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, soil-driven and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This will be superb with a bit more cellaring. 2018-2040. **92+.**

1998 Corton “Clos du Roy”- Domaine Antonin Guyon

The 1998 Guyon Clos du Roy is even a bit less evolved structurally than the Bressandes, but shows equally fine potential. The domaine used fifty percent new oak for its Cortons back in 1998, which may have contributed a bit to the sturdy nature of this wine. The superb bouquet offers up a blend of black cherries, baked dark berries, venison, coffee, forest floor and a deep base of other soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and still quite tannic, with the tannins nicely integrated into the fruit of the wine. The finish is long and

complex, with fine balance and plenty of fruit to carry the sturdy framework far into the future. This is a fine wine in the making, but give it time. 2020-2060. **92+**.



Alexandre Gaunoux in his cellars in Pommard- his 1998s are amongst the superstars of the vintage.

1998 Corton “Renardes”- Domaine Michel Gaunoux

Like so many of the very top wines from this vintage, the 1998 Corton “Renardes” from Domaine Michel Gaunoux takes a little coaxing, once it is opened, to start to blossom, but once it has had a bit of air, the stunning potential of this wine is readily apparent. The deep and youthful nose offers up a seamless and very pure aromatic constellation of cherries, quince, mustard seed, blood orange, gamebird, a touch of raw cocoa and a simply stunning base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and marvelously complex, with great focus and balance, a rock solid core, suave tannins and stunning length and grip on the perfectly balanced and very soil-driven finish. Like so many adolescent Gaunoux wines, there is a touch of dried fruit elements in the aromatic profile of the wine when it is first opened, but this vanishes fairly briskly and is replaced by truly vibrant and pure fruit elements, along with the full cornucopia of aromatic complexity that makes Corton such a magical wine for those who have the patience to wait for these beauties to fully blossom. A great, great wine in the making. 2020-2050+. **95+**.

Pernand-Vergelesses

1998 Pernand Vergelesses- Domaine Rollin Père et Fils

The 1998 Pernand AC is really drinking quite well at age sixteen, offering up a fine nose of black cherries, charred wood, fresh herb tones, *sous bois*, coffee and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still shows a bit of the '98 vintage's backend tannin, with lovely focus and grip and a long, classy finish. This is drinking well, but has the balance to cruise along for many years to come, and like so many of the 1998 reds today, it is probably best left alone in the cellar for a few more years. 2014-2030. **88.**

Savigny-lès-Beaune

1998 Savigny-lès-Beaune- Domaine Chandon de Briailles

The 1998 vintage of red Burgundy is pretty shut down at the present time (I have an article in the works on the vintage), but the Savigny-lès-Beaune AC from Chandon de Briailles is one of the more accessible and tasty examples of the vintage I have tasted in the last year or so. The bouquet is excellent, offering up a fine mélange of black cherries, red currants, gamebird, nutskin, forest floor and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just about into its apogee, with a fine core of fruit, still a bit of the vintage's chewy tannins, and fine length and grip on the complex finish. It is not a crime to be opening this wine today, but it will be even better with another year or two in the cellar. 2016-2035. **90.**

Pommard

1998 Pommard “Grands Épenots”- Domaine Michel Gaunoux

I have not been touching the fairly substantial selection of 1998s in my own cellar, as I still have a goodly supply of 2000s and older wines for current drinking, and have been letting the lovely 1998s continue to develop with bottle age. So, I was very happy to have a chance to taste this lovely 1998 Grands Épenots, just to see where it was in its evolution, as I had not tasted it since a sample crossed my path at the domaine three years ago. The nose is deep and blossoming beautifully, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a beautiful base of minerality, *pigeon*, notes of bonfire and forest floor and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very much defined by its soil elements, with excellent complexity and balance, a fair bit of tannin still to resolve and a long, tangy and focused finish. This is a lovely wine, but it is still at least five years away from really reaching its apogee. 2017-2040+. **92+.**

1998 Pommard “Rugiens”- Domaine Michel Gaunoux

The 1998 Rugiens from the Gaunoux family is another excellent and really well-balanced example of the vintage, but it too is on the young side and definitely requires more cellaring to start to fully blossom. The bouquet is a promising and nascently complex blend of cherries, pomegranate, blossoming notes of gamebird, dried herb tones, a bit of citrus peel, complex soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very transparent in personality, with a rock solid core, firm, well-integrated and ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, beautifully-balanced and youthful finish. This is going to be a superb wine, but give it a year or two longer in the cellar than the Grands Épenots. 2019-2040+. **93.**

1998 Pommard “les Chaponnières”- Domaine Parent

1998 was Anne Parent's first vintage in charge of the winemaking at her family's domaine, and by her own admission, it is not a vintage that she was particularly fond of out of the blocks. However, as we tasted this lovely wine, she noted that her opinion on the vintage is

starting to turn and the wines are starting to show a lot more charm than they did early on and they may well prove to be better than she had initially hoped. The 1998 Chaponnières was raised in about thirty-five percent new wood in this vintage (in comparison to the fifty percent it is raised in today) and the wine delivers a blossoming bouquet of cherries, plums, gamebirds, incipient notes of bonfire, forest floor and a gentle base of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, resolving tannins and fine length and grip on the focused finish. This is good juice that still needs a few more years of bottle age to fully soften. 2017-2035+. **89+**.

Volnay

1998 Volnay “Caillerets”- Domaine Marquis d’Angerville

I may have had bad luck with this bottle of ’98 Caillerets from Domaine d’Angerville, as the wine seemed rather flat for this usually bright and tangy bottling. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of cherries, quince, gamebirds, dusty soil tones, coffee and herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rather one-dimensional, with slightly tiring fruit, but good acids, moderate, well-managed tannins and sneaky length and grip on the complex finish. With sound acids as this bottle shows, the fruit component here should be much fresher on both the nose and palate than it is, and I wonder if this bottle was not pristine, or if this is just how the ’98 Caillerets is evolving at age fifteen? If this is the wine, holding it much longer before drinking it would seem to be folly, but again, this may just be a bottle that is unrepresentative. 2013-2030. ???

1998 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 1998 Clos des Chênes is just reaching its apogee and will now drink at this plateau for at least a couple of decades. The classy and blossoming nose wafts from the glass in a superb mélange of cassis, dark berries, *sous bois*, espresso, a touch of mint, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with melting tannins, excellent focus, lovely balance and a long, meltingly tannic and soil-driven finish. Just a beautiful example of the 1998 vintage. 2012-2035+. **92+**.

1998 Volnay “Premier Cru”- Domaine Coche-Dury

Jean-François Coche has never been given adequate credit for the beautiful red wines that he fashioned during his time at the head of the family domaine, and his lovely 1998 Volnay “Premier Cru” bottling is another classic wine from his long and highly successful tenure. This is a blend of Taillepieds and Clos des Chênes, and in 1998 the wine has turned out beautifully, as it wafts from the glass in a complex and refined mélange of cherries, red plums, gamebirds, *sous bois*, bonfires, fresh herbs and just a touch of new wood torrefaction. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core of red fruit, fine soil inflection and lovely balance on the long, modestly tannic finish. There is a relatively velvety texture to the tannins here that shows how the Côte de Beaune had a bit of an advantage in this vintage, with a touch more physiological ripeness than was the case in the north. A lovely, lovely wine that is currently drinking very well, but with fine potential for further evolution. 2014-2035+. **93+**.

1998 Volnay “Taillepieds”- Domaine Marquis d’Angerville

After having had a questionable bottle of ’98 Caillerets and a youthfully grumpy magnum of Clos des Ducs from the same vintage, it was a great pleasure to cross paths with a bottle of Taillepieds that was spot on and showed just how beautifully Jacques d’Angerville succeeded in 1998. This is still a very young wine, but all of its components are superb and in perfect balance and all the wine needs is a bit more time in the cellar to really start to turn some heads! The

beautifully pure and focused nose jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, a great signature of soil, a touch of dried eucalyptus and juniper berries. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a great core of ripe fruit, stunning transparency, ripe, moderate tannins, tangy acids and laser-like focus on the very long and classic finish. As someone at the table sagely commented about this wine, “no one made more intellectually honest Burgundies than Jacques d’Angerville during his heyday.” A beautiful wine that still needs more cellaring to fully blossom, but which will have a very long and magical plateau of peak drinkability. 2025-2075. **94.**

1998 Volnay “Clos des Ducs”- Domaine Marquis d’Angerville (served from magnum)

The 1998 Volnay “Clos des Ducs” from the Marquis d’Angerville is still quite young (particularly in magnum), but is going to be a very good example of the vintage with a bit more bottle age. I should note, that given how beautifully the ’98 Taillepieds from Jacques d’Angerville showed out of regular-sized bottle, it may well be that the Clos des Ducs is still just impenetrably closed in magnum today and that I have underrated this wine considerably. Presently, the bouquet is complex and quite bright in its blend of cherries, juniper berries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, cardamom and incipient notes of *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite structured, with a fine core of sweet fruit, fine soil signature, fairly low acids for a wine from Jacques d’Angerville and fine length and grip on the still moderately chewy finish. Give this another six or seven years (minimum) in magnum. As I said, this wine may well move up considerably in score as it has a chance to reemerge from its current period of hibernation. 2020-2050+. **90+.**

Auxey-Duresses

1998 Auxey-Duresses Rouge “les Duresses”- Domaine Gilles Lafouge

The Lafouge family only purchased their parcel in les Duresses in 1994, so this was still pretty early days for their bottling from this lovely premier cru. The wine is still a tad on the young side at age fifteen and is more developed on the nose at the present time. The superb bouquet is a fine blend of red and black cherries, bonfires, an exotic touch of red curry, gamebirds, autumnal soil tones, coffee and a topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and a bit of slightly dry-edged, chewy tannins perking up the backend and demanding a few more years’ worth of bottle age to soften. This is a very good example of the vintage, but give it just a few more years in the cellar to more fully blossom. 2015-2035. **89+.**

St. Aubin

1998 St. Aubin “Sur le Sentier du Clou” Vieilles Vigne Rouge- Domaine Prudhon et Fils

The 1998 Sur le Sentier du Clou from Domaine Prudhon is just starting to reach its apogee of maturity and offers up a tertiary bouquet of desiccated red and black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of tariness and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and autumnally complex, with a good core, still a bit of chewy tannin and sneaky length and grip on the complex finish. There is a touch of rusticity here that will probably always be part of the wine, but this is a good drink for the next five to ten years and really is quite enjoyable. 2013-2020+? **87.**

CHÂTEAU CANTEMERLE THE SOUTHERN MÉDOC'S HIDDEN CROWN JEWELL



Château Cantemerle is one of the great estates of the southern Médoc, and alongside of Château La Lagune, one of the first two great properties one sees as one drives north from the *Rocarde* autoroute exit for the D2 in the direction of Pauillac and through a series of hardscrabble small villages and arrives finally in wine country on the Left Bank. Château Cantemerle is ranked as a Fifth Growth in the 1855 Classification, though it took a bit of last minute persuasion on the part of the property's owner in the mid-nineteenth century, Madame Caroline de Villeneuve-Durfort, to have the estate included at all in the classification, as it was initially overlooked and only added to the list while the exposition was in progress in Paris. Her lobbying efforts were well-rewarded, as Cantemerle at that moment in history was already a very well-respected property in the Médoc, with a wide and loyal clientele (principally in Holland at this time- one of the reasons that is often set out for it being initially not included in 1855) and a fine reputation already for consistent excellence of quality. The original roster of the 1855 classification can still be seen with Château Cantemerle added in at the very end of the lineup of Fifth Growths, written in tiny print, but still making the classification. The fine reputation for quality at Cantemerle has not changed in the nearly one hundred and sixty years since Madame de Villeneuve-Durfort made the trip from Bordeaux to Paris to ensure that Cantemerle was not

completely overlooked in the 1855 classification, and today, the estate is making stellar wines that would no doubt delight her nineteenth century clientele and which remain some of the finest values to be found anywhere in the world of Bordeaux wine. To my palate, the Fifth Growth classification does not really do justice to the quality of the wines being produced today at this large and beautifully maintained property in the southern Médoc, and in reality, Château Cantemerle is at least worthy of a Third Growth ranking, if the Pandora's Box of re-classification were ever to be opened on the original 1855 classification.

The reputation of Château Cantemerle today is of an estate that was superb back in yesteryear, but which fell on hard times in the latter half of the nineteenth century and did not really perform up to its capabilities during much of the twentieth century- only reclaiming its rightful place as one of the bright stars on the Left Bank after the property was purchased by the French Insurance Group of SMABTP (*Les Mutuelles d'Assurances du Bâtiment et des Travaux Public*- got to love acronyms!) in December of 1980. Only this spring, the fine, Bordeaux-based English commentator, Jane Anson, writing about the estate, commented that Cantemerle “languished for a century” after the de Villeneuve family sold it in the wake of phylloxera and that it was only after the SMABTP purchase that things started to look up here. While there is little question that the new ownership group has brought much needed energy and investment to the property- particularly in the realm of long overdue planting of large parts of the vineyard patrimony at Cantemerle, as many vineyard parcels had never been replanted in the aftermath of phylloxera- the wines I have had the good fortune to taste from the 1960s and 1970s at Cantemerle have also been beautifully pure, complex and evocative clarets that belie the conventional wisdom of a prolonged period of dormancy and slump at this fine estate. Certainly, the previous owners here were working with only a tithe of the vineyards on the property, as Cantemerle is one of the larger estates in the Médoc, but they were making very fine wines from the vineyards that were still performing during this era, and one should not focus exclusively on the renaissance that began here with SMABTP purchasing the property in 1980, as this does not do justice to the fine wines that were still being made here in the era of under-capitalization under previous ownership.

Château Cantemerle sits in the commune of Macau, just to the south of the Margaux appellation, and despite it only being entitled to the Haut-Médoc status, its wines are often quite similar to those of that more illustrious appellations just to the north. It is a large and very well-known property in the annals of Bordeaux wine, having been one of the first wines mentioned specifically by name in the history of the region back in the latter half of the sixteenth century. The property was first established in the Middle Ages and came to prominence during the long ownership of the de Villeneuve family, which purchased Cantemerle in 1579 and owned it until the blight of phylloxera made it necessary for them to sell it in 1892. As noted above, it already had a very good reputation during the era of the de Villeneuve family's ownership, and though phylloxera hit it every bit as hard as any other of the properties on the Left Bank at the end of the nineteenth century, it did not fall immediately into decline once the de Villeneuve family had sold the estate. The property was initially sold to the négociant firm of Calvet, but only for a very short period of a few weeks in 1892, before they re-sold the estate to Théohile-Jean Dubos, and the Dubos family would have another long and very successful run with the property. Théohile-Jean Dubos also ran the family *négociant* firm at this time in Bordeaux, Dubos Frères, which was part of the Bordeaux wine trade until it was sold in 1914. Théohile-Jean Dubos passed away in

1905, leaving the *négociant* business and Cantemerle to the joint ownership of his two sons, Pierre and Bernard. The brothers ran the estate together for a few years, but management eventually fell into the hands of Pierre, and in 1923, he bought his brother out and became the sole proprietor at Château Cantemerle. Pierre Dubos ran the property with great vigor and success during his more than fifty year tenure at Cantemerle and he was one of the most important personalities in the Bordeaux firmament during his career. By all accounts, the wines from the property during his era were amongst the finest ever to be produced at Cantemerle, and it is likely that it is only since the release of the 1982 at this property that the quality reached the same superb level as was routinely realized during Monsieur Dubos' era in the first half of the twentieth century.

Pierre Dubos ran Cantemerle with great passion during his years at the helm here, with the vineyards nurtured and the wines produced with a true dedication to quality. During his tenure, many of the estate's vineyards were replanted from the phylloxera and downy mildew epidemics, and fully ninety hectares of vines were under cultivation at the peak of his trusteeship at Cantemerle, which was fairly close to the peak grape production of one hundred and twelve hectares under vine on the property during its height in the 1860s. Keep in mind that Cantemerle is a very large estate, with much of its land not planted to vineyards, so that even at its height of well-being in the immediate aftermath of the 1855 classification, only one quarter of the land on the property was planted to vines, and now after its renaissance, those percentages roughly continue on to the present day. As is so often the case in the history of a family-owned property on the Gironde, succession issues at Cantemerle eventually led to a lack of investment in the estate and falling fortunes. Pierre Dubos passed away in 1967, having shared the management of Cantemerle with his son-in-law, Henri Binaud, for several years prior to his passing, and Monsieur Binaud continued to manage the property from 1967 until it was sold at the end of 1980 to the SMABTP-led investor group. However, the ownership of Cantemerle during this time was shared by several heirs of Monsieur Dubos, and there was zero desire amongst some of the partners to invest in the property, so the cellars and vineyards became more and more decrepit as time went by during this last sad chapter of the Dubos family's ownership of Cantemerle. By the time that SMABTP purchased the property at the end of 1980, there were only twenty hectares of vineyards still in good shape and productive, and more than fifty hectares of vines were completely unproductive and in need of immediate replanting. While the general consensus is that the quality of the wines here suffered during this period of zero investment, the two vintages that I have tasted from the end of the Dubos family era at Cantemerle, the 1970 and the 1978, were still excellent wines and I suspect that while more and more of the vineyards fell out of production from the 1960s until 1981, the remaining healthy vineyards still produced very good fruit and Monsieur Binaud continued to make very, very good wines at the end of his tenure, albeit in smaller and smaller quantities (due to the unwillingness of several cousins to invest in the property).

In any event, the modern history of Château Cantemerle can be said to begin with its purchase in December of 1980 by SMABTP-led investor group for just under six million dollars. The well-known *négociant* and château owner, Cordier, was also a minor shareholder in this purchase, as they initially bought eight percent of Cantemerle and oversaw the management of the property and the distribution of the wines for the first dozen years after the sale. During this initial period of the new management team's tenure, the long neglected investments at

Cantemerle were undertaken with great alacrity, as the ownership group invested an additional eight million dollars here, so that the *cuvée* and *chais* were completely renovated, forty-five hectares of vineyard land was replanted over the first ten years of the new group's ownership and the quality of the wine immediately blossomed. Most Bordeaux commentators will point to the 1983 vintage at Château Cantemerle as the break-out year for the estate and the harbinger of the great things to come here, but in fact, the 1982 Cantemerle is also a stunning wine and was really the vintage where the estate showed the wine world what was to come at this important property. However, as Cantemerle is so close in proximity to Margaux and 1983 was such a superb vintage for this commune in particular, I suppose it was natural for the stunning quality of the 1982 to be initially overlooked by so many claret commentators, but make no mistake, this is a great vintage for Cantemerle as well. In the cellars, the new ownership has installed a combination of oak, cement and stainless steel fermentation tanks, in which, I am happy to report, the wine continues to undergo its malolactic fermentation in its entirety, and of course, the percentage of new oak barrels used for the *élevage* was raised right from the outset of the SMABTP era to around one-third new wood each year. Cantemerle has never been an overtly-oaky wine, and even today, the estate typically will only use forty percent new wood in a structured year like 2009 for its *grand vin*, and the wine remains one of the most *terroir*-driven wines on the Left Bank.

Cordier ran the estate here with great commitment during its dozen years as the managing partner at Cantemerle. In addition to overseeing the beginning of replanting of the forty-five hectares of vineyards that had fallen out of production in the latter years of the Dubos family's ownership, the Cordier team was also responsible for overseeing the complete renovation of the *chais* and *cuvée* at Cantemerle in the decade of the 1980s, as well as making the wines and handling all of the world-wide distribution of the estate's wines. In the first three years alone, more than thirty hectares were replanted at the property. The twelve years of the Cordier association with Cantemerle were excellent years for the property, with the wines gaining in recognition and climbing back into the consciousness of the claret market during the decades of the 1980s. However, to my palate, there was a slight change in style of Cantemerle's wines during this era, as they were certainly a touch more extracted in style during the Cordier period than was the case at the end of the Dubos family's running of the property (or at least this is my read on the wines based on tasting the 1966, 1970 and 1978 Cantemerles made during the latter stages of the Dubos era), but as the notes below will attest, the quality was always exemplary during the Cordier management at Château Cantemerle, and the wines from this era are aging beautifully and many are now starting to really reach their apogees of peak drinkability. In 1993, the Cordier team sold its stake in Cantemerle back to the SMABTP insurance group, as SMABTP had decided to build up its own, independent management team for its wine properties in Bordeaux, which now also includes Château Grand Corbin in St. Émilion. The insurance group brought in Philippe Dambrine to run Cantemerle in 1993, and he has continued to build upon the success realized during the first dozen years under the Cordier management of the estate and today Cantemerle is making wines as fine as at any time in the illustrious history of the property.

Monsieur Dambrine is not a native of the Bordeaux region, having arrived on the Gironde in 1981 from Paris. He began his career with a one year *stage* at Château Gruaud Larose in St. Julien, and then took over the management of Château Greysac in 1982. He ran Greysac through its finest era in the 1980s and 1990s, and then added the direction of Cantemerle to his duties in

1993, when the Cordier management era ended here. He remained in charge of both Greysac and Cantemerle from 1993 until 2012, when Château Greysac was sold by its long-time owners, the Agnelli family, to Monsieur Jean Guyon. As Philippe likes to comment, “I was on time share for both properties up until the sale of Greysac in 2012”, splitting time between the two estates, but “spending about seventy percent of my time at Cantemerle and thirty percent at Greysac” during this period of directing the two properties simultaneously. Monsieur Dambrine is quick to acknowledge that he is benefiting today from the decisions taken in the 1980s to replant vineyards very quickly at Cantemerle, as those vines are now starting to come into their primes and the quality of grapes that he now has to work with in the *cuvée* is far superior to what was available in the late 1980s. The percentage of second wine being produced at Cantemerle in recent times aptly demonstrates that the new plantations are really starting to come into their own at the property, as in the late ‘80s and 1990s, forty percent of production would routinely be relegated to the second wine, Les Allées de Cantemerle, and today that percentage is down to thirty percent. The vineyards today are planted to fifty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-five percent merlot, six percent cabernet franc and four percent petit verdot, which is slightly different from what was the case back in the Dubos era. Edmund Penning-Rowsell, writing back in 1969, observed that Cantemerle’s vineyards were planted to forty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty percent merlot, fifteen percent cabernet franc and ten percent petit verdot, so both the cabernet sauvignon and the merlot have increased with the replanting here in the 1980s.



Château Cantemerle’s Managing Director, Philippe Dambrine, in the cellars.

In 1999, Château Cantemerle purchased twenty hectares of vineyards from the neighboring property of Domaine Le Moyne Nexon, which had previously been rented out by the former owners to another estate. Philippe Dambrine describes these vineyards as “possessing excellent *terroir*,” but it seems likely that they were not particularly well cared for prior to their purchase by Cantemerle and the decision was taken to completely replant them over the course from 2000 to 2012. Monsieur Dambrine notes that “the twenty hectares from Le Moyne Nexon lie precisely between the vineyards of Cantemerle and La Lagune and were actually part of Cantemerle in the sixteenth century, but were sold off for inheritance purposes”, so this is really a return of part of the Cantemerle vineyard legacy of yesteryear, rather than a new addition. These vineyards have been replanted entirely to cabernet sauvignon, which eventually seem likely to increase the percentage of cabernet in the blend of Cantemerle, but they will obviously not be used for the *grand vin* for the foreseeable future. However, Monsieur Dambrine notes that “we have great expectations about the potential of this vineyard in the next ten years!” With the addition of the vines from Le Moyne Nexon to the vineyard patrimony at Cantemerle, the property now has between ninety and ninety-four hectares of vineyards in production, though twenty of these are still relegated exclusively to the second wine. When the new cabernet sauvignon plantations come on line for the *grand vin* in another decade or so, Cantemerle will have climbed back to about the same number of hectares in production as was the case during the glory days of the Dubos family’s ownership of the estate in the first half of the twentieth century, but still not quite up to the levels of the pre-phylloxera era here of one hundred and twelve hectares of vineyards. When I asked Monsieur Dambrine about the possibility of reaching the same vineyard production levels at Cantemerle as were in use back in the 1860s, he noted that “in fact, we cannot go back to the 1868 figures, since some of the land which was concerned has not been included in the AOC area back in the early 1930s when the INAO did establish the map of numerous AOC in the Bordeaux region,” so some of the old vineyard lands that were part of Cantemerle then are no longer entitled to the Haut Médoc classification.

The winemaking style at Cantemerle has been quite traditional since as far back as the Dubos era at the estate, and the current ownership group has certainly not changed anything in the direction of the modern style of Bordeaux since it arrived at the end of 1980. The wine is fermented in a combination of wooden, cement and stainless steel vats, all of which were replaced in the aftermath of the sale of the property in 1980, as part of the renovations of the *cuvée* and *chais* on the estate. Philippe Dambrine notes that “we tend to use the wood and cement fermentation tanks for the older vines and the stainless steel for the production from the younger vines,” rather than fermenting certain grape varieties in specific types of tanks. As I alluded to above, the malolactic fermentation continues to take place in tank, prior to the young wine being racked into barrels for aging. Typically, a young vintage of Cantemerle will be raised in anywhere between thirty and forty percent new barrels, depending on the style of the vintage in question, with the wines spending only twelve months in barrel, prior to an *assemblage* being made for the *grand vin* and the wine harmonizing in tank for many months prior to bottling. It is this shorter period in barrel that also adds to the very modest influence of new oak in the wines at Cantemerle and contributes to the impression that this is one of the most classically soil-defined wines in the Left Bank. For lovers of old school claret, Château Cantemerle should be right up at the very top of the shopping list, as the wines here today are amongst the most traditional in all of Bordeaux.

I mentioned above my impression that the wines at Cantemerle were a bit more extracted in style during the dozen years when the Cordier team was in charge of the cellars and vineyards here. I asked Monsieur Dambrine about this and he observed that this was most certainly the case, and that as the replantation of the vineyards in the early 1980s has gotten older, there has been the possibility to further fine tune the winemaking here. I asked if the slightly more extracted style of the Cordier era was in response to the cellar team having to work with more younger vine fruit in that era, so that a bit more extraction was desirable at that time, and he replied that “this is correct” and that he has had the luxury to start to work with more mature vineyards and this has allowed him to be a bit more gentle in terms of extraction and further refine the personality of this most elegant of wines. And I cannot overstate just how elegant Cantemerle is at its best, as is very much in evidence with the wines from the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, which are now fully mature and show off such a filigreed complexity and silky palate impressions. Like many claret lovers of my generation, I really came to know the wines of Château Cantemerle beginning in the 1980s, after the sale of the property by the Dubos family to SMABTP, and based on wines such as the 1983, 1985 and 1986, which I drank with quite a bit of frequency in the decade of the 1990s (though they were all on the young side), I had the impression that Cantemerle’s style was for more robust and black fruity wines. However, in the last several years, as I have had the possibility to drink more Cantemerle from earlier decades, and as the wines of the decade of the 1980s have really started to get into their apogees of maturity, I have been able to reassess my initial impressions and it is quite clear that this is one of the most elegant of Left Bank wines at its apogee. Perhaps the dozen years that the Cordier team was in charge here may prove to be a just a touch less elegant at their apogees than was the case back in the old days here (though they will compensate with a bit more mid-palate stuffing during their long lives), but they are wines that are really gaining in refinement now that they approach maturity, and the vintages that have been crafted during Monsieur Dambrine’s tenure seem likely to even surpass the great elegance of the last top years of the Dubos family’s era.

It will be interesting to follow the further stylistic refinement at Château Cantemerle as the next decades unfold and the newly acquired twenty hectares of vines start to be incorporated into the *grand vin*. If everything goes well with the new vineyards, which the team at Cantemerle has planted entirely to cabernet sauvignon, fifteen or twenty years from now, the *cépages* here is going to be around seventy percent cabernet sauvignon. Philippe Dambrine comments that “this is quite possible, but first, we must wait to see how good will be the quality of the grapes” from this new parcel in the Cantemerle vineyard patrimony. If all goes according to plan and these new vineyards perform up to expectations, then Cantemerle’s increased percentage of cabernet sauvignon in the blend of the *grand vin* will mirror changes that are afoot at other great, classically-styled Médoc properties, such as Beychevelle and Lagrange, which have also laid the foundations in their own vineyards to utilize a higher percentage of cabernet sauvignon in the *cépages* of their wines in the immediate future. In any event, Cantemerle remains today one of the great secrets in the realm of Left Bank Bordeaux, as the wines are of exceptional quality and they continue to be priced at very reasonable levels that makes them accessible to wine lovers with an interest in actually drinking the wines which they purchase, rather than solely catering to wine investors looking to make a margin on their mountainous piles of claret stuffing warehouses the world over. It is wines such as Cantemerle that may be able to reopen the long-standing pipeline between younger wine lovers and the wines of Bordeaux. So many people of my generation cut their teeth on fine claret in our formative wine drinking years, when Bordeaux

was seen as the region that supplied the greatest synthesis of quality and value. For recent generations of wine lovers, there has been a serious disconnect between the notions of Bordeaux and value, and many have simply ignored the wines from this lovely region, citing the brutally high prices of the most famous names as making them inaccessible to younger wine drinkers. However, Château Cantemerle remains eminently reasonable in price and is a wine that would make a wonderful cornerstone for any younger wine collector as he or she starts to build a cellar, and this sane pricing policy, as much as the great traditional style, makes Cantemerle one of the most classical of great clarets today.

2012 Château Cantemerle (Haut-Médoc) *Barrel Sample Note*

The 2012 Château Cantemerle will be a lovely middleweight in the fullness of time, and though it is a bit low in acidity this year, it is delineated and quite elegant. The fine nose offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, smoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and gently structured, with moderate tannins, very gentle acidity and lovely focus and grip on the poised and elegant finish. Clearly the team at Cantemerle did not want to lose the inherent refinement of the vintage with over-extraction and have been very gentle in the cellar with the wine this year. This is a lovely and quite honest example of the vintage. 2019-2035+. **89.**

2010 Château Cantemerle

The 2010 Cantemerle has evolved in the direction of the vintage in general over the last couple of years, which is not a positive direction, and it appears that I had overrated this wine a bit out of barrel back in the spring of 2011. It remains one of my favorite 2010s, but it is a bit headier than I anticipated and shows some of the vintage's inherent coarseness on the palate from this intense drought year. The bouquet is still quite enjoyable and not particularly overripe in its blend of dark berries, tarry tones, cigar ash, dark soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a very primary personality, some bit of backend heat and a real coarseness to the tannins on the finish that is very un-Cantemerle-like, though very emblematic of the 2010 vintage. This is a strong 2010, but one of the weaker recent vintages at Cantemerle. 2022-2040+. **87.**

2009 Château Cantemerle

In contrast to the hot and rustic personality of the 2010 Cantemerle, the 2009 is a superb example of this excellent *terroir* in a ripe and buxom vintage, and this wine is quite strong. The superb nose shows far more purity than its 2010 counterpart, wafting from the glass in a generous mélange of cassis, sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, lovely, dark soil tones, cigar wrapper and a bit of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush and primary, with a fine core, ripe, chewy tannins and very good focus and grip on the long, youthful and very well-balanced finish. This is a lovely, broad-shouldered Cantemerle in the making, but give it plenty of time in the cellar to blossom. 2025-2075. **92.**

2008 Château Cantemerle

The 2008 Cantemerle is an utterly classic and superb example of this utterly classic and vastly underrated vintage, delivering outstanding nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet delivers an aromatic constellation of dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, a fine base of Cantemerle's dark, gravelly soil tones, espresso and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with excellent focus and balance, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the properly reserved and very promising finish. It still needs at least another five years in the cellar to start to blossom and really will not

be at its peak for another decade. The 2008 Cantemerle will evolve beautifully in the cellar and is clearly superior today to the more-heralded 2010 vintage here. 2019-2045+. **93.**

1996 Château Cantemerle

I was not travelling to Bordeaux back when the 1996s were first displayed, and my primary business at this time in the wine trade was not young claret, so I do not have anywhere near as much tasting experience with the young '96s as I do with the 1995 vintage. Consequently, I am always happy to cross paths with wines from this year, which is clearly very, very strong on the Left Bank. The 1996 Cantemerle is outstanding, offering up a deep and very vibrant bouquet of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, incipient notes of chipotles and a deft base of new vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classically balanced, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, blossoming refinement and excellent length on the tangy and still fairly chewy finish. This wine is going to be excellent, but it is still at least six or seven years away from primetime drinking. 2020-260+. **93.**

1989 Château Cantemerle

I have always liked the 1989 Château Cantemerle since its very earliest days, and at age twenty-five, the wine is really starting to drink at its apogee. The bouquet is pure, complex and classy, offering up scents of cassis, cigar smoke, a bit of charred wood, dark soil tones, exotic spice overtones (curry?) and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still shows off a bit of tannin, with fine mid-palate concentration, excellent focus and grip and a very long, complex and generous finish. This was still in the era where the Cordier team was in charge of the winemaking at Cantemerle, and the style is a bit more extracted during this epoch and the 1989 does not possess quite the same refinement as is found in the excellent 1996 version. But, this is still a very well-made wine and a strong vintage for Cantemerle. 2014-2040+. **92.**

1988 Château Cantemerle

The 1988 vintage in Bordeaux is a good, solid vintage, and where proprietors were intent on making old school claret that reflected the style of the year, the wines have turned out quite well. The 1988 Cantemerle, not surprisingly, is one of those wines, as it offers up a lovely, black fruity bouquet of dark berries, cassis, tobacco leaf, a touch of youthful bell pepper and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very well-balanced, with fine focus, still a bit of tannin to resolve and lovely length and grip on the finish. This is not a blockbuster, but it is a fine middleweight that could use just another year or two in the cellar to fully blossom. 2016-2035+. **88.**

1986 Château Cantemerle

The 1986 Cantemerle was a wine that I liked very much from day one, and at age twenty-eight, the wine is starting to drink with style and breed, but it is not quite as polished as the wines being produced at the estate today. The bouquet is deep, still a touch youthful and very pure in its mélange of cassis, espresso, cigar ash, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite tangy, with a lovely core, still some of the vintage's tannins waiting to be resolved, fine complexity and grip and a long, slightly sharp-edged finish. In the context of 1986, the tannins here are very well-managed and will have no difficulties dissolving in the fullness of time, but I would still be inclined to let this wine sleep for a bit longer in the cellar and more fully soften. 2020-2050+. **90+.**

1983 Château Cantemerle

The 1983 Cantemerle is a superb wine that has been rightly lauded since its initial release way back in 1985. I have had the pleasure to drink this vintage of Cantemerle with frequency over the years, and it has only gotten better and better as it has had a chance to blossom with

bottle age, and it is probably now just starting its plateau of peak drinkability. This most recent bottle was utterly classic and even better than the bottle I reported on a while back on my feature on the 1983 vintage, as it wafts from the glass in a fine blend of sweet cassis and dark berries, incipient notes of black truffles, dark soil tones, cigar ash, a touch of roasted game and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very vibrant, with a sappy core of black fruit, excellent soil signature, just a touch of remaining tannin and outstanding length and grip on the focused and complex finish. A *tour de force*. 2014-2050. **94+**.



1982 Château Cantemerle

While I have had the good fortune to drink dozens and dozens of bottles of the 1983 Château Cantemerle over the years, this was the first time that I can recall having a bottle of the 1982! This is a superb wine that is unfairly overlooked when great vintages of this estate's wines are mentioned, and I strongly recommend searching this wine out in the marketplace. The 1982 is at its absolute apogee of peak maturity and drinking with great style, as it offers up scents of sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, cardamom, a Latour-like whiff of sweet walnut, dark soil tones, cedar and a whisper of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with melting tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, pure and seamlessly balanced finish. A superb wine. 2014-2035. **93**.

1978 Château Cantemerle

The 1978 Cantemerle hails from the toughest period in the history of the estate since phylloxera, but the wine is really very good and is still drinking quite well, despite obviously having been fully mature for several decades and now starting to get towards the far side of the plateau. The bouquet is complex and stylish, offering up scents of dark berries, cigar smoke, complex, soil tones, sweet walnut, a gentle touch of chipotle pepper and stylish, floral topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very elegant, with no rough edges, gentle fruit and lovely length and grip on the refined, middleweight finish. The fruit in this bottle seems to just be starting to think about fading, so I would be inclined to drink up the 1978 Cantemerle in the next several years, while there is still a lot of pleasure to be had. Good juice. 2014-2020+? **88.**

1970 Château Cantemerle

The 1970 vintage of Cantemerle is another really lovely middleweight that is very elegant and perfumed in personality and shows no rough edges on the palate. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of violets, sweet cassis, cherries, walnuts, lovely soil tones and a nice, delicate topnote of summer truffle. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and really refined, with a sweet core of fruit, a velvety texture from its relatively low acids and just a touch of remaining tannin adding grip on the long and complex finish. This is a beautiful bottle at its apogee, and what probably gives the 1966 a slight edge over this wine is the superior acids of the '66 vintage, which has kept the wine just a touch more vibrant in its older age. That said, the 1970 Cantemerle is so beautifully balanced that it shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. 2014-2030+. **92.**

1966 Château Cantemerle

The 1966 Château Cantemerle is a lovely example of this underrated vintage that has clearly been fully mature for decades, but continues to drink beautifully well and still has plenty of life in it. I am not sure what role Pierre Dubos was still playing in the château at this point in time, as this was only a year before his passing away, but I suspect his spirit runs deeply through this wine, even if he was not actively involved in its making! The deep, complex and tertiary bouquet wafts from the glass in a very elegant mix of cherries, sweet cassis, violets, cigar ash, dusty soil tones, black truffles, woodsmoke, a bit of walnut and just a touch of chipotle pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very suave on the attack, with lovely intensity without undue weight, fine focus and grip, faded tannins and a very long, complex and refined finish. This is now a stylish and tangy middleweight, but still with perfect balance and breed. It will continue to drink beautifully for many years to come, and I suspect it is really stunning in magnum these days. 2014-2040. **93.**

A VISIT WITH VINTAGES 2013, 2012, 2011 AND 2010 AT SOME OF MY FAVORITE BEAUJOLAIS ESTATES



Lovers of Beaujolais have had quite a lovely run of vintages since 2005, with great years in 2011, 2009 and 2005 augmented by very good to excellent years in 2006, 2010 and 2013. Even the more difficult years of 2008 and 2007 produced some very good wines, with only the brutal summer of 2012 seemingly stacking the odds against the top *vignerons* beyond the point where success could be realized on a wide scale basis. The 2013 vintage in Beaujolais is a decided improvement on the tiny and very hard-hit crop in the region in 2012, though the crop size is not overly generous. The year did not get off to a particularly august start, as the late, damp and cool spring of 2013 here mirrored the difficulties in other major viticultural regions in France. The flowering was late in Beaujolais in 2013, so that the projected harvest date was pushed back several weeks from a “normal year” and picking was not to begin until the 24th of September in 2013 and most producers in the Crus were picking well into October. But, the summer months were far better here in Beaujolais than in many other sectors of French wine country, with good weather in mid-summer only marred by a mid-July hailstorm, and the vineyards in the region received more sunshine hours this year than any other summer in the last twenty years, so the potential for very good quality grapes was quite evident from early August on in Beaujolais. For *vignerons* who had lost at least half their crop in the brutally difficult year

of 2012, the good weather during the months of July and August were a welcome relief from the previous year, though with the difficulties with the flowering and fruit set in the late spring, yields were quite variable from parcel to parcel, and the 2013 crop in general is far from a large harvest. But, other than shorter yields than would be ideal, there is an awful lot to like about the 2013 vintage in Beaujolais and this is clearly a year where the magic is back for the wines of the region.

The style of the 2013s is very attractive and quite classic in profile, with the recent fine vintage of 2010 serving as a good model to get a general idea about the balance and style of the 2013s. The 2013 vintage did not produce the same depth and structure as the great year of 2011, nor the plush opulence of the 2009 Beaujolais crop, but it is a vintage that is beautifully pure, focused and poised in profile, with excellent mid-palate depth, tangy acids, moderate tannins and great potential for longevity amongst the more long-lived Crus. At this early stage, I would rank the 2013s that I have tasted as even a step above the very good 2010s, as the wines in general seem to have even a bit more complete ripeness than the 2010s, which has equated to superior concentration at the cores of most wines, as well as really lovely textural elements in the moderate tannins. The 2013 Beaujolais are very, very classic wines, with excellent intensity of flavor and fine soil signatures. coupled to plenty of mid-palate stuffing, which will allow even the more structured wines from villages like Moulin-à-Vent, Morgon and Côte de Brouilly to be accessible fairly early, but with the requisite structures to also age very long and gracefully. The balance is really quite remarkable on this vintage, and though it is not as exceptionally deep and structured as the 2011s, it may be that three or four years down the road, we will be ranking the 2013s ahead of every vintage since 2005, with the exception of the 2011s.

As is my custom in these yearly reports on the Beaujolais region, I have tasted across several recent vintages, rather than just focus on the newly arriving 2013 crop of wines, and so I have had ample opportunity to re-visit (or taste for the first time) several wines from 2012, 2011, 2010 and other vintages in preparation for this article. All of these vintages have (of course) been evolving since I last wrote about them, and it probably makes sense to touch base again on the general style and point of evolution of the wines from each year. The 2012 vintage, which I wrote about in depth last October, was one of the most difficult in the region in a generation, with problems at flowering, shot berries in the bunches, hail, cold, damp weather and uneven and marginal ripening all conspiring to make a very tiny crop of relatively green, peppery and difficult wines. Mother Nature simply stacked the cards against the *vignerons* in the region in 2012, and what is really rather amazing that there are some very good wines to emerge from the most talented and lucky producers in Beaujolais in this brutal growing season. But, it is not a vintage where the usual suspects have all had success- even in relative terms- so it is a vintage to tread very lightly when it comes to purchases- not that there very short crop has produced that many bottles in the first place. Most producers lost at least fifty percent of their normal crop, and the quality in 2012 is as inconsistent and modest as we have seen from Beaujolais in a long time. For this report, I tasted, for the first time, some pretty miraculously complete and well-made 2012 wines from Château Grange Cochard in Morgon and Pierre-Marie Chermette at Domaine du Vissoux, but also several wines of rather middling quality from some of my favorite producers who simply could not overcome the unfair hand dealt to them by Mother Nature in this difficult year.

In complete contrast, the wines that I tasted or revisited from the 2011 vintage seem even better than they did a year ago, and the quality of this excellent year continues to impress me and it now seems likely that I underrated this great vintage a bit at the outset and the 2011s are likely to go down as one of the greatest Beaujolais vintages of the last quarter century. Over the course of the two years that I have been following the 2011s, the wines have shown more and more mid-palate sweetness and sappiness, while not losing their extraordinary structural attributes, so that what was once a vintage that was defined by its tannic backbone is now often awash in magically pure and velvety fruit, with the ripe tannins now being subsumed in soft and succulent fruit and really starting to show glorious balance. In tastings where both 2013s and 2011s are opened side by side, the differences in the depth of the 2011s becomes striking, and further underscores just how brilliant this vintage is becoming as the wines evolve. There are still several important Crus from 2011 out there in the market, and I cannot emphasize strongly enough how happy folks will be down the road if they move briskly to secure some more 2011s for further aging in the cellar. The 2010 vintage is also looking better than ever today, with this quite classic and good quality vintage now drinking at its apogee, and this is the vintage I reach for most often from my own cellar when I want a mature bottle of Beaujolais for the dinner table. There is no rush to drink up the 2010 Beaujolais vintage, particularly from the top villages and producers, but the wines are now in a lovely place.

The 2009 vintage is not aging quite as classically, in general, as the 2010s, and I find that the wines are sometimes a bit too roasted in their fruit plumpness today, and I am not currently enjoying the vintage quite as much as I thought I would at the outset. There are still lots of outstanding wines in 2009, but perhaps the vintage has not produced as many top flight wines as years such as 2011, 2010, 2006 and 2005, and I expect that as more 2013s come along, this vintage too will begin to outshine all but the very finest 2009s. I still have some odds and ends from both 2008 and 2007 in my cellar, but I will age those another year and report on their evolutions in next year's Beaujolais feature, so I do not have anything to report on those two vintages at the present time. 2006, as is the case in the Côte d'Or for red wines, is a very good and underrated vintage and the Beaujolais from this year are drinking beautifully. 2005 is a reference point vintage of excellent quality for the Beaujolais region and I have only been drinking a few bottles from my cellar, as I feel this vintage is going to be very long-lived and there is no reason to be opening the wines today. Along with 2011, this is the greatest vintage in the region in the last decade and seems likely to one day be looked back upon as one of the classic years for Beaujolais.

I should talk a bit in this article about some of the new or relatively new domaines in the region that have crossed my radar in the last twelve months, as there is a great renaissance taking place in Beaujolais today and there are more and more good sources emerging (or being more prominently featured in importers' books) than was the case a decade ago. Completely new to me this spring were the wines from the brother and sister team of Claire and Fabien Chasselay. The Chasselay family have been *vignerons* in the village of Châtillon d'Azergues in the southern region of Beaujolais for centuries, and offer up a good selection of crus, in addition to several different bottlings of Beaujolais-Villages from their vines in the south. They are really making excellent wines these days (perhaps this has been the case for a generation, as I have only had the pleasure to taste their wines starting with the 2011 vintage) and their 2013s should most assuredly be on Beaujolais lovers' shopping lists this year. I was particularly struck by the

excellence of their Chénas “la Carrière” and Fleurie bottlings, but the whole range is exemplary. Château Grange Cochard in Morgon is another relatively new name that should start being spoken about as reverentially as the “Gang of Four” in the village, as Sarah and James Wilding have started producing remarkable wines here since they purchased the estate in 2008, the team at Grange Cochard may well have produced the very finest and most complete wines of the entire 2012 vintage (nothing “off vintage” about the two Morgon bottlings I tasted from them in this year) and this estate clearly belongs in the very first division of Cru Beaujolais producers today. I cannot wait to taste their 2013s! I was also very favorably impressed by the first wine I have ever tasted from Yohan Lardy, his 2012 old vine bottling of Moulin-à-Vent “les Michelons”- if this excellent wine is any indication of how well Monsieur Lardy can do in such a difficult vintage, I cannot wait to taste his wines from a top flight year! Other relatively new names in the firmament of Beaujolais, whose wines I have written about previously, but who deserve to be singled out again for the fine quality of their lineups, include Michel Guignier, Julien Sunier and Jean-Louis Dutraive, all of whom are making wines that are a bit outside of the box of what we think of today as traditional Beaujolais (often with some barrel fermentation and aging in older Burgundy barrels), but whose wines are excellent.

As I have touched upon in the past, I am really quite ambivalent about the continuing (and perhaps growing?) trend to produce low sulfur or no sulfur bottlings in the region. Certainly, this fashion is not exclusive to Beaujolais, but due to the superb quality of wines from Marcel Lapierre during his lifetime (and his other low sulfur buddies in Morgon), there is a real attraction for producing wines in this manner in the region. While such practices, if the wines are stored and shipped with proper temperature control (not always the case, no matter what merchants or importers might claim) do not demand immediate consumption, there can be little doubt that wines made in this manner do not have the same potential longevity as wines produced with some SO₂ utilized during the *elevage* and bottling of the wines. I have of course heard stories of wines from folks like Monsieur Lapierre that age for a very long time, but this has simply not been my experience with his wines (nor other producers of low sulfur Beaujolais), which drink with great style and breed in their early years, but do not have the same staying power as, for example, the Morgons from Château des Jacques. Just recently a 2011 magnum of the Lapierre Morgon was simply delicious, but also absolutely *à point* and ready for drinking at the present time, which is not what I have found with other 2011 Morgons- in regular format bottles, let alone magnums! I know that low sulfur and no sulfur bottlings attract attention from partisans of the natural wine movement, and many estates in Beaujolais have been in need of a greater fan base for generations, but I hope that this regimen has peaked and will start to recede in the coming years, now that Beaujolais seems to be a bit more firmly established on the international wine map and can perhaps tailor cellar techniques to producing the finest wines possible for longer-term aging, at least from the Cru villages where there is a long history of cellar-worthy wines in top flight years.

The following wines have been tasted between November of 2013 and early September of this year. The notes are arranged geographically for the most part, from north to south, with the exception that I have placed the notes on the Beaujolais Blanc, Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages bottlings at the start of the series (when in fact, most of these wines hail from the southern half of the Beaujolais region). Within each geographical subsection, the wines are listed by vintage from youngest to oldest, and alphabetically by producer.

Beaujolais Blanc

2013 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaine des Terre Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun's 2013 Beaujolais Blanc is a very pretty example of the vintage and a fine bottle of chardonnay, as it offers up a soil-driven nose of apple, peach, gentle leesy tones, a lovely base of stony soil, white flowers and a bit of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, sound acids, very good focus and balance and a long, classy finish. This is every bit as satisfying as many a top Mâcon and sells for far less, making it a lovely value. 2014-2019. **89.**

2013 Beaujolais Blanc “Cépages Chardonnay”- Domaine du Vissoux (P.-Marie Chermette)

The 2013 Beaujolais Blanc from Domaine du Vissoux is a very good wine, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, peach, a touch of fruit skin, salty soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and succulent, with a good core of fruit, crisp acids and a long, nicely balanced and classy finish. Monsieur Chermette is not widely recognized for his fine touch with chardonnay, but he makes excellent white wines in addition to his stellar lineup of reds. Fine juice. 2014-2019. **89.**

2012 Beaujolais Blanc- Depeuble Père et Fils

The 2012 Beaujolais Blanc from Depeuble Père et Fils is a very nice wine, with its ripe and wide open style perfect for early consumption. The stylish bouquet offers up a mix of apple, baked peaches, chalky soil tones, orange zest and a floral topnote redolent of honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and easy-going, with a plump core, solid framing acids and good length and grip on the juicy finish. This is made for near-term drinking, but is very pleasant. 2014-2017. **87.**

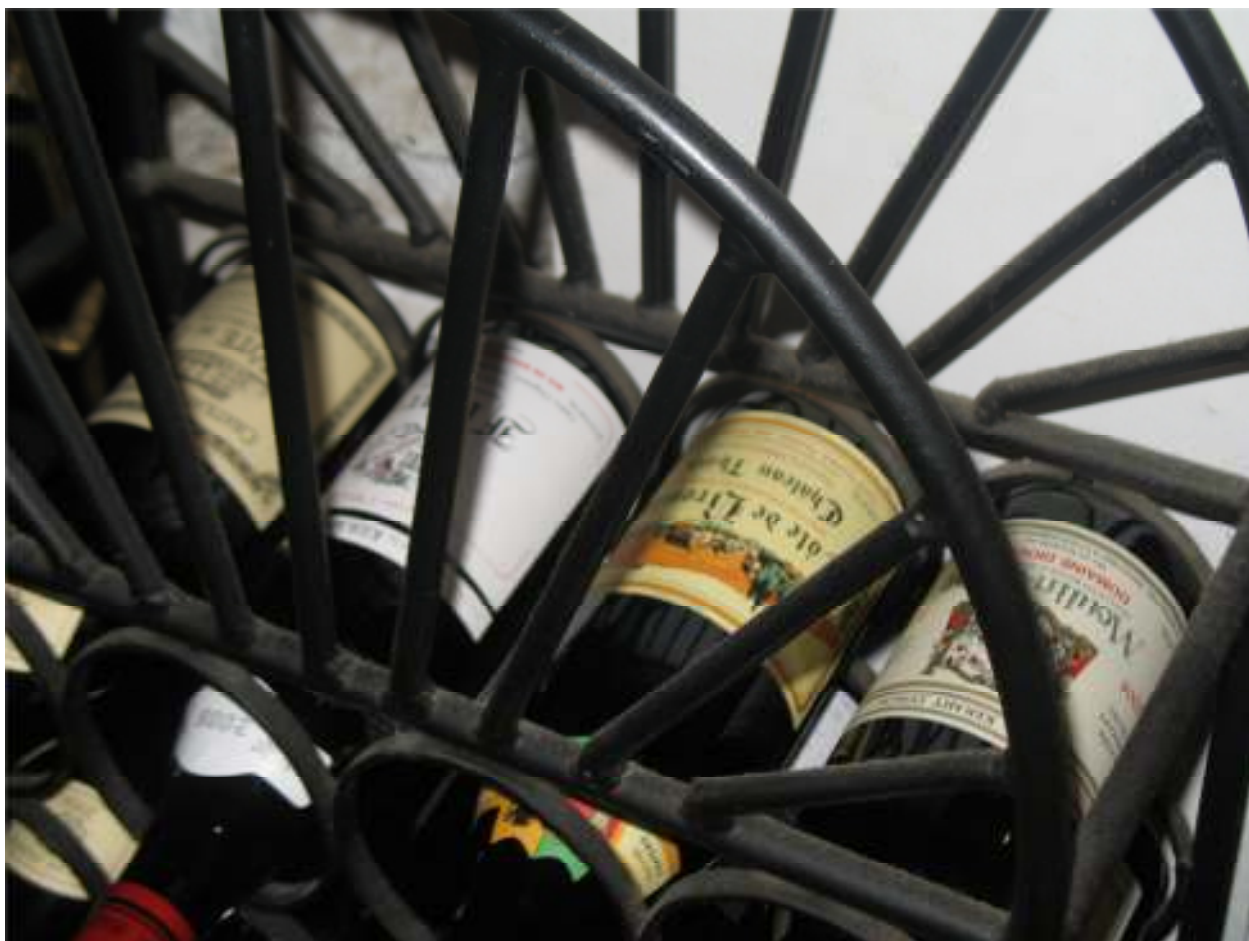
Beaujolais et Beaujolais-Villages

2013 Beaujolais “Quatre Saisons”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The Chasselay family have been *vignerons* in the village of Châtillon d’Azergues in the southern region of Beaujolais for centuries, with the most recent generation of the Chasselay family, Claire and her brother Fabien joining their parents, Jean-Gilles and Christiane Chasselay in running the family domaine in 2006. Jean-Gilles Chasselay had already been farming in an organic manner for many years, having taken over the estate from his parents all the way back in 1981, and the arrival of Claire and Fabien full-time to the domaine caused the family to be certified by Ecocert. Their 2013 Quatre Saisons bottling is their regular bottling of Beaujolais and offers up a classic and vibrant bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, violets, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and sappy, with a fine core, lovely complexity, just a bit of tannin, tangy acids and very impressive length and grip on the youthful and exuberant finish. This is a lovely example and could even do with six months bottle age to fully blossom. This should age very well and really shows off the fine mid-palate stuffing of the vintage. 2014-2025. **89+.**

2013 Beaujolais-Villages- Damien Coquelet

The 2013 Beaujolais-Villages bottling from Damien Coquelet offers up lovely succulence and soil signature on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a bright and classic blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, pretty spice tones, a lovely base of soil and a bit of acorn in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and still fairly youthful in personality, with a very good core of fruit, just a whisper of tannin, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish. Fine juice and a great bargain! 2014-2025. **90.**



2013 Beaujolais “Les Grands Eparcieux”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The Les Grands Eparcieux bottling of Beaujolais hails from the oldest vines that the Chasselay family owns in this appellation, and the 2013 is quite a bit more reserved in personality than the Quatre Saisons and really will need a year in the bottle to blossom fully. The bouquet is quite promising in its youthful blend of pomegranate, cranberry, pepper, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and the first stirring of the forest floor to come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows lovely mid-palate depth, with tangy acids, a bit of tannin and fine balance and grip on the long and modestly chewy finish. This is still quite primary and really deserves a year’s worth of bottle age, for the wine will be excellent when it really starts to hit on all cylinders. 2015-2025+. **90.**

2013 Beaujolais “La Platière”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The La Platière bottling from Domaine Chasselay all hails from vines in the *lieu à dit* of the same name, and though these are not the oldest vines in their vineyard portfolio, the *terroir* is very good and the family ages this wine in one year-old Burgundy barrels. The 2013 La Platière is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex and sappy bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of gamebird, dark soil tones, a touch of oak leaves and a delicate framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, modest tannins, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, youthful and intensely flavored finish. 2014-2025+. **91.**

2013 Beaujolais- Pierre-Marie Chermette

The straight Beaujolais from Pierre-Marie Chermette is absolutely lovely in 2013 and a quintessentially crunchy and vibrant bottle, wafting from the glass in an extroverted blend of sweet cranberries, cherries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil and a fine topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with nice mid-palate intensity, tangy acids and lovely complexity on the long, poised and succulent finish. This is a low fat, transparent and very classy bottle of Beaujolais and a terrific value. 2014-2025. **89.**

2013 Beaujolais-Villages “La Lutine”- Domaine Terres Vivantes (Marie & Ludovic Gros)

The Domaine des Terres Vivantes of Marie and Ludovic Gros are located just south of the Cru villages of Beaujolais, and their wines are produced from organically farmed vineyards. The 2013 La Lutine bottling is lovely, wafting from the glass in a bright blend of cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebird, violets and a bit of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and complex, with good mid-palate intensity, a bit of youthful *herbacité*, a whisper of tannin and a long, tangy finish. This is another 2013 Beaujolais-Villages bottling that could really do with six months or so of bottle age to blossom. Good juice. 2015-2020+. **88+.**

2013 Beaujolais- Michel Guignier

Michel Guignier’s 2013 regular Beaujolais is a fine follow-up to the very strong version of this bottling that the domaine produced in 2012, which may well have been the best basic Beaujolais that I tasted from the 2012 vintage. This wine all hails from forty year-old vines located around Morgon. The 2013 is just absolutely pure and classic in profile, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of red and black cherries, violets, complex soil tones (that will be autumnal with just a few years bottle age), fresh thyme, chicory and bonfires. On the palate the wine is medium-full, primary and bouncy, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine focus and balance, just a bit of backend tannin and fine grip on the long finish. Good juice and a pretty strong argument that one does not have to focus exclusively on Cru Beaujolais to get top flight wines in this region. 2014-2025+. **89+.**

2013 Beaujolais “Beau”- A la Chapelle de Guinchay (screwcap)

The 2013 Beaujolais “Beau” from A la Chapelle de Guinchay comes in a very stylish, modern package, with an artsy label that is very attractive, but the wine is undone by its closure. The bouquet is still quite fresh and pretty, offering up scents of red berries, cherries, woodsmoke, a nice touch of soil and a bit of fresh herbs in the upper register. Aromatically, the screwcap has not yet touched this wine at all and the raw materials are excellent. However, on the palate the wine is messed up, with its medium-bodied format shredded and pinched by its closure. Oddly, the wine still has a nice touch of sappiness at the core, but it is not focused, as if one was looking at the wine’s reflection in a broken mirror, and the finish is already starting to get bitter and herbal as reduction starts to bite hard on the backend. I would love to taste this wine under natural cork, as it has some lovely raw materials, but this is already on the way down under the screw. 2014-2014. **????**

2013 Beaujolais “Cuvée l’Ancien”- Domaine des Terre Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Along with the Cuvée Traditionelle from Domaine de Vissoux, this is probably the most consistently exceptional Beaujolais bottling that has been produced in the region in the last couple of decades, but the 2012 was decidedly a child of its vintage. Happily, the 2013 is back to the customary level of this excellent cuvée, offering up a deep and youthful aromatic constellation of cherries, quince, vinesmoke, pepper, gamebirds and complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and still youthfully tight, with a fine core, lovely soil signature,

tangy acids, a bit of youthful tannin and a long, primary and slightly peppery finish. This needs a year or two in the cellar to really start to come into its own, but it will be a fine example of Cuvée l'Ancien in the fullness of time. However, folks who decide to open it early on will probably find it a bit youthfully tight and showing some *herbacité*. 2016-2030+. **90+**.

2013 Beaujolais “Cuvée Traditionnelle”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2013 Beaujolais “Cuvée Traditionnelle” from Domaine du Vissoux is outstanding. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a bright and youthful mélange of cranberries, cherries, mustard seed, a very complex base of soil, a touch of coffee and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very soil-driven out of the blocks, with a lovely core of fruit, a bit of sappiness about to arrive, modest tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This is certainly quite tasty now, but as is typical of this excellent bottling in a top vintage, a bit of bottle age will be richly rewarded. 2014-2030. **91+**.

2013 Beaujolais “Coeur de Vendanges”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

These old, centenarian vines produced a very strong wine in the tough year of 2012, and in the top flight year of 2013, this may very well be the best value in French red wine out there in the marketplace! The 2013 Coeur de Vendanges offers up a stunning and quite sappy nose of red and black cherries, violets, woodsmoke, a nice touch of nutskin, a gloriously complex signature of soil tones and that signature touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great focus and nascent complexity, a touch of backend tannin and great length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. This is great Beaujolais and a stunning bargain! 2014-2030+. **93**.

2012 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine Guy Breton

The 2012 Beaujolais-Villages from Domaine Breton is a good, solid effort in this difficult vintage. The nose is a fine blend of cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, coffee grounds, smoke and some balsamic overtones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and juicy on the attack, with a bit of a dip in the mid-palate and a short, compact finish. This was not an easy year and this is really a pretty good bottle, in the context of the vintage, but it is a tad one dimensional. 2014-2020. **86**.

2012 Beaujolais “Quatre Saisons”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2012 Quatre Saisons bottling from Domaine Chasselay is a very good example of this difficult vintage. The bouquet offers up a bright and red fruity blend of cherries, strawberries, vinesmoke, lovely soil tones, herbs and a bit of white pepper. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with nice transparency and a long, complex finish. This is not as herbal as many 2012s, and is really quite tasty, but I am looking forward to trying this cuvée in an easier year. 2014-2019. **87**.

2012 Beaujolais “Les Grands Eparcieux”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2012 Les Grands Eparcieux bottling from Domaine Chasselay is another very strong example of this difficult vintage. The wine offers up a sappy aromatic constellation of cherries, red plums, a nice touch of meatiness, mustard seed and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and succulent at the core, with lovely soil signature, tangy acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. There is just a whisper of the vintage's *herbacité* here on the backend, but this is a very strong 2012 Beaujolais. 2014-2020+. **89**.

2012 Beaujolais- Depeuble Père et Fils

The 2012 Beaujolais-Villages from Depeuble Père et Fils is a very nice example of the vintage, offering up a sappy nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, violets and a

touch of sweet nuttiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and still a bit tightly-knit, with a fine core of fruit, good ripeness, tangy acids and just a bit of backend tannin to resolve. It is eminently drinkable today with a bit of aeration, but I suspect it will be much more plush on the backend with six months or a year's worth of bottle age. A fine result in this vintage. 2014-2020. **89.**

2012 Beaujolais-Villages- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2012 Beaujolais-Villages from Joseph Drouhin is really a very pretty example of the vintage, with lovely ripeness and a very clean personality evident in its bright bouquet of cherries, cranberries, fresh thyme, a nice base of soil tones and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and wide open, with good, but not great depth, just a wisp of tannin, bouncy acids and impressive complexity on the long and juicy finish. This is a wine of moderate weight, but lovely intensity of flavor and some of the most even ripeness I have tasted from a 2012 Beaujolais-Villages bottling. Fine juice. 2014-2020+. **88.**

2011 Beaujolais-Leynes “Bien-Venu in X-Tremis”- Domaine la Soufrandière

The “Bien-Venu in X-Tremis” cuvée from Domaine la Soufrandière is crafted from forty-six year-old gamay vines and some of the blend is raised in Burgundy barrels. The 2011 is quite nice and surprisingly accessible right out of the blocks for a 2011, offering up a bright and youthful bouquet of cherries, cranberries, woodsmoke, a touch of meatiness, fresh herb tones and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, juicy and quite wide open, with a good core, a touch of the vintage's backend tannin and lovely length and grip on the finish. Good juice. 2014-2020+. **88.**

2010 Beaujolais “la Perreon”- Domaine de la Madone

The 2010 Beaujolais “la Perreon” from Domaine de la Madone strikes me as quite ripe for this vintage, as the label states that it is thirteen percent alcohol and the wine seems even a bit higher than that in the mouth. The bouquet is a jammy blend of black cherries, chocolate, a touch of marshmallow and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush on the attack and a bit hot on the backend, with a plump core, low acids and a soft, succulent finish. This is okay, but I wonder how late they had to pick here to get a 2010 Beaujolais up into the thirteens? 2014-2016. **86.**

St. Amour

2012 St. Amour- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Maison Drouhin's St. Amour is often one of my favorite bottlings from this fine cru, and the 2012 version is quite well made, but clearly a child of its vintage. The high-toned nose shows fairly moderate ripeness in its aromatic blend of cherries, quince, vinesmoke, white pepper and soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and a bit weedy, with a nice little core of red fruit, fine soil inflection, a modest amount of tannin and a gently green stripe on the long and tangy finish. This is not bad at all in its style, as the balance and focus here are very fine, but this will always be a wine of modest ripeness- though it is not particularly shrill or herbal. 2014-2020+. **86+.**

2011 St. Amour- Domaine des Billards

The 2011 Domaine des Billards St. Amour from the Barbet family is a brilliant example of this vintage, with the wine having almost bottomless depth of pure fruit and a stellar signature of soil. In a lineup of very good 2013s, the Billards 2011 really shows just how stunning this vintage is becoming as it has a chance to blossom, as the wine soars from the glass in a sappy

and pure mélange of black cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a bit of bitter chocolate, nutskin, violets and just a whisper of oak influence (as the family is now raising a portion of this cuvée in older Burgundy barrels, to augment the traditional *foudres*.) On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really sappy at the core, with laser-like focus, ripe, buried tannins and superb length and grip on the still very primary, but, oh so promising finish. This is one of the finest Cru Beaujolais bottlings in the entire region, and the 2011 Domaine des Billards will be worth a special search to find in the market, before it disappears. It is certainly approachable today, but I would be inclined to give it at least a couple of years in the cellar and allow its secondary layers to begin to emerge. 2016-2035+. **94+**.

Julié纳斯

2013 Julié纳斯- Michel Tête (Domaine du Clos du Fief)

The 2013 Julié纳斯 from Michel Tête is another example of the vintage that arrived here in the states a short time before I tasted it, so it was probably still a bit shaken from travel, but its underlying quality was very easy to appreciate. The bouquet is a deep and classic blend of pomegranate, black cherries, lovely dark soil tones, a touch of gamebird, fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a touch of tannin, fine focus and a long, complex and classy finish. I am sure this is drinking very well right now, but right off the boat, it seems to want a bit of bottle age to really blossom. But, probably four or five weeks from now, it will be singing. Fine juice. 2014-2024. **92**.

2012 Julié纳斯 “Beauvernay”- Domaine Cédric Chignard

The 2012 Julié纳斯 “Beauvernay” from Cédric Chignard is a well-made wine, but it is very much a creature of its vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and a bit weedy, offering up scents of red and black cherries, white pepper, herb tones, vinesmoke and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, peppery and a bit shrill, with a good core, a fair bit of tannin and a long, youthful and moderately ripe finish. This may blossom with a few years of cellaring, but right now it is pretty tough sledding. 2015-2025+? **86+**.

2011 Julié纳斯 “Cuvée Prestige”- Michel Tête (Domaine du Clos du Fief)

I had great expectations for the 2011 Julié纳斯 “Cuvée Prestige” from Michel Tête, but my sample bottle was slightly reduced and took a lot of coaxing to get it to blossom a bit in decanter. Eventually the wine does open up and its promise becomes very readily apparent, as the youthful and sappy bouquet is a mix of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, roasted *pigeon*, dried violets, a beautiful base of soil tones and a gentle topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a great core of fruit, a fair bit of youthful, well-integrated tannin, tangy acids and great focus and grip on the very long, very complex and soil-driven finish. This is going to be a great, great bottle of Julié纳斯, but like so many of the top 2011 Crus, it will need a bit of cellaring to really blossom and deliver on all of its considerable promise. 2017-2030+. **93**.

2010 Julié纳斯 “Cuvée Prestige”- Michel Tête (Domaine du Clos du Fief)

I love the fact that Michel Tête, along with Domaine des Billards in St. Amour, is intent on releasing a percentage of his production with a bit of bottle age, so that his 2010 Julié纳斯 “Cuvée Prestige” is a current release in the market. The bouquet is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a maturing mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of forest floor, woodsmoke, gamebird, incipient notes of nuttiness and a nice touch of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, excellent delineation, tangy acids, still a touch of backend tannin and fine complexity on the long and classy finish. This is drinking

beautifully today, but it still has the structure to continue to age gracefully for at least a decade. Fine, fine juice. 2014-2025f. **92.**

Chénas

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

The 2013 Chénas “la Carrière” from Domaine Chasselay was just off the boat at the time I tasted it, and was still a bit reduced and really deserves a bit of time to settle in from shipping. However, once I gave this some extended breathing, the wine really blossomed nicely and offers up a deep and very classy bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of dark chocolate, a superb base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a nice touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with tangy acids, a touch of tannin, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is young, but excellent. 2014-2030. **92+.**

2011 Chénas “la Carrière”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2011 Chénas “la Carrière” from Domaine Chasselay is a stellar example of this great Beaujolais vintage and a far more serious window into the quality of this family’s wines that what can be gleaned from the difficult 2012 vintage. The beautifully pure and sappy nose jumps from the glass in a complex mix of red and black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, violets, a touch of raw cocoa and an exotic topnote of clove. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a sappy core, excellent focus and grip, just a bit of tannin and a long, primary and very refined finish. This is a gorgeous bottle of Chénas that is drinking marvelously right now, but should age very well for at least the coming decade. 2014-2025. **93+.**

Moulin-à-Vent

2012 Moulin-à-Vent- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2012 Moulin-à-Vent from Maison Drouhin is again very much a reflection of its vintage, with a fairly lean character by the high standards of this bottling, and a bit of uneven ripeness in evidence on both the nose and palate, but not without complexity and interest. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, espresso, vinesmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of chicory and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and shows fairly modest ripeness, with a bit of greenness running down the middle of the palate, but with good intensity of flavor, very well-integrated tannins and acids and impressive length and grip on the focused finish. This is eminently drinkable in its moderately ripe style and is really quite good. 2014-2025. **87.**

2012 Moulin-à-Vent “les Michelons”- Domaine Yohan Lardy

The 2012 Moulin-à-Vent “les Michelons” from Yohan Lardy was the first wine I have tasted from this *vigneron*, and if the success he has achieved with this wine in 2012 is indicative of its customary quality, then I am looking forward to tasting it in a top vintage! Monsieur Lardy farms two hectares of vines, spread out between Beaujolais-Villages, Fleurie and Moulin-à-Vent, uses only indigenous yeasts for fermentation, modest amounts of SO₂ and ages his wines for ten months in older Burgundy barrels prior to bottling. The Moulin-à-Vent hails from two parcels of old vines in the *climat* of les Michelons, with one plot planted in 1950 and the other in 1911. These old vines have turned out a lovely wine in 2012, offering up a very red fruity bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, a bit of smoked meat, complex soil tones, a bit of bonfire, fresh thyme and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very well-balanced, with a good, solid core, superb soil inflection, tangy acids, modest tannins, superb

vibrancy and very good length and grip on the focused and very energetic finish. There is just a faint touch of backend austerity here that shows this to be from the 2012 vintage, but this is really a spectacular success for this very difficult growing season! 2014-2025+. **90.**

2012 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun's 2012 Moulin-à-Vent is one of my favorite wines from him in this vintage, as it offers up a lovely blend of classic Moulin-à-Vent structure and fine aromatic and flavor complexity. The bouquet is a classy blend of dark berries, charred wood, espresso, chicory, bonfires, complex and gently autumnal soil tones, venison and acorns in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very well-balanced for a 2012, with a good core of fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate, very slightly dry-edged tannins, tangy acids and lovely soil drive on the long and complex finish. This does not have the mid-palate core of a top vintage of this bottling, but it is very nicely balanced, with sufficient fruit to buffer the touch of the vintage's toughness on the backend. A fine result. 2015-2025. **88.**



2012 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2012 Les Trois Roches from Domaine du Vissoux is (naturally) not in the same league as the brilliant 2011 version, but it is a ringing success for the vintage and a lovely wine for mid-term drinking. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, red curry, a touch of gamebird, vinesmoke, dark soil tones and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively concentrated at the core, with just a touch of

tannin, fine focus and complexity, and a long, suave and vibrant finish. There is just a whisper of the vintage's backend *herbacité* present here, but it plays a very minor role in the flavor profile of the wine and this is one of the finest 2012s that I have had the pleasure to taste, as well as one of the few examples of the vintage that should really age pretty well for a decade or more. 2014-2025. **90+**.

2011 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Grand Moulin (Xavier et Nicolas Barbet)

I have been looking forward to tasting the 2011 version of the old vine Moulin-à-Vent bottling from the Barbet family for a year now, and the wine is everything one could ask for from this long-lived appellation and this beautifully structured year. The deep, young and very pure nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of sweet dark berries, a bit of spit-roasted game, espresso, a complex base of dark soil tones, a very discreet touch of fresh herbs, woodsmoke and perhaps a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a fair bit of the vintage's ripe tannins in need of resolution, outstanding focus and grip, impressive nascent complexity and outstanding length and grip on the pure, classic and still quite youthful finish. I would bury this stellar wine in the cellar for at least four or five years, to allow it to really blossom. It should prove to be very long-lived and I cannot imagine it not lasting forty years! The Barbets also own the great St. Amour property of Domaine des Billards, and it is quite clear that this is a great, great vintage for their two flagship properties. 2018-2050. **93+**.

2011 Moulin-à-Vent- Château des Jacques

The 2011 Moulin-à-Vent from Château des Jacques is a superb and youthful example of this outstanding vintage, wafting from the glass in a still quite primary constellation of pomegranate, cherries, a touch of juniper berry, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, chicory and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, sappy on that attack and seriously structured on the backend, with a rock solid core, nascent complexity, ripe, chewy tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and palate-staining finish. This superb bottle of Moulin-à- Vent needs a handful of years in the cellar to really blossom (though it is approachable already with some decanting time), and will be a long-lived and outstanding example of the vintage. 2018-2050. **93+**.

2010 Moulin-à-Vent- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2010 Moulin-à-Vent from Joseph Drouhin is an absolute classic in the making, with outstanding depth, purity and transparency, with a bit of tannin to carry it and the kind of impeccable balance that makes for great longevity. The bouquet is a first class and complex blend of dark berries, black cherries, espresso, dark soil tones, fresh thyme, mustard seed, a bit of chicory and incipient notes of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and gently tannic, with a good core, sound acids, lovely focus and grip and a very long, complex and classy finish. Fine, fine juice that is beginning to drink very well. 2015-2030+. **93**.

2010 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos du Grand Carquelin”- Château des Jacques

The Clos du Grand Carquelin from Château des Jacques is a lovely Moulin-à-Vent, offering up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, cassis, chicory, gamebirds, dark soil tones, fresh thyme, a bit of spicy oak and bitter chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and sappy at the core, with superb focus and balance, sound acids and a fair bit of backend tannin on the very long and very refined finish. A bit of the tannin on the backend right now hails from the new wood used for this bottling, but the wine simply needs some bottle age to fully integrate these tannins. 2018-2040+. **92**.

2009 Moulin-à-Vent- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2009 Drouhin Moulin-à-Vent is quite a bit riper than the 2010 version, but it has retained its purity and focus very well and is a lovely bottle in the making. The deep and sappy nose offers up a black fruity blend of black cherries, hung game, cassis, chocolate, woodsmoke, fresh thyme and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush (by Beaujolais standards) on the attack, with a good core of fruit, ripe, well-measured tannins, fine focus and complexity and a very long, ripe and classy finish. On some objective scale, this is probably at least as good as the lovely 2010 Drouhin Moulin-à-Vent, but stylistically, I have a very slight preference for the leaner, but more precise 2010 version. But, it is a very close call, and I imagine that there are plenty of folks who would prefer the almost sumptuous generosity of the 2009 Moulin-à-Vent to the leaner version of the 2010. Both are excellent wines. 2014-2030+. **92+**.

Fleurie

2013 Fleurie “Cuvée Christal”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2013 Cuvée Christal from Alain Coudert is a beautifully vibrant and expressive example of this fine year, wafting from the glass in a mélange of pomegranate, black cherries, dark soil tones, a bit of bonfire and a pungent topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and sappy at the core, with outstanding delineation and balance, good acids and a long, velvety and exuberant finish. I know this will age, but good luck trying to keep your hands off of the bottles in your cellar! 2014-2025+. **91**.

2013 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2013 “regular” bottling of Clos de la Roilette is superb, offering up a deep, pure and vibrant bouquet of red and black cherries, violets, a bit of bitter chocolate, lavender, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, focused and full-bodied, with a primary personality, a superb core of fruit, stellar focus and transparency and a very long, tangy and modestly tannic finish. This is a beautiful young wine that is coiled to spring, and six months from now will be absolutely ravishing to drink. 2015-2030+. **93**.

2013 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2013 Cuvée Tardive from Clos de la Roilette is a bit more structured than the regular bottling, every bit as pure and refined, but deeper and more primary on both the nose and palate. The superb bouquet offers up a youthful mix of pomegranate, black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, dark soil tones, incipient nuttiness and a touch of discreet cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very, very primary, with a rock solid core of fruit, a fair bit of tannin on the backend and excellent focus and grip on the very long and perfectly balanced finish. All this beauty needs is some extended bottle age, as it is quite youthfully reticent today, but all of the constituent components are here for greatness down the road. 2018-2040. **94**.

2013 Fleurie- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2013 Fleurie from Claire and Fabien Chasselay is a simply stellar example of this cru, with a soil-driven personality that is rare for this village and very exciting. The deep and serious bouquet wafts from the glass in a mélange of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, very complex soil tones, fresh thyme and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a silky attack, a fine

core, just a bit of tannin and great transparency on the long, complex and tangy finish. This is a Fleurie for Burgundy lovers and other *Terroirists*! 2014-2025. **92+**.

2013 Fleurie “Clos de la Grand Cour”- Domaine de la Grand Cour (J-L. Dutraive)

The 2013 from Jean-Louis Dutraive is a lovely example of the vintage, produced from the family’s clos in Fleurie that is planted to vines that range from thirty to seventy years of age. The wine utilizes carbonic maceration and then is aged in a mix of seventy percent older Burgundy barrels and thirty percent old *foudre*. The 2013 jumps from the glass in a very expressive nose of cherries, red berries, a touch of orange zest, lovely autumnal soil tones, a bit of nuttiness and gentle spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely focused, with tangy acids, a lovely core, superb soil signature and a long, complex and classy finish. The aging in Burgundy barrels gives this a slightly exotic personality for Fleurie, but this is serious juice! 2014-2020+. **91.**

2013 Fleurie “Le Clos Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Grand Cour (J-L. Dutraive)

The old vine bottling from Monsieur Dutraive hails from a parcel of sixty-five to seventy-five year-old vines and is raised entirely in Burgundy barrels, ranging from one to five years of age, so there is a little wood influence to this cuvée. The 2013 is outstanding, offering up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of cherries, raspberries, coffee, gamebird, lovely soil tones, spice elements redolent of clove and mace, a bit of mustard seed and a nice touch of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully structured, with a sappy core, fine soil signature and a bit of tannin to resolve on the long, youthful finish. This is emphatically not a classic style of Fleurie, but it is an extremely well-made wine whose inspiration seems to be as much Vosne-Romanée as it is Fleurie. The focus and balance here are impeccable and I see no reason this wine will not age superbly well, and for those who are looking for a gateway Fleurie to make the transition from the Côte d’Or to Cru Beaujolais, this is a perfect wine! 2017-2030+. **92.**

2013 Fleurie- Domaine Julien Sunier

The 2013 Fleurie from Julien Sunier is a stylish and quite red fruity example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a complex constellation of red plums, cherries, lovely spice elements such as cardamom and mustard seed, fine soil tones (that will go autumnal fairly quickly) and just a touch of cedar from the Burgundy barrels used in the *elevage* for this wine. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip, a bit of wood-derived (but well-integrated) tannins and fine length and grip on the youthful and tangy finish. Good juice, but give this wine a year’s worth of bottle age to integrate its touch of wood and really start to blossom. 2015-2025. **90+**.

2013 Fleurie “Grillé Midi”- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The Grillé Midi is considered one of the top *lieux à dits* in Fleurie, as it is a granitic amphitheater where the grapes obtain optimal ripeness. Monsieur Brun chooses to treat this wine like a Côte d’Or red, fully destemming the grapes and then fermenting them with several punch-downs. The 2013 is a very young and very promising example of the vintage, with a deep and structured nose of cherries, cranberries, venison, bonfires, a superb signature of granitic soil, fresh herb tones, roses and a topnote of cherry skin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with an excellent core of red fruit, a fair bit of ripe tannin, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long and primary finish. Give this excellent and quite structured Fleurie some extended time in the cellar to really come into its own, but it will be excellent when it is ready for primetime drinking. 2018-2035. **92+**.



The church in the center of Fleurie, lying just beyond this plot, as the spring sap starts to stir in the vines.

2012 Fleurie “Les Moriers”- Domaine Cédric Chignard

The flagship Fleurie “Les Moriers” bottling from Domaine Cédric Chignard shows very good ripeness for a 2012 and this is one fairly youthfully structured cru from the vintage that I am quite hopeful for ultimately blossoming with a bit of bottle age. The bouquet shows just a bit of sappiness in its blend of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, solid and fairly tannic on the backend, with a bit a slightly edgy aspect to the tannin (from the hail?), a bit of white pepper, but very good focus, length and grip. Give this a couple of years. 2015-2025. **86+**.

2012 Fleurie- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2012 Drouhin Fleurie is another stellar success for this vintage, with no signs of hail damage or uneven ripeness on the nose. The wine offers up a sappy and pure nose of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, a touch of nutmeg, woodsmoke, violets and a whisper of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and shows a bit more of the vintage character than the nose suggested, with a bit of a youthful green streak running down the spine of the palate. The core of fruit here is clean and shows good concentration, there is a bit of tannin, nice acidity and focus and a long, youthful and soil-driven finish. Right now, it seems like the moderate ripeness here will dissolve nicely into the fruit as the wine blossoms and this should be a lovey drink with another year or two of bottle age. 2015-2025. **88**.

2012 Fleurie “Cuvée Griffé du Marquis”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2012 Fleurie “Cuvée Griffé du Marquis” from Alain Coudert is one of the best wines I have tasted from this vintage. The bouquet shows some of the *herbacité* of 2012, but also sweet and sappy fruit tones that nicely buffer the herbs, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, pomegranate, vinesmoke, lovely, dark soil tones, fresh herbs and a bit cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and concentrated at the core, with a fine signature of soil, tangy acids, a bit of well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the low fat, complex finish. This is really long and shows great intensity of flavor on the backend, with the *herbacité* of the vintage just a gentle footnote, rather than the focal point of the wine. A very, very impressive 2012 Beaujolais! 2014-2025. **90.**

2012 Fleurie- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun has to be one of the finest winemakers in all of Beaujolais, so it is not surprising that his 2012 Fleurie has turned out quite well. The nose is a very pretty, red fruity and transparent blend of strawberries, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, rose petals, a nice touch of meatiness and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and a bit rigid structurally, with a pretty good core, a bit of firm tannin, good focus and complexity, but some overt pepperiness on the reasonably long backend. This will probably dry out as the years go by, so I would be inclined to drink it on the young side, despite its moderate spine of tannin today. This is a very strong effort for the vintage, but the slightly pinched and pepper aspect of this wine underscores just how difficult this vintage was for *vignerons* in the region. 2014-2020+? **86+.**

2012 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2012 Fleurie “Poncié” from Domaine du Vissoux is another very strong effort for the vintage. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of cranberries, a touch of red curry, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and a bit of lead pencil tones from the bit of barrel aging the wine undergoes. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very nicely knit together, with a superb core for a 2012, tangy acids and just a touch of backend tannin on the long, vibrant and complex finish. There is only the faintest shadow of the vintage’s greenness on the fine finish here, and this is another really very good 2012. Impressive! 2014-2025. **89.**

2011 Fleurie “La Roche Muriers”- Villa Ponciago

Villa Ponciago is now owned by the Champagne house of Henriot, and these lovely 2011s were the first wines I had tasted from the estate. The 2011 La Roche Muriers is a bright and vibrant example of this outstanding vintage, offering up a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, violets, woodsmoke, a touch of red curry and a whisper of new wood in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, just a touch of tannin and lovely length and grip on the focused and succulent finish. High class Fleurie. 2014-2025. **91+.**

2011 Fleurie “Les Hauts du Py”- Villa Ponciago

The Fleurie “Les Hauts du Py” from Villa Ponciago is also excellent in 2011, offering a slightly deeper and meatier expression of Fleurie than the La Roche Muriers bottling in this vintage. The exceptional bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of black cherries, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, dark soil, a touch of grilled meat and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and simply beautifully balanced, with a sappy core, a nice base of ripe tannin and a very long, focused and still fairly youthful finish. This is really a serious bottle of Fleurie that will be even better with another year’s worth of bottle age. Impressive juice. 2015-2030+. **93.**

2010 Fleurie- Maison Joseph Drouhin

With all of the examples of the difficult 2012 vintage in Beaujolais currently in the market, it is fortunate to still have wines such as the 2010 Joseph Drouhin Fleurie still available, as this classic and quite good vintage is drinking very well and a very welcome alternative to so many 2012s. The bouquet is beginning to show some secondary layers of complexity, delivering scents of cherries, gamebird, vinesmoke, sweet cranberry, a bit of forest floor, mustard seed, cocoa and a bit of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and complex, with a good core, moderate tannins, fine focus and grip and a very long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is drinking very well, but it has the structure to continue to age gracefully and may be even more interesting to drink with a few more years' worth of bottle age. Fine Fleurie that is transitioning nicely out of the sappy stage of youth and moving onto a more serious, soil-driven period of peak drinking. 2014-2030+. **91.**

2010 Fleurie- Maison Trénel Fils

In my formative days in the wine trade, all the way back in the 1980s, Maison Trénel Fils was one of my workhorse suppliers for fine bottlings from both Beaujolais and the Mâconnais. I had not tasted their wines in years, but ran across this very tasty bottle of 2010 Fleurie recently. The bouquet is deep and very classic in its expression of red and black cherries, cranberries, a bit of bonfire, lovely soil tones and fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, nice accessibility and very good length and grip on the tangy finish. Good, solid Fleurie. 2013-2020. **89.**

2009 Fleurie “Cuvée Jules Appert” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine de la Chapelle des Bois

The Cuvée Jules Appert from Domaine de la Chapelle des Bois is another old vine bottling from this fine house in Fleurie, with this wine raised in three and four year-old small Burgundy barrels for twelve months prior to bottling. The 2009 version is lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and succulent on the attack, with a plump core, lovely focus and balance and just a touch of oakiness showing through the flavor spectrum on the long and velvety finish. Good juice with quite a judicious use of wood. 2014-2030. **92.**

2002 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2002 Cuvée Tardive from Alain Coudert is drinking beautifully at age twelve and is now at its apogee. The very refined and mature bouquet offers up a lovely blend of black cherries, bitter chocolate, lovely, dark soil tones, a bit of venison, charred wood and a topnote of dried violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moving from its more fruit-driven personality of youth to the more autumnal personality of older Beaujolais, with a nice touch of inkiness starting to develop at the core, melted tannins, sound acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and impeccably balanced finish. A fine vintage for this bottling. 2014-2025+. **92.**

Chiroubles

2013 Chiroubles- Domaine Daniel Bouland

Daniel Bouland is rightly recognized for the outstanding quality of his Morgon bottlings, but his Chiroubles is one of the finest examples produced from this lovely appellation and the 2013 is stellar. The bouquet is a complex and vibrant red fruity mélange of sappy cherries, quince, violets, a touch bonfire, orange peel and a pure and classy signature of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a sappy core, just a touch of tannin, bright

acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very, very long and very transparent finish. This is great juice! 2014-2030. **92+**.

2013 Chiroubles- Damien Coquelet

Damien Coquelet's 2013 Chiroubles is a superb bottle in the making, but it is still a bit on the young side and could do with a bit of cellaring to blossom fully from behind its lovely structure. The bouquet is a bright and primary blend of red and black cherries, vinesmoke, a touch of gamebird, a bit of peppercorn, a fine signature of soil and oak leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with good focus and grip, a fine core and a fair bit of backend tannin on the long and nascently complex finish. Tuck this away for a year or two and watch it blossom into a very stylish bottle. 2015-2025+. **91+**.

2012 Chiroubles "Vieilles Vignes"- Damien Coquelet

The 2012 Chiroubles "Vieilles Vignes" from Damien Coquelet is a very good example of the vintage, with a bright red fruity personality and quite good ripeness for the vintage. The complex nose wafts from the glass in a mix of cranberries, cherries, fresh herb tones, a bit of citrus peel, rose petals, lovely soil tones and a nice topnote of cardamom. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tightly-knit and tangy, with a good, respectable core of fruit, fine soil signature and a bit of backend tannin on the long finish. There is none of the vintage's green streak here, but the wine is still on the young side and could do with another year's worth of bottle age to really let it blossom from behind its structural elements. A fine middleweight in the making. 2015-2025+. **89**.

Régnié

2013 Régnié- Julien Sunier

The 2013 Régnié from Julien Sunier is a lovely example of the vintage and a very strong indication that, though this domaine has only been around since 2008, Monsieur Sunier is now one of the top estates in the region. As readers may recall, Julien Sunier worked with Christophe Roumier at the start of his career, prior to setting out for several different regions and wearing various winemaking hats, prior to settling in Beaujolais and opening his own domaine in '08. His Beaujolais bottlings are not classics, but rather more of a hybrid of Beaujolais and Côte d'Or styles, as he ferments his whole clusters in cement vats with indigenous yeasts, prior to aging them for nine or ten months in old Burgundy barrels (that he still gets from Domaine Roumier). His 2013 Régnié offers up a bright, red fruity and complex nose of cherries, baked red berries, cardamom, lovely soil tones, turmeric and just a bit of oak spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, wide open and drinking beautifully, with a good core of fruit, solid acidity and grip and a long, complex and succulent finish. Lovely juice in a quite unique and compelling style. 2014-2020+. **89+**.

2012 Régnié- Domaine Guy Breton

The 2012 Régnié from Domaine Guy Breton is another good, solid effort for the vintage, but its quality *vis à vis* what is customary at this great estate underscores just how hard this year was for *vignerons* in the region. The bouquet is a black fruity and quite complex blend of cassis, dark berries, dark soil, woodsmoke, espresso and charred wood. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, but with quite modest depth at the core and some hard-edged, underripe tannins poking out on the relatively short finish. Okay. 2014-2020. **85**.

2012 Régnié- Christian Ducroux

The 2012 Régnié from Christian Ducroux is a very strong example of the vintage, offering up a deep and complex nose of cherries, strawberries, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, a

lovely base of soil and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and very well-balanced, with good and quite complete ripeness for the year, virtually no tannin, a nice touch of glossiness on the attack and a long, complex finish. This is wide open and drinking beautifully right now, but it will not make old bones. 2013-2016+? **89.**

2012 Régnié “Grain et Granit”- Domaine Charly Thévenet

The 2012 Régnié “Grain et Granit” from Charly Thévenet is another respectable wine for the vintage, but not up to the customary level of this fine producer. The wine offers up a bouquet of cassis, dark berries, coffee grounds, some balsamic tones and damp soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush for a 2012 on the attack, though it lacks some energy, with a good core, but again, some dry-edged, uncovered tannins sticking out on the moderately long finish. Not bad, but not great. 2015-2020+. **85.**



Morgon

2013 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Daniel Boulard

The 2013 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes from Daniel Boulard is a beautiful wine, as these vines, mostly planted in 1925, have excelled in this vintage. The wine jumps from the glass in a stunning blend of cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, nutskin, orange peel, fresh herb tones and a topnote of roasted gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tight and absolutely rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, a touch of tannin and excellent length and grip on the complex and soil-driven finish. First class Morgon! 2016-2035+. **93.**

2013 Morgon “Delys”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2013 Morgon “Delys” from Daniel Bouland is another absolutely beautiful, single vineyard bottling from old vines, with these youngsters having been planted in 1926! The wine is more primary out of the blocks than the superb Corcelette V.V., offering up scents of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of blood orange, superb soil tones, nutskin and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully sappy at the core, with modest tannins, fine focus and grip, lovely soil signature and a very long, youthful and promising finish. Monsieur Bouland’s Corcelette V.V. is quite drinkable right out of the blocks in 2013, but the Delys really needs a few years in the cellar to blossom and allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. It is another outstanding wine in the making. 2017-2035+. **93+**.

2013 Morgon- K. Descombes

The 2013 Morgon from Domaine K. Descombes is a very fine bottle, with a combination of sappiness and tautness of structure that is very exciting. The pure and very classy nose wafts from the glass, delivering a blend of pomegranate, cherries, a bit of bonfire, lovely Indian-like spice tones, a fine base of soil (that will go autumnal in profile fairly quickly) and fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit peppery out of the blocks, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, a fair bit of chewy tannin and a long, tangy and classic finish. All this fine bottle needs is a bit of bottle age to soften up its edges. 2016-2030. **91**.

2013 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Michel Guignier

Michel Guignier’s 2013 Morgon Vieilles Vignes is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a pure and red fruity bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, granitic soil tones, fresh thyme and a classic youthful topnote of pepper. On the palate the wine is pure and beautifully balanced, with its full-bodied format quite nicely structured out of the blocks, with tangy acids and ripe tannins giving this wine plenty of chassis for long-term aging. The core is sweet and solid, the wine is focused and nascently complex, with outstanding backend length and grip; this lovely wine really deserves a year or two in the cellar to fully blossom and should prove to be one of the great long-distance runners of the vintage. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2040. **92+**.

2013 Morgon “Bio-Vitis”- Domaine Michel Guignier

The 2013 Morgon “Bio-Vitis” from Michel Guignier is a bit more black fruity in personality than the Vieilles Vignes bottling, as these sixty year-old vines in the fine *lieu à dit* of La Roche Pilée have excelled in this vintage. This wine is aged in old Burgundy barrels, with very light sulfuring taking place only at bottling and the vineyard raised according to organic principals. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and still quite youthful mélange of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of venison, lovely soil tones, a touch of espresso, a bit of fresh herb tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, great soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins and a very long, intensely flavored and tangy finish. This is really a superb bottle of young Morgon, and though it is so beautifully balanced that it is approachable today, I would not want to touch a bottle for a few years and really let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. It too should be a long-lived example of the vintage. 2016-2035+. **93**.

2013 Morgon- Julien Sunier

Julien Sunier’s 2013 Morgon is vinified similarly to his Régnié, and the wine has turned out splendidly in this excellent vintage, wafting from the glass in a very stylish aromatic constellation of cherries, blood orange, nutskin, cardamom, a beautifully complex base of soil

tones and just a whisper of oak spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite sappy at the core, with lovely soil signature, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. Lovely juice. 2014-2025+. **92.**

2012 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Guy Breton

I very much like the forward and well done aromatic profile of the 2012 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Guy Breton, but the palate composition shows off the vagaries of this vintage. The bouquet is a nice blend of dark berries, cassis, charred wood, espresso, balsam bough and a bit of damp earth. On the palate the wine is medium-full and a bit defined by muddy soil elements, with some coarse, dry-edged tannins and unripe acids toughening up what is really a pretty long finish for the vintage. This needs a couple of years to try and soften the edginess on the backend, but how will the fruit hold? A respectable effort from a tough year. 2016-2022. **85.**

2012 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Damien Coquelet

The 2012 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Damien Coquelet is a good example of the vintage, with more ripeness in evidence on the nose than is customary for this tough year. The bouquet is a fine mélange of black cherries, spit-roasted gamebird, fresh thyme, a bit of coffee bean, red curry and a nice base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is far more a reflection of its vintage than the nose suggests, with its full-bodied format a bit constricted by its firm, slightly dry-edged tannins. There is good solid depth here at the core, fine focus and length, but the tannins seem likely to always have the upper hand in the balance here (despite fine depth) and I would be inclined to drink this wine in a couple of years, when the tannins have begun to soften up a bit, but the fruit is still plump with the recollection of youth, rather than hope for a long-term resolution of the full tannic chassis. I suspect the wine will have a short window of pretty good drinkability, and then the fruit will start to evolve far faster than the tannin and the wine will eventually just dry out. 2015-2020+? **87.**

2012 Morgon “Côte du Py” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Damien Coquelet

The 2012 old vine bottling of Côte du Py from Damien Coquelet has an absolutely superb nose, as it jumps from the glass in a deep and sappy blend of red and black cherries, gamebirds, complex soil tones, a bit of walnut, woodsmoke, just a touch of pepper, red curry and a gentle topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and currently very bound up in its structural elements, with a fine core, snappy acidity, firm (fairly ripe) tannins and great soil signature on the long and youthfully zesty finish. I like the overall balance here better than in the regular 2012 bottling of Monsieur Coquelet’s Côte du Py, as the tannins are riper and better integrated here, but the acids are really zingy right now and I wonder if somewhere down the road they might not become rather volatile. But, my gut instincts suggest this wine will be able to keep its structural integrity intact (just barely) over the years and end up being one of the top wines of the vintage. But, given it a few years to blossom, as those acids right now are pretty serious fare. 2016-2030. **90+.**

2012 Morgon- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2012 Morgon from Domaine Georges Descombes is a pretty strong example of the vintage, with this year’s *herbacité* not particularly in evidence on the nose, but it does perk up and define the backend of the palate quite a bit. The bouquet is quite attractive in its mix of cranberries, orange peel, woodsmoke, lovely, forest floor soil tones, mustard seed and a bit of acorn. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and nicely transparent, with a low fat personality, tangy acids, a bit of backend tannin and some of the vintage’s white pepperiness

perking up the finish. This is a very good effort for the vintage, with impressive balance, but it is a bit lean by the high standards of this bottling in superior years. 2014-2020. **86+**.

2012 Morgon “la Voute Saint Vincent”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2012 la Voute Saint Vincent from Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes is a very strong example of the vintage, with only moderate ripeness, but none of the really overt streaks of greenness that plague so many of the wines from this tough growing season. The bouquet offers up a complex constellation of black cherries, dark berries, vinesmoke, dark soil tones, herbs and a bit of charred wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tightly-knit and soil-driven, with a moderate core of fruit, a bit of well-integrated tannins and a long, low fat finish that offers up good complexity and balance. While this will never be confused with the classic 2011 version, this is quite successful for the vintage. Like several of the 2012s, I would be inclined to drink the 2012 la Voute Saint Vincent in its relative youth, as there is only moderate depth of fruit here, and one imagines that the odds are pretty good that this will start to fade before the structure really softens completely. 2014-2019. **87**.

2012 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2012 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes is another very strong example of the vintage, with impressive mid-palate depth for this tough year, though with a bit of the backend austerity that is so typical of the 2012s. The bouquet is deep, youthful and impressively intense in its blend of red and black cherries, a bit of bonfire, stony soil tones, mustard seed, fresh thyme and a faint whiff of gamebird in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and quite solid at the core, with some firm, slightly dry-edged tannins, good focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is one 2012 Cru Beaujolais that seems to have the stuffing to outlast its tannins, and I would be inclined to keep this very good 2012 in the cellar for a couple of years and allow it to blossom a bit from behind its sturdy structural elements. It does not have the mid-palate sappiness that is typical of this bottling in riper vintages, but it is very well-made and certainly a success for the vintage. 2016-2023+. **87+**.

2012 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The Desvignes family’s 2012 bottling of Morgon “Javernières” (I am not sure if this is the bottling from the upper or lower section of the vineyard) is the strongest of these three very successful 2012s from the domaine, offering up a bright and transparent nose of cherries, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, a fine signature of stony soil, woodsmoke, just a touch of meatiness and incipient notes of autumn leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very nicely balanced, with a good core, superb transparency, moderate tannins and very fine length and grip on the complex and classy finish. This does not have the customary mid-palate amplitude of a top vintage, but the wine is beautifully balanced at its octane level and is a very complete and classy example of this difficult vintage. 2014-2025. **89+**.

2012 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2012 Morgon from Joseph Drouhin is a good example of the vintage, with a slightly lean character, but good cleanliness on both the nose and palate, with pretty good ripeness and fine focus and balance. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine mix of cherries, strawberries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of stony soil tones, fresh herbs and just a hint of pepper. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, red fruity and transparent, with modest depth, fairly ripe, measured tannins and good length and grip on the tangy, soil-driven and youthful finish. This probably has just enough meat on the bones to blossom with a year or two of bottle age, but it will never be a succulent example of Morgon. However, given how tough the vintage was in Morgon, this is really a very good middleweight in the making. 2015-2025. **87**.

2012 Morgon “Corcelette”- Domaine Jean Foillard

The 2012 Domaine Foillard Morgon “Corcelette” is probably the finest Morgon I have yet tasted from this vintage, as this region was hit by hail, but this bottling shows no signs of inadequate ripeness, peppery aspects and only a whisper of edgy structural elements. Instead, one has a beautifully pure and wide open wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a lovely blend of sappy black cherries, dark berries, bonfires, dark chocolate, a lovely base of stony soil tones and a topnote of crushed violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with an excellent core, a fine base of granitic minerality, relatively low acids and a bit of chewy backend tannin that adds grip on the long finish. It is only as the wine closes that one gets a sense that this is a 2012 Morgon, so I would opt for drinking this on the early side, though its modest level of tannins, rather than waiting to see if they become a more pronounced as the youthfully plush fruit starts to evolve. This is a ringing success for the vintage. 2014-2020+? **93.**

2012 Morgon “Côte de Puy”- Domaine Jean Foillard

Jean Foillard’s 2012 Morgon “Côte de Puy” is another very, very successful example of the vintage, but here there is a bit more tannin and the tannins are a bit more gritty on the backend and more reflective of the difficulties faced by *vignerons* here in Morgon. The bouquet is deep and ripe, offering up a sappy blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, stony soil tones, herbs, pepper and a bit of cherry skin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite clean on the attack, with a fine core, very good soil inflection, but some dry-edged, chewy tannins on the long and slightly edgy finish. I am more sanguine about the balance of the 2012 Corcelette from Monsieur Foillard. 2015-2022+? **87+?**

2012 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Château Grange Cochard

Château Grange Cochard has only been in the hands of the Wilding family since 2008, but it has quickly become one of the stars in Villié-Morgon, and the 2012s are far superior to several more famous names in the village in this difficult year. The Vieilles Vignes bottling at Grange Cochard hails from a couple of parcels of fifty-plus year-old vines that lies outside of the Côte du Py, and the 2012 is an impressively ripe and sappy example of the vintage. The bouquet is a vibrant and classy blend of black cherries, pomegranate, fresh thyme, nutskins, beautiful soil tones and a bit of cardamom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with superb mid-palate concentration, just a touch of velvety tannin and a very long, seamless and complex finish. This is a revelation for the vintage without a bit of greenness! 2014-2025. **90.**

2012 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2012 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Château Grange Cochard is also outstanding, wafting from the glass in a deep and sappy aromatic constellation of red plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, dark soil tones, thyme and a delicate topnote of Indian spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off a lovely core of fruit, with fine soil signature, a touch of tannin and very good length and grip on the focused finish. Another transcendental example of the 2012 vintage, but this year, I have to give a very, very slight nod to the estate’s Vieilles Vignes bottling. 2014-2025. **89.**

2012 Morgon- Domaine Marcel Lapierre

The 2012 Morgon from Domaine Lapierre is another rather dry-edged wine on the backend, and coupled with the very low acidity the wine shows out of the blocks, I wonder just how it will evolve. The bouquet is quite deep-pitched and sappy, offering up scents of dark berries, marinated black cherries, balsam boughs, damp soil and a bit of oxidative, cookie dough

aromas. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core, but the vintage's coarse, dry tannins poking out on the low acid and already slightly oxidative finish. Is this already tiring? ???

2012 Morgon- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun's 2012 Morgon is really a very good example of the year (you've already heard that before!), with excellent and quite pure aromatics, but some *herbacité* and a slightly dry edge in evidence on the backend of the palate and which is probably the result of the hail that hit Morgon in early summer in 2012. That said, the wine is really still very good (and impressively successful for the vintage), offering up a bright and complex bouquet of cherries, quince, mustard seed, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones (that will get autumnal fairly quickly) and a topnote of cardamom. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and focused, with a good core, lovely soil signature, and just a whisper of greenness on the backend, with a modest base of slightly dry tannin and a closing note of white pepper on the long finish. This is another of those 2012 Crus that I would opt to drink relatively early on, as the balance seems best out of the blocks for enjoyable drinking, despite a bit of tannin. 2014-2020+? **87.**

2012 Morgon "Vieilles Vignes"- Domaine Jean-Paul Thévenet

Time will tell, but it seems that the tough 2012 vintage may have been quite ill-suited to low sulfur regimens, as so many of these Morgons show advancing aromatics and tough, dry tannins, and how does one project such a combination out to a good window of drinkability? In any case, the Domaine Thévenet Morgon "Vieilles Vignes" offers up a deep-pitched bouquet of road tar, dark berries, hung game, chocolate, damp soil and balsamic overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, quite generous on the attack, with a modest core and an astringent finish of dry, coarse tannins. A very difficult wine to read in its youth. ???

2011 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I have several cases of Joseph Drouhin's Morgon in my cellar, as this is one of the strongest wines in their excellent range of Beaujolais bottlings, and the 2011 is simply stellar. The pure and sappy nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of red and black cherries, fresh herb tones, gamebird, lovely, stony soil tones, vinesmoke and a bit of chicory. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and beautifully soil-driven, with a superb core of fruit, lovely transparency, still a bit of the vintage's tannin to resolve and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and palate-staining finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Morgon that is quite approachable today, but is really still a handful of years away from its apogee of peak drinkability. I love the sappiness on the backend, which suggests that this wine will continue to put on weight as it ages-much like the great Côte d'Or reds from the Drouhin family. I clearly underestimated this wine's potential longevity when I tasted it a year ago. A superb example of the vintage. 2017-2035+. **92+.**

2011 Morgon- Château des Jacques

The 2011 Morgon from Château des Jacques is outstanding and will only need a couple of years in the cellar to really start to drink well. The pure and vibrant nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, pomegranate, fresh thyme, a lovely base of granite minerality, woodsmoke and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This needs a couple of years in the cellar to fully integrate its new wood component, but it will have no difficulties doing so and should be a superb bottle of Morgon for a long time to come. 2016-2035. **91+.**

2011 Morgon- Domaine Marcel Lapierre (served from magnum)

The 2011 Morgon from the Lapierre family is drinking beautifully today out of magnum and was one of the true hits at a very large and varied tasting dinner I attended this past August. Like so many of the top 2011s, the early structural bit of the vintage has backed off here and the wine is really drinking with great style and complexity at the present time, jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of sweet cranberries, cherries, vinesmoke, citrus peel and a lovely base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and *à point*, with a fine core of sappy fruit, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This will not make old bones by the standards of 2011 Morgon bottlings, but for drinking over the next six to ten years, it will offer up plenty of enjoyment. 2014-2024. **92.**

2010 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château des Jacques

This was the first time I had tasted the 2010 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Château des Jacques, and not surprisingly, it is a very deep and structured example of this very good year and will be an excellent wine with a bit of bottle age. The bouquet is deep, black fruity and youthful, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, vinesmoke, stony soil, herbs, a bit of white pepper, chicory and the first stirrings of autumn leaves that will become quite prevalent as this wine reaches its apogee. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core, a bit of firm tannin, tangy acids and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. The wine is a touch more forward on the palate than the bouquet suggests, but this wine deserves another three or four years in the cellar to really come into its own. There is just a whisper of *herbacité* here that may put some folks off, but to my palate it is just another lovely element in the inherent complexity of this fine wine. 2017-2030+. **90+.**

Brouilly

2012 Brouilly- Georges Descombes

The 2012 Brouilly from Georges Descombes is really a pretty solid effort for the vintage, with a bright and red fruity nose of cranberries, cherries, woodsmoke, herb tones and some early autumnal notes of forest floor. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and complex, with solid mid-palate depth, tangy acids and just a touch of the greenness of the vintage on the backend that comes across as a bit of white pepper. But, in the context of the vintage, the *herbacité* here is fairly modest and the wine is quite tasty for near to mid-term drinking. 2014-2019. **87.**

2012 Brouilly- Château Thivin (Claude Geoffray)

I love the wines from Château Thivin, but the 2012 Brouilly bottling from the Geoffrays does not seem to possess a whole lot of promise out of the blocks. That said, I have had some fabulous, old wines at the domaine from what were considered fairly minor vintages in their day, so perhaps this wine does have some hope with bottle age and I just caught it in an awkward early stage. The nose on the 2012 Brouilly seems decidedly underripe this year, offering up notes of cherries, herb tones, white pepper, game and damp soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, nascently complex and fairly green, with a modest core, a bit of moderate, dry-edged tannin and a long, tangy finish. Maybe this will come around with some extended bottle age, but right now it seems pretty malnourished for a wine from Claude Geoffray. **???**



2012 Brouilly “Pierreux”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2012 Brouilly “Pierreux” from Pierre-Marie Chermette is a very strong 2012, as Monsieur Chermette seems to have done about as good of a job as was humanly possible in this difficult year. The wine offers up a very pure and nicely ripe nose of cherries, strawberries, fresh herb tones, coffee, a nice dollop of soil and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure on the attack and quite complex, with a good core (particularly for 2012), tangy acids and a bit of backend *herbacité* and pepper perking up the long finish. Like so many 2012s, this is not thoroughly ripe, but it is very nicely balanced and for drinking over the next half dozen years, it will provide pretty remarkable pleasure for a 2012 Beaujolais. 2014-2020. **88.**

2011 Brouilly- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I cannot believe that another year has passed and this stellar 2011 Brouilly is still available in the pipeline! Like so many of the top 2011 Beaujolais, this wine has blossomed beautifully with some bottle age and is now drinking with great verve and sappiness, as it jumps from the glass in a pomegranate, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, beautiful soil tones and violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovely transparency, just a bit of tannin, tangy acids and excellent complexity and intensity of flavor on the long and vibrant finish. The sappiness at the core here also perks up again on the finish, auguring very, very well for the continued blossoming of this first class Brouilly over the coming decade. An outstanding example of the vintage and a stunning value! 2014-2025+. **91+.**

Côte de Brouilly

2013 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2013 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie” from Daniel Bouland is another absolutely brilliant example of this fine vintage. The vibrant bouquet jumps from the glass in a constellation of red and black cherries, nutskin, gamebird, a beautiful vein of minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off a superb mid-palate core of sappy fruit, with tangy acids, excellent complexity, just a whisper of tannin and laser-like focus on the very long, soil-driven and perfectly balanced finish. As readers know, I love top flight Côte de Brouilly, and the 2013 from Monsieur Bouland is most assuredly top flight juice! 2014-2035. **93.**

2013 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée des Ambassades”- Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes

At a distance, the label of this fine bottling looks very much like Château Thivin’s, and though both wines are exemplary bottles of Côte de Brouilly, the Cuvée des Ambassades is more red fruity out of the blocks and really offers up more early accessibility than Claude Geoffray’s reference point bottlings from the extinct volcano of Côte de Brouilly. The 2013 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée des Ambassades” from Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes is an excellent example of both this fine appellation and the excellent growing season. The wine offers up lovely purity and nascent complexity in its classy bouquet of sappy red and black cherries, nutskin, sweet cranberry, stony soil tones, violets and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very transparent in personality, with a sappy core of fruit, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and classic finish. A very fine 2013. 2014-2025. **92.**

2012 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2012 Côte de Brouilly from Domaine des Terres Dorées is a good, solid effort for the year, but a bit high-toned and structurally austere. The bouquet is a very pretty and red fruity mélange of cherries, quince, vinesmoke, a touch of gamebird, dried herbs, a bit of red curry and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and really has impressive mid-palate concentration for the vintage, with tangy acids, fine focus and grip, but some dry-edged and almost fiery tannins also vying for attention on the long and soil-driven finish. Some backend weediness here suggests that this wine may be most interesting to drink early on, despite its rather substantial base of tannin, as the fruit component here could end up being a touch more fragile than the other structural elements. It is a very good 2012, but it is unequivocally a 2012! 2014-2020+? **86+.**

2012 Côte de Brouilly- Château Thivin (Claude Geoffray)

The regular bottling of Côte de Brouilly from Château Thivin in 2012 shares more in common with the Brouilly here this year (not a whole lot of ripeness in evidence) than with the Cuvée Zacharie. The nose is very modestly ripe, but quite complex, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of dark berries, cassis, shoe polish, white pepper, green herbs, dark soil and vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite dry-edged today, with a good core, a fairly green profile and a bit of backend bitterness poking out on the fairly astringent finish. As I noted when talking about the 2012 Brouilly from this fine domaine, I have had some lesser vintages here that have aged very well, so maybe there is hope for this wine down the road. 2018-2025+? **???**

2012 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Zacharie”- Château Thivin (Claude Geoffray)

The 2012 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Zacharie” from Château Thivin is fairly remarkable for the vintage, as it is quite clean and nicely ripe on the nose and attack of the palate. However, it is still quite chewy on the backend and shows off a distinctly dry edge to its tannins this year.

The bouquet is fairly closed at the present time, offering up notes of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, bitter chocolate, lovely dark soil tones and a bit of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows good sappiness at the core, with a fine signature of soil, firm, almost tough tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the dry-edged finish. In addition to the tannins here, the acids do not seem particularly ripe either, and it seems a fifty-fifty proposition that the wine will eventually resolve, and if it comes through positively in the cellar, it will be one of the wines of the vintage. As Claude Geoffray has made so many absolutely brilliant wines over the course of his career, it is very hard to bet against one of his bottlings- particularly a Cuvée Zacharie! 2016-2030? **86-90+?**

2012 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

Nicole Chanrion's 2012 Côte de Brouilly is another success for the vintage, with a fair bit of structure to work through, but lovely purity and few signs of the vintage's depredations on either the nose or palate. The bouquet is clean, bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a bit of sweet cranberry, woodsmoke, gamebird, a beautifully complex base of minerality and a touch of cocoa. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, firm, chewy tannins, tangy acids and lovely length and grip on the backend. With air, the tannins here build a bit and get a bit more dry-edged, but this seems to me to have enough stuffing of pure fruit to outlast the tannins and this wine should be very good to drink in three or four years. 2016-2025. **90.**

2011 Côte de Brouilly "l'Heronde"- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2011 Côte de Brouilly from Claire and Fabien Chasselay is another excellent example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a lovely mix of sappy black cherries, pomegranate, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh thyme and black pepper. On the palate the wine is pure, primary and full-bodied, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent structure and focus, a fair bit of the vintage's tannin and a very long, youthful and rock solid finish. A very fine bottle of Côte de Brouilly in the making, I would give this wine at least a couple of years in the cellar to start to blossom and show off some of its secondary layers of complexity. 2016-2035. **92+.**

2010 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

Up until very recently, I had drunk more Cru Beaujolais from Nicole Chanrion than probably any other producer in the region in the last five years, but with the folks at Kermit Lynch (Madame Chanrion's US importer) currently pissed off at me for overt honesty, it is likely that I am not going to see a lot of samples of the new vintages of this superb producer of Côte de Brouilly. Happily, my cellar is well-stocked, so I am not going to run out of these fine wines any time soon, and this most recent bottle of the 2010 was showing absolutely beautifully, as it delivers the Chanrion signature aromatic purity in its mélange of pomegranate, black cherries, nutskin, a beautiful base of soil, woodsmoke, mustard seed and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and *à point*, with a good core, just a bit of tannin, tangy acids and a long, complex and gently peppery finish. This vintage from Nicole Chanrion is currently at its apogee and really drinking beautifully, but it shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. 2014-2025+? **92.**

THE 2004 DRY RIESLING COMPARISON: ALSACE, AUSTRIA AND GERMANY



Klaus-Peter Keller picking in October of 2013 in the vineyard of Hipping in Nierstein- his 2004s are stunning.

On the last evening of my visit to Germany in March of this spring, I had the pleasure to once again join the Saarbrücken Wine Club for another in their ongoing series of superb tastings. The theme at the end of March was the dry Rieslings of the 2004 vintage, organized to see how the vintage was faring as it reached its tenth birthday across a number of different Riesling regions. It was a terrific blind tasting with some very interesting results, and it was particularly informative, as ten years ago is really the point in time to my mind where dry German Rieslings were just beginning to come of age and developing into the style that we all know today. At the time, both Austria and Germany back in 2004 or 2005 were almost universally ranked as superior regions for dry Rieslings than Germany (which was still generally considered to hit its most magical levels with classical sweeter styles), but as we shall see, 2004 was an important vintage for these dry wines from Germany. All of the wines in the tasting were served blind, with the tasters having a list of what was included in the lineup (with one or two additions that were not on the list to keep everyone honest), but the wines were not revealed until the end of the tasting. There was no attempt to organize the wines by style or region of origin, in the hopes that would keep prejudiced tasters such as myself a bit more honest, and in fact, there was general delight when a screwcap-sealed wine (it was a very good Franken bottling from Weingut Johann Ruck that I was completely unfamiliar with before, but quite impressed with its quality) was my favorite on my scorecard of a flight of three wines, as my hearty dislike for this

closure was already quite well known to most members of the Wine Club and everyone got a good chuckle when I placed the wine first in that flight! It was a very enjoyable way to finish up my week-long stay in Germany as part of three and a half weeks on the road this spring and certainly energized me for my next leg of the trip, which was in Champagne. I will give a brief sketch of the vintage characteristics of each growing region represented at this tasting- Germany, Austria and Alsace- prior to getting on to the results of the tasting.

The 2004 vintage in Germany was a fairly late harvest, as the weather pattern was neither too hot nor too cold during the rather uneventful growing season, but sugars moved upwards at a most leisurely rate. Consequently, most estates did not start harvesting until late in October and a great many producers extended their picking out to the middle of November. After the freakishly hot summer of 2003 the year before, it was a return to a more “normal” growing season in 2004, with the wines quite high in acidity and nicely buffered by good, but not exceptional fruit ripeness, and in general, not a whole lot of botrytis was to be found in this vintage. In fact, very little of the botrytis that eventually arrived later in the season was particularly clean, and most growers sought to avoid any botrytis in the vast majority of their wines (whether destined to be dry or sweet), as it was not the most noble of noble rot. On paper, this should have made for a very fine vintage for dry Rieslings, and in fact, the tasting showed off a great many truly exceptional examples of Grosses Gewächs and the like that were starting to reach their apogees at age ten. However, it is also pretty safe to say that dry Riesling techniques in Germany were not as fine-tuned ten years ago as they are today, and beyond the very top practitioners of this style, the quality was not as consistent in our tasting as one might expect from similar raw materials today. In my opinion, 2004 was a transition period for German dry Rieslings, as growers at this epoch were trying to find a more generous style that would excite the market a bit more than the leaner and razor-sharp Trocken wines that were quite prevalent in the decade of the 1990s and were often akin to electric shock therapy for the palate when drunk on the young side. In recent times, I have been able to revisit several of those lean and very snappy Trocken wines from the 1990s and have found that several have aged far better than I would have initially imagined and a great many are quite lovely to drink today, but there is little doubt that only real purists embraced them lovingly from the get-go and today’s style of dry German Rieslings are generally far less severe structurally out of the blocks than was the case twenty or twenty-five years ago.

However, in the search for a bit more ripeness to add body, alcohol and extract to buffer the acidity of dry German Rieslings in the early 2000s, some estates managed to produce wines that were a bit heavy-handed in style, and a few of these seemed to have found their way into our tasting lineup of the 2004ers. I have to imagine that the success in the marketplace of dry Rieslings from Austria during this period, particularly for the top producers’ Smaragd bottlings, with really very high levels of alcohol for Riesling, were encouraging to producers in Germany searching to replicate some of this market success with their own dry Riesling bottlings, particularly their Grosses Gewächs, and did not lead them to shy away from what would be considered pretty elevated levels of alcohol in Germany a decade earlier. Keep in mind that Grosses Gewächs was only officially brought in as a category around 2001, so when we settled in to taste a representative sampling of these bottlings from 2004, it was still very early days for this category of wines and things have evolved very nicely from that point to where we are today. In fact, at the time that most of these wines went into the bottle in the late spring of 2005,

it would be hard to say that a great many German winegrowers who produced these dry Rieslings had expectations that they would be able to favorably compete with the far better-established dry Riesling styles from Austria and Alsace, that have had a significant head start on their German Grosses Gewächs counterparts in refining their own styles, but, as we will see a bit further along, this tasting proved to be rather surprising in several aspects.

As I noted above, botrytis in the 2004 vintage in Germany was quite minimal in general, and in theory, this should have been an ideal year for producing outstanding dry Rieslings. However, I certainly tasted a few examples from both the Rheingau and Rheinpfalz that strongly suggested that some botrytized grapes found their way into the dry Riesling bottlings that we sampled. Of course, botrytis in dry Austrian Riesling had been far from exceptional during the several vintages leading up to the 2004 vintage (and was also quite prevalent in 2004 in Austria), with most commentators not particularly alarmed by this characteristic, so perhaps producers in the Rheingau and the Pfalz thought a little noble rot could only serve to elevate the aromatic expressiveness of their dry wines out of the blocks. In my experience, any trace of botrytis in a dry wine is undesirable, as it seems to inevitably undermine the ability of the wine in question to age gracefully, as the noble rot tends to eventually get the upper hand on the other aromatic and flavor elements of the wine over time, and eventually takes away both complexity and elegance. As botrytis also acts to concentrate the must by dehydrating the grapes, one also gets a concentration of sugars and acids in the unfermented grape juice, which can be counter-balanced in sweet wines with residual sugar, but which cannot be addressed in dry wines. Keep in mind that Grosses Gewächs bottlings must be officially Trocken wines, which means that they cannot have more than nine grams per liter of residual sugar, regardless of the acidity level of the wine, and if one is aiming to make a Grosses Gewächs bottling, then there is nothing to do but ferment out the sugars in the must to that magical threshold of nine grams per liter, even if it means the alcohol is going to spike up in the finished wine. I know that it is anathema to suggest a bit of flexibility in the realm of German wine laws, but it would be logical and intelligent if the maximum level of residual sugar for Grosses Gewächs bottlings was set on a vintage by vintage basis to take into account vintages with exceptionally high acidity or other characteristics that would make for better dry wines with a bit more buffering sweetness. Just a thought.

In Austria, the 2004 vintage was generally more difficult than in Germany. The spring was cool, rainy and budbreak was late. As the rains were a continuation of the generous precipitation from the winter of 2003/2004, initially, this was greeted sympathetically, for after the torrid drought year of 2003, replenishing water reserves for the vines was desirable. However, as the rain and overcast skies dragged on throughout the spring and into early summer, with even May and June still grey and damp, flowering was uneven, late and the potential crop size was diminished. Happily for Austrian winegrowers, after grey skies that lasted almost to the end of July, both August and September were warm, sunny and perfect for playing catch up with the delayed ripening in the vineyards, and pessimism began to be replaced by some measured optimism for (at least) the quality of the crop, if not its size. However, rainy weather returned in early October, just as the earliest-ripening grape varieties were beginning to be picked, and showers were very frequent throughout the remainder of the month, with the days without rain still very humid and botrytis spread like wild fire in the later-ripening varieties such as Riesling. Grapes had to be brought in as quickly as possible for wines destined to be used for dry wines, and it was pretty clear from our handful of top producers' Riesling Smaragd bottlings that there

was still plenty of botrytis influence in the dry wines produced from Riesling in this vintage in Austria. Predictably, at age ten, these wines did not really acquit themselves swimmingly, as the botrytis tended to swallow up the complexity of the wine, and alcohol levels, which are usually too heady for me in any case with top, single vineyard bottlings, were quite generous and all of the 2004 Austrian wines we sampled showed some heat on their backends.

In Alsace, the 2004 vintage was almost the inverse of the growing season in Austria. Like Champagne, the good and hot weather of the autumn of 2003 allowed the vines to remain green and keep their foliage for a good two months after the harvest was completed, so that the vines were able to build up substantial energy reserves for the upcoming growing season of 2004. The stress in the vines in 2003 also produced a large potential crop in 2004, and in fact, the year of 2004 produced (as in Champagne) a huge crop load. In Alsace, the 2004 vintage turned out to be the largest crop since 1992 in the region. The area enjoyed excellent weather throughout the spring and early months of summer, but just as the grey skies and rain were relenting at the start of August in Austria, rain and cold weather arrived in Alsace and stayed for the first three weeks of the month. Eventually, fine weather returned at the end of August, and September was beautiful and sunny, but just as the harvest in Alsace was poised to get underway in early October, it turned rainy again and stayed that way throughout the picking. Prior to the arrival of the October rains, the grapes were in beautiful condition, with very high sugars and also very high acidity levels, as the sunny month of September had been accompanied by cool nights, which allowed the acid levels to remain high in the grapes. But, the great potential of the end of September was generally not realized in the finished wines, as the grapes were brought in during wet weather throughout the month of October, with botrytis and grey rot putting tremendous pressure on *vignerons* to get this very large crop of grapes into the *cuvées* as quickly as possible to fend off the effects of both noble and ignoble rot, but the sheer number of grapes out on the vines ensured that a substantial amount of the crop would be harvested later than was ideal in the rainy October weather.

In any event, it is quite clear from the brief vintage descriptions for each region that 2004 hardly presented a level playing field for the dry Rieslings from Alsace, Austria and Germany, and I suppose that the relative success of the wines from each region in our tasting was as much a reflection on the varying vintage characteristics as on any other qualities. For, as my introduction might have suggested, the best wines at this tasting were hands down from Germany. That said, we also had a great many more German wines than those from either Austria or Alsace, but we did have some true “blue chips” from Austria and my two favorite bottlings of dry Riesling from Alsace, the Trimbach family’s Cuvée Frédéric Émile and Clos Ste. Hune, so what we lacked in quantity from these two regions we made up for in reputation for quality! As the notes below will attest, not everything from the 2004 vintage in Germany was special, mostly for the reasons I outlined above in the introductory remarks, as this was still very early on in the evolution of the dry Riesling movement in its current incarnation in Germany, and some of the wines showed the obvious growing pains of a newly-born style of wine. But, amongst the top producers of dry Rieslings today, it was very clear that they did not miss the opportunity that the 2004 vintage in Germany presented and have made some absolutely stellar bottlings in this year. Only a couple were not yet blossoming into their peaks of maturity, but the lion’s share of the very best wines are just starting their period of perfect maturity and will

continue to cruise along at very high levels for decades to come. At least if premature oxidation does not rear its ugly head here.

I have had several examples of prematurely oxidized white wines from both Alsace and now Austria (not a region I drink with any great frequency), but so far, have not had problems with any of my wines in the cellar from Germany. However, as I noted in Issue 49's report on the 2013ers from Germany, Tim Fröhlich of Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich has seen problems with some of his own dry wines from past vintages, and which he attributes to the overuse of bottle molds by glass manufacturers, causing imperfections on the interior of the neck of the bottles and preventing corks from making a proper seal along the glass wall of the neck, so it is possible that one day we will also be talking about regular problems with prematurely oxidized German wines. But, for the present time, I will remain hopeful that Tim's experience will prove to be isolated and these wines will continue to age as gracefully and realize all of the promise that they showed at our tasting of the 2004ers at the end of March in Saarbrücken. I have not listed the following notes in the same order as the organizer of our tasting listed the wines on our programs on this evening. As I noted above, the wines were shuffled and placed in flights of three wines, so that a flight might include one, two, three or no German wines, and the same for the other regions. But, rather than list the wines in the order we tasted them, it seemed to make far more sense to simply list them by region, and alphabetically within each regional subsection. This is of course not a report of a comprehensive tasting, but it does offer a fine snapshot into the respective quality of the 2004 vintage for dry Rieslings in these three major wine regions.

Mosel/ Saar

2004 Goldtröpfchen Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Reinhold Haart

The 2004 Goldtröpfchen Grosses Gewächs from Weingut Reinhold Haart is a spectacular wine and one of the best, mature dry Rieslings I have had the pleasure to taste from the middle Mosel. Ironically, we tasted this wine at the domaine a couple of days before our big tasting and managed to convince Johannes Haart to allow us to include a bottle at the tasting a couple of days later, only to have a bottle at the tasting that was not on form! Happily, I still had my note from the tasting at the estate in Piesport to fall back upon for this article. The wine is reaching its apogee of peak drinkability and offers up a stunning bouquet of pear, gentle mossiness, a bit of butter, white flowers, a superbly complex base of salty soil tones and a very smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core, beautiful balance and complexity and a very, very long, vibrant and utterly seamless finish. A great bottle of wine. 2014-2035. **95.**

2004 Riesling Uhlen "R" (Roth Lay)- Weingut Heymann-Löwenstein

The 2004 Riesling Uhlen "Roth Lay" from Weingut Heymann-Löwenstein was a rather perplexing wine, as it showed some overtly oxidative traits on both the nose and palate that I could not really attribute to closure issues. Reinhard Löwenstein likes to practice a fairly long maceration for his Rieslings, followed by a longer period of aging on the fine lees prior to bottling, and perhaps this was the reason that the 2004 Uhlen Roth Lay was a bit more advanced than most of the other wines in this tasting. The bouquet shows an oxidative quality in its blend of caramel, baked peach, petrol and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit sweeter than some of these other "dry" Rieslings (Herr Löwenstein does not use a Trocken designation for any of his bottlings, and sometimes the residual sugar will be above

the official threshold for Trocken), with good acidity, but an overtly bitter note poking out on the long, but fairly oxidative finish. Perhaps this bottle was simply not representative? ???

2004 Scharzhofberger Riesling Pergentsknopp “P”- Weingut Van Volxem

The 2004 Scharzhofberger Riesling Pergentsknopp “P” from Weingut Van Volxem is a very good wine that is now at its apogee of peak drinkability, but should probably continue to cruise along very nicely for at least the next seven or eight years. The bright and complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of tangerine, slate, gentle hints of caramel, petrol, a bit of fresh almond and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with tertiary complexity, a good core, plenty of alcohol, but sufficient extract to nicely buffer the octane and keep the wine balanced and tasty on the long and maturely complex finish. Good juice, though perhaps not what I would call a paradigm of the Scharzhofberg’s potential, which I really think reaches its zenith as a noble sweet wine. 2014-2022+? **92.**



Nahe

2004 Hermannshöhle Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff

Helmut Dönnhoff’s 2004 Hermannshöhle Riesling Grosses Gewächs is a beautiful bottle of wine that is now into its plateau of peak drinkability, but has years and years of life still ahead of it. The outstanding bouquet soars from the glass in a complex and vibrant constellation of fresh rosemary, apple, tangerine, beautifully complex minerality, smoke and a potpourri of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very suave

on the attack, with a superb core, great purity and mineral drive, vibrant acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. A very, very high class bottle at its zenith. 2014-2030+. **94.**

2004 Monzinger Halenberg Grosses Gewächs “Auf de Lay”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

To my palate, Weingut Emrich-Schönleber makes some of the most beautiful dry Rieslings in the world, though they take time to unfold and really need extended cellaring to show all of their inherent beauty. At our 2004 dry Riesling tasting, the superb Auf de Lay GG bottling from the Halenberg vineyard placed in almost everyone’s top three wines- no small feat in a lineup that included a full roster from Klaus-Peter Keller, Clos Ste. Hune, Hermannshöhle Grosses Gewächs from Helmut Dönnhoff and one of the top bottlings from Koehler-Ruprecht! The wine offers up a deep, complex and very classy bouquet of pink grapefruit, tart orange, white soil tones, lime peel, petrol and lovely, wild yeast overtones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and complex, with excellent mid-palate depth, great mineral drive, ripe, snappy acids and great length and breed on the vibrant and very polished finish. First class juice at its apogee. 2014-2030+. **95.**

Rheinpfalz

2004 Pechstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Bürklin-Wolf

The 2004 Pechstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs from Weingut Bürklin-Wolf was one of the weaker wines in this fine lineup, as it showed a fair bit of heat on the backend and a rather coarse textural element that was decidedly second division in this stellar company. The wine is deep, complex and quite advanced on the nose, offering up scents of grapefruit, orange peel, leather, lemongrass and a nice base of soil tones that are not particularly mineral in nature. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite hot, with a bitter, grapefruit pith element on the backend that is not particularly endearing. The finish is long, but coarse and alcoholic. Perhaps this was more interesting in its youth, but it is pretty mediocre today. 2014-2020. **84.**

2004 Kallstadter Saumagen Riesling Auslese Trocken “R”- Weingut Koehler-Ruprecht

The 2004 Kallstadter Saumagen Riesling Auslese Trocken “R” from Bernard Philippi of Weingut Koehler-Ruprecht is a superb wine that is actually still a couple of years away from really blossoming completely and could use a bit more bottle age! The deep and complex nose delivers a fine mélange of grapefruit, rosemary, bread fruit, some leesy tones, orange peel, stony minerality and a topnote of straw. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in style, with fine complexity and cut, a rock solid core, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the still slightly primary finish. Fine juice, but give it a bit more cellaring, as it is still a puppy! 2016-2040. **93+.**

2004 Forster Ungeheuer Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Georg Mosbacher

The 2004 Forster Ungeheuer Riesling Grosses Gewächs from Weingut Georg Mosbacher (now run by the husband and wife team of Sabine Mosbacher-Düringer and Jürgen Düringer) is a good solid effort that has its issues with botrytis, which has served to concentrate alcohol and add a bit of coarseness to the wine on the palate. The bouquet is a complex blend of orange, minerals, petrol, a bit of herb tones and a topnote of citrus oil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and showing some backend heat, with a good core, sound acids and a pretty good length on the chunky, slightly coarse and warm finish. I am sure this was pretty tasty in its early days, but like so many botrytized dry Rieslings, age has not benefited this wine a whole lot. Still quite drinkable, but I would imagine that the noble rot will further lessen the enjoyment here as

the years roll by, and I would drink this up sooner, rather than later, though it retains good acidity. 2014-2025? **88.**

Rheinhessen

2004 Riesling “von der Fels”- Weingut Keller

The 2004 Riesling “von der Fels” from Klaus-Peter Keller was not on our lineup cards, but was inserted as a “Pirate Wine” to keep us all honest. It made its appearance in the very first flight and showed beautifully, wafting from the glass in a mix of orange, wild yeasts, petrol, a beautifully complex base of soil, smoke and lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and seamlessly balanced, with a fine core, impressive complexity, excellent focus and grip and a long, still quite youthful and vibrant finish. This is a beautiful wine and shows that Klaus-Peter Keller and his wife, Julia, hit the ground running here at the family domaine in 2001, as this is only their fourth vintage at the helm, and this wine is superb-particularly for what is effectively one of their “Village Wines”! 2014-2035. **91.**

2004 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

Weingut Keller’s 2004 Hubacker Grosses Gewächs has aged beautifully and really is drinking with great style and breed at age ten. The bouquet is a deep and very refined mix of blood orange, peach pit, petrol, yellow plum, citrus peel and a lovely, smoky overtone in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very elegant, with excellent concentration in the mid-palate, bright, zesty acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, classy finish. Beautiful juice at its apogee, but with decades of life still ahead of it. 2014-2035. **94+.**

2004 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

Klaus-Peter Keller’s 2004 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs is drinking beautifully and has reached cruising altitude at age ten. The bouquet is deep, pure and quite lovely in its mélange of peach, spring flowers, citrus zest, pit fruits, petrol, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, ripe and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, poised and complex finish. The wines that the Kellers are fashioning from Kirchspiel today are even more precise and refined than this lovely 2004, which only augurs well for their eventual evolution in the cellar, as this wine is delicious to drink right now and still has many years of life ahead of it. 2014-2030. **93.**

2004 Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2004 Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs from the Keller family is an absolutely brilliant wine and was my absolute favorite on this particular evening. The brilliant nose soars from the glass in an exotic blaze of tangerine, blood orange, a touch of papaya, petrol, magnificent limestone minerality, a gentle dollop of wild yeasts, lovely floral tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with great mid-palate intensity, magical complexity, laser-like focus and great cut and grip on the suave, effortless and utterly refined finish. A brilliant, brilliant wine that has now just reached its plateau of peak maturity, where it will continue to delight the senses for decades to come. A vinous *tour de force*! 2014-2040. **97.**

2004 G-Max- Weingut Keller

Back in these early days, the G-Max bottling hailed from a specific plot of vines in the Keller’s portion of Morstein, but today it has a different vineyard source. So, given how much I loved the 2004 Morstein GG, it is not surprising that I also found the 2004 G-Max a stunning wine, as it offers up a beautiful bouquet of tangerine, pink grapefruit, smoke, brilliant soil tones,

a touch of *mirabelle*, petrol and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and magically complex, with a rock solid core, plenty of ripeness, crisp acids, lovely mineral drive and great focus and grip on the very, very long and seamless finish. This is a bit less evolved than the straight Morstein bottling from Klaus-Peter Keller in this vintage, so perhaps with more bottle age, this wine will overtake that great bottle. 2020-2050. **96+**.

2004 Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Wittmann

I do not get to taste a lot of wines from Weingut Wittmann, but those that I have crossed paths with have been very good, and this 2004 Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs is no exception. Philipp Wittmann and his wife Eva own vines in both Morstein and Kirchspiel in Westhofen, and in 2004, the estate had just transitioned over to *biodynamique* viticulture. Their 2004 Morstein Grosses Gewächs is a very good wine that is now at its apogee of peak maturity, wafting from the glass in a blend of pink grapefruit, orange peel, a touch of caramel, a gentle base of stony soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open and ready, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, slightly heady and zesty finish. This is a bit riper than Klaus-Peter Keller's 2004 Morstein, but it is a good bottle and should continue to drink well for the next half dozen years or so. 2014-2020+. **91.**

Rheingau

2004 Nonnenberg Riesling- Weingut Georg Breuer

The 2004 Nonnenberg Riesling from Weingut Georg Breuer is also quite marked by botrytis, and at age ten, the noble rot here has affected this wine's balance adversely. The nose is a botrytized blend of grapefruit, lemongrass, stony soil tones and rosemary. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, short and lacking in mid-palate depth, with some backend heat and a coarse, clipped finish. Maybe this was interesting in its very early days, but its appeal today is quite limited. 2014-2018. **82.**

2004 Hölle Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel Trocken- Weingut Franz Künstler

Weingut Franz Künstler is located in the village of Hochheim, where the Hölle vineyard is situated. This was my first experience with the wines from this estate. Their 2004 Hölle Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel Trocken is a good wine that may be showing a bit of coarseness on the palate these days from a bit of botrytis, but it offers up a good bouquet of tart orange, rosemary, stony soil tones, pit fruit and petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with good focus and balance, crisp acids and a long, moderately inelegant finish. Not bad and still with at least a decade's worth of life ahead of it, but not top division. 2014-2025. **88.**

Franken

2004 Julius-Echter-Berg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Johann Ruck

This was the first wine I had tasted from Weingut Johann Ruck and it was quite good. The bouquet is clean and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a mix of lemon, pink grapefruit, stony soil tones, lemongrass and a bit of fresh rosemary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined on the attack, with crisp acids and just a whisper of backend alcohol keeping the score down a tad on the long and complex finish. Good juice. 2014-2030. **88.**

Wachau

2004 Riesling Loibenberg Smaragd- Weingut Alzinger

I was able to identify right out of the blocks that Weingut Alzinger's 2004 Riesling Loibenberg Smaragd was of Austrian origin, as it combined outstanding aromatics with a high octane level on the palate that totally spoiled my enjoyment of the wine. I was chastised by my neighbor at the table for not approaching the wine in its context, but it was overtly hot and I do not know how to adjust for sheer imbalance. In any event, the bouquet was quite lovely in its mix of fresh rosemary, grapefruit, orange, stony minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely driven by its minerality on the attack, but with an overtly hot and alcoholic finish that is a flaw in my book. The length is very good and the wine still has a lovely girdle of acidity at age ten, but the alcohol here was mismanaged from the outset and is the defining element of the wine on the backend. 2014-2020. **86.**

2004 Riesling Kellerberg Smaragd- Weingut F. X. Pichler

The F. X. Pichler 2004 Riesling Kellerberg Smaragd is still quite attractive on the nose, but is collapsing into heat, shortness from botrytis and perhaps some premature oxidation as well on the palate. The nose is a blend of grapefruit, orange, rosemary, stony soil tones and citrus peel, and this is by a wide margin, the most interesting element of this wine today. On the palate the wine is deep and full on the attack, but already showing some overtly oxidative signs on the backend, with a lot of heat and not much length or grip. Drink up, as this one is going down. ???

2004 Riesling Achleiten Smaragd- Weingut Rudi Pichler

Weingut Rudi Pichler's 2004 Riesling Achleiten Smaragd is another botrytized wine that has not stood the test of time. The wine is rather muscle-bound and four-square in style, and also a bit hot on the backend. There is clearly some botrytis in play here, which in my book is never, ever a good thing for a dry wine. The bouquet, which is my favorite element in this 2004er, is a mix of sweet grapefruit, tart orange, rosemary, stony soil tones and caraway seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and alcoholic, with crisp acids, but a rather forced personality that shows some signs of overt bitterness on the backend to go along with the heat. Not a special wine, but was perhaps better in its youth. 2014-2020. **84.**

2004 Riesling Wachstum Bodenstein Smaragd- Weingut Prager

This particular bottle of the 2004 Riesling Wachstum Bodenstein Smaragd from Weingut Prager was the first example of premature oxidation that I have seen from Austria (admittedly, due primarily to octane issues, my sampling of Austrian wines is tiny). The wine is in its first stage of premox and still drinkable, but probably needs immediate consumption, as it offers up notes of tangerine, rosemary, some leesy tones, smoke and a bit of overt nuttiness of imminent oxidation. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, soft and losing length and grip on the backend, with premox taking hold of this bottle and pushing it into the grave with alacrity. There are probably still good bottles out there, but this is a wine, if one happens to have it in their cellar, that needs immediate attention. ???

Kremstal

2004 Riesling Steiner Hund- Weingut Nikolaihof

The 2004 Riesling Steiner Hund from Weingut Nikolaihof is a botrytized wine and, consequently, is a bit more advanced than one might hope for as it celebrates its tenth birthday. The tertiary nose offers up scents of tangerine, petrol, citrus peel, a fine base of soil and a very smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant on the attack, with a fine core, sound acids, plenty of ripeness, but nice balance and grip on the long and complex

finish. I am sure that this wine was just ravishing in its youth, but today, the botrytis has taken away some of its complexity and really fast-forwarded it a bit in terms of evolution, so that it is already starting to look over the far side of the plateau and I would drink it up in the next handful of years. It is still a perfectly respectable glass of wine, but its days are numbered and my gut feeling is that it was far more stunning in its youth. 2014-2020. **87.**

Alsace

2004 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach

The 2004 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile” from the Trimbach family was not showing particularly well at our tasting, and I wonder if it was beginning to fall victim to the first vestiges of premature oxidation. The nose is not particularly fresh today (at least on this bottle) and is quite mealy in character, offering up scents of apple, petrol citrus peel, smoke and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and decidedly fresher and more precise than on the nose, with a good core, fine complexity and a long, wide open finish. I am one of the dinosaurs who remembers well when a ten year-old bottle of Cuvée Frédéric Émile would just be starting to drink well, but this vintage (or this particular bottle?) seems already starting to get a bit long in the tooth and I suspect it is beginning to crumble from premox. 2014-2020? **87+?**

2004 Riesling “Clos Ste. Hune”- Maison Trimbach

I was really hoping for a brilliant showing for the 2004 Clos Ste. Hune, as this used to be one of my absolute favorite white wines in the world, but this particular bottle was not singing. The wine is certainly very good, as it is very long and beautifully focused, but it also seemed more advanced than any ten year-old Clos Ste. Hune has a right to be (at least before the age of premox!) and the wine was also plenty ripe and showed a bit of backend alcohol. The bouquet is a ripe and complex mélange of pink grapefruit, orange, complex, limestone-derived minerality, petrol, a touch of fresh herbs, citrus peel and an exotic topnote of licorice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe in personality, with a good core, sound acids and good length and grip on the slightly heady finish. I do not detect any signs of premox stirring in this particular bottle, but this vintage of Clos Ste. Hune lacks the cut and vibrancy of the great vintages here in the pre-climate change era. 2014-2025. **93.**

THIS SUMMER'S FINE LINEUP OF OLD SCHOOL AND NEO-CLASSICAL AMERICAN WINES



I last wrote up a feature on American wines back in February, and given the rise of more and more partisans of balance, lower alcohol and less overtly new oaky wines on the west coast of the United States with each passing season, it seems likely that I am not going to be able to keep up with this region in the not too distant future. When one adds the growing number of relatively new producers- folks like Arnot-Roberts, Masút Vineyards, Bravium, Calluna, Halcón, Kutch, Kendric Vineyards (to name just a few)- to the long-standing traditionalists like Kalin Cellars, Heitz Wine Cellar, Andrew Will, Corison, Joseph Swan, Stony Hill and the like, it is hard not be very excited about the present and future of American wines. Certainly, there still remains a majority of producers in the US who remain stuck in the dark old days of high alcohol, heavy manipulation in the cellar and even heavier oaking, but the number of wineries bent on returning American wine to its fine roots of balance and potential for long-term aging continues to grow exponentially and it is hard not to think that we are living in the midst of a real renaissance for these wines. I suppose the true acid test will be to see how Charles Banks does with his new acquisition of Mayacamas Vineyards- will he walk the walk or just talk the talk- but, given his investment in Wind Gap (one of the new practitioners of low octane wines) and their continued excellence, one can easily be optimistic about the future shape of Mayacamas

under its new ownership group. And if the one of the founders of Screaming Eagle can get it right at Mayacamas, how long can all those other vinous dinosaurs continue to roam freely in the market?

As has been the case for the last couple of articles on Old School American wines, I have reached out to some of my favorite new and not so new producers on the west coast of the US and asked the wineries to send samples of their new releases, and then combined those notes on other American wines that I have tasted out of my own cellar since the last report on the region in February. As I write this introduction on the fifth of September, California has already started their 2014 harvest, which is a bit early this year, and a number of wineries who had said they were going to send samples, such as Joseph Swan and Edmunds St. John, got caught up in the pre-harvest requirements and did not get the bottles out to me prior to the release of this feature, but I hope that once the fermentations settle down and they have a chance to take a deep breath, they will be able to get those bottles shipped out east, so that I can include them in the next installment. I should take a moment to discuss the moniker of “Old School” wines, as Ted Lemon of Littorai Vineyards took exception to my having listed his winery in the “Old School” when we last had a chance to chat via email, as he feels that Littorai’s charting and championing of *terroir* in the Russian River Valley is as cutting edge as it gets today in California, and would certainly agree with him on that count. When I use the term for American wines, I wish to do so to underscore how the wines in question harken back to the early days of American wines and which pay homage stylistically to the great winemaking pioneers there at the dawn of high quality American wines, people like Joe Heitz, André Tchelistcheff, Lee Stewart and Martin Ray. Looking further back, these folks used European wines as their models and all sought to make wines that would age and improve gracefully with time in the cellar. This school of winemaking is far removed from the focus group-generated, cookie-cutter and alcoholic monstrosities that masqueraded as serious wine for a couple of decades in the US, with their “dialed-in” aromatics and flavors, extraordinarily manipulated personalities and front-loaded and simplistic early appeal that did as much to damage the American wine business as prohibition ever did, and it is in celebration of these new and not so new wineries and their guiding lights who champion balance and ageability for their wines that these bi-annual reports are dedicated.

I have been remiss in not getting out regularly to the west coast of the United States to taste at the wineries, as there is so many fine addresses here that I have never had the pleasure to visit, and so many estates where I have only been there once or twice during the years that I have been writing full-time about wine. In a perfect world, I would be there much more often, but with children and other family responsibilities, it has been hard to envision adding more tasting trips to a schedule that already has me on the road nearly three months of every year. However, my kids are getting older (the youngest has just started college), so I hope that the future will allow a bit more flexibility in terms of my scheduling and I can start to get out to the west coast on a more regular basis and taste wines at the properties and visit the vineyards with these talented proprietors. Ted Lemon of Littorai mentioned that he is not inclined to send samples of his new releases to journalists, as he prefers to have them tasted *sur place* and I can certainly appreciate this perspective, so that is just another incentive (as if I needed another!) to rework my travel schedule for next year to make sure I allocate some travel time for visiting and tasting on the west coast of the US.

One of the things that I continue to find interesting as I taste through more and more fine, Old School new releases from American wineries is that the old war horses of cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay are lagging a bit in terms of shaking off the shackles of stylistic school of excess and returning to the fold of balanced US wines. Maybe it is just the producers whose wines I have crossed paths with in preparation for this report, but at least out of my very generous pile of samples, pinot noir and syrah seemed to be the most exciting types of wines coming out of the Old School, with a few noteworthy exceptions. Syrah in particular was really exciting to taste this time around, and given how few producers remain in the northern Rhône whose winemaking styles still really excite me, I was ecstatic to taste so many absolutely stellar examples of pure, soil-driven and low alcohol syrahs from California. I know that the Monster Truck school of California syrah is still out there (though I have no idea who, if anyone, actually buys these monstrosities), but the growing number of low octane, beautifully-made American syrahs is very, very exciting. Pinot Noir in the US has also very much come of age (this has been going on for quite a while already I know) and there are so many truly world class American pinots being produced these days that it is almost easy to take in stride the dizzying spiral upwards in the price of red Burgundies (not to mention the rude allocation games prevalent in so many markets) and leave that battleground to others. And this is from one who really only sees the tip of the iceberg when it comes to pinot noir, as I still have not had the opportunity to visit producers in Oregon, which I am sure is also making large numbers of poised and balanced pinot noirs to augment all of the good things going on with this varietal in the cooler vineyards of California.

In the realm of cabernet sauvignon, there were some nice new surprises for me when tasting the recent cabernet releases from Arnot-Roberts, as I had never had their cabernet bottlings before and I was very impressed with the two that I had the opportunity to taste. The relatively new cabernet specialist of Calluna Vineyard in the Chalk Hill section of Sonoma, run by the fine East Coast transplant, David Jeffrey has turned out simply stunning wines in the cool vintage of 2011, and they are worth a special search of the marketplace to find, as they are some of the most beautifully balanced and most classically structured wines I have had the pleasure to taste from this varietal in many years and will be absolute cellar treasures down the road. But mostly, it seems that one still has to rely on a the handful of holdouts from the old days for balanced and ageworthy cabernets in California- folks like Heitz Wine Cellar, Cathy Corison, Philip Togni and Ridge Vineyards. I should remind folks who are fans of the old school style of cabernet that the current releases from Mayacamas remain wines crafted by Bob Travers, as there is some significant lead time necessary before the new team's wines from this great Mount Veeder property will make their way into the market, so do not ignore these wines if they cross your path. And of course, one can also range a bit further afield and pick up some of the current releases from Chris Camarda's Andrew Will Winery in Washington, which are getting better and better with each passing vintage and are some of America's most ageworthy and serious red wines. I am looking forward to tasting the new releases from Andrew Will for the next installment of this feature, as well as those from folks like Steve Edmunds and Rod Berglund at Joseph Swan.

The following notes are sectioned off by varietal, with the wines listed chronologically within each subsection, and then alphabetically by producer. Where there are multiple bottlings by a single producer, I have often listed the vineyard designates in the order which I tasted them.

Chardonnay

2012 Alesia “Alder Springs Vineyard” Chardonnay (Mendocino)

The second label from Rhys Vineyards, Alesia, seems to be home these days to some of the more serious examples of chardonnay and pinot noir that one can find on the market, as this 2012 chardonnay from the Alder Springs Vineyard is exceptional. The wine is fairly ripe for a wine from Rhys, tipping the scales at 13.2 percent, but it is focused, balanced and shows lovely promise for cellaring. The bouquet is a complex mélange of pear, pineapple, fresh nutmeg, a fine base of soil, a bit of butter, acacia blossoms and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary, with a fine core, crisp acids, lovely focus and a long, poised and very well-balanced finish. I had no troubles whatsoever finishing the sample bottle, but this wine is going to be an even better drink with a year or two of bottle age. 2014-2025. **90+**.

2012 Bravium “Abbassi Vineyard” Chardonnay (Carneros)

The 2012 Bravium “Abbassi Vineyard” Chardonnay is really a throwback to the 1970s (except for the age of the vines in this vineyard, which were planted in 1976, so they are substantially older than what winegrowers back in the day would have been working with for their own wines!), as the wine essentially did not go through malolactic fermentation and was raised in a combination of French and Hungarian oak barrels, with only twenty percent new oak. I remember very well drinking chardonnays cut from this same cloth back in my college days in the very early 1980s from the likes of folks like Château Montelena and Mayacamas. The 2012 Abbassi Vineyard offers up a young and promising nose of pear, gentle pineapple, lovely, salty soil tones, white flowers and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, excellent focus, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the primary finish. This is still very early days for this impressive chardonnay, and two or three years’ worth of patience will be rewarded with a wine of substantially more layers of complexity. Superb juice. 2016-2025+. **92+**.

2012 Clos Blancheau Chardonnay (Napa Valley)

The Clos Blancheau chardonnay hails from the Green Island Vineyard, which is the most southerly vineyard in Napa and sits overlooking the San Pablo Bay. The vast majority of the fruit from this very cool vineyard is sold to Schramsberg for their sparkling wines. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, has the malo partially blocked and is aged all in older barrels and bottled without fining and filtration. The 2012 is excellent, tipping the scales at a cool 12.7 percent alcohol and offering up a very classy bouquet of green apple, tart orange, a fine base of chalky soil tones, citrus peel, a touch of leanness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, very Chablis-like flavors on the backend and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is high class chardonnay! 2014-2020+. **92+**.

2012 Forman Vineyards Chardonnay (Rutherford Bench)

Ric Forman has been making superb chardonnay for decades and decades, but his 2012 looks likely to be one of his very finest of his career. The wine was raised in ten percent new wood, has its malolactic blocked and tips the scales at a very civilized 13.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, jumping from the glass in a mélange of apple, tangerine, pear, a complex base of soil, musky floral overtones and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and supremely elegant in personality, with lovely mid-palate depth, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and very refined finish. Great juice that is drinking superbly out of the blocks, but should also age quite well. 2014-2025+. **94**.

2012 Porter Creek Vineyards Chardonnay (Russian River Valley)

Alex Davis is making excellent wines from his family's Porter Creek winery, and his 2012 chardonnay is a very fine example of the vintage, albeit a bit riper than many of his chardonnays, as it tips the scales at a full 13.9 percent alcohol. Consequently, the nose is not quite as precise as some of his recent, lower octane offerings, but offers up a complex and attractive blend of apple, pear, gentle leesiness, almond paste, lovely soil tones, a very discreet touch of vanillin oak and a musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open, but with only a modest core, good complexity, fairly soft acids and solid length and grip on the ripe and succulent finish. This seems likely to be one of the shorter-lived chardonnays from Alex, but for near-term drinking, there is certainly some pleasure to be had here. But, by the very high standards that Alex Smith has set since he took the reins at Porter Creek, this is one of his weaker efforts. 2014-2016. **87.**

2012 Rhys Vineyards Chardonnay "Horseshoe Vineyard" (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 Rhys chardonnay from the Horseshoe Vineyard is a beautiful and absolutely refined example of its varietal, coming in at a cool 13.1 percent alcohol and offering up plenty of *terroir* to go with its beautiful fruit tones. The deep and complex nose jumps from the glass in a stunning constellation of apple, pear, a touch of iodine, hazelnuts, a fine base of soil and a deft framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still very youthful and primary, with lovely delineation and mid-palate depth, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is still a very young wine (particularly on the palate) and I would not hesitate to tuck this away in the cellar for at least another three or four years before starting to drink it. Aromatically, there is a strong nod to Jean-François Coche's white wines, and that is never a bad thing! Great juice. 2018-2035. **94+.**

2012 Rhys Vineyards Chardonnay "Alpine Vineyard" (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 Alpine Vineyard chardonnay from Kevin Harvey and his very talented team at Rhys Vineyards is another absolutely brilliant bottle of chardonnay. The wine is a touch riper than the Horseshoe bottling, coming in at 13.3 percent alcohol and offering a stellar bouquet of pear, white peach, iodine, a touch of acacia blossom, a bit of *crème patissière*, complex soil tones and a nice base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a superb core of fruit, laser-like focus, great mineral drive and a very long, very young and very classy finish. This is simply a stunning bottle in the making, with grand cru authority, but it is still a puppy and needs plenty of bottle age to unwind from behind its racy and soil-driven structure. It is the best chardonnay I have tasted to date from Rhys, and their legacy with this grape has already been very impressive indeed, but I have the sense that the 2012 Alpine chardonnay has taken this varietal to a new level at Rhys Vineyards! 2020-2040+. **96+.**

2012 Wilde Farm Chardonnay (Brousseau Vineyard" (Gavilan Mountains)

Pax Mahle of Wind Gap is the winemaker for the Wilde Farm chardonnay and the wine is very fine indeed. The 2012 tips the scales at a very responsible 13.2 percent alcohol and was raised entirely in older oak barrels. The wine wafts from the glass in a superb blend of apple, white peach, gentle leesy tones, a touch of saffron, lemon blossoms, lovely soils tones and a nice dollop of custard. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus, zesty acids and very good grip on the long and vibrant finish. Fine juice. 2014-2019. **91.**

2010 Mount Eden Vineyards “Wolff Vineyard” Chardonnay (Edna Valley)

Wolff Vineyard was planted in 1976, making these the oldest chardonnay vines in Edna Valley, and Mount Eden has been sourcing chardonnay from this vineyard since 1985. The 2010 is a rather buxom 13.8 percent alcohol and shows some heat on the palate, which is quite atypical for my experience with Mount Eden. The bouquet is quite attractive, if not particularly complex, offering up a mélange of pear, pineapple, honeysuckle and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely focused, with modest complexity, good length and grip and a bit of uncovered alcohol poking out on the backend. This is okay, but Mount Eden usually travels at a more exalted altitude than this bottle. 2014-2017. **87.**

Other White Wine Varietals

2013 Kendric Vineyards “Marin County” Viognier

The 2013 vintage of Viognier from Stewart Johnson is a bit lower in alcohol than its 2012 counterpart, coming in at 13.6 percent alcohol (versus 13.9 percent) and the wine is a bit fresher as a result, but this is still a bit too high in octane for my palate. The bouquet is okay, offering up the slightly marinated fruit tones of viognier at this octane, with notes of pears, nectarines, acacia blossoms, a bit of soil and some citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tasty, but not particularly complex, with nice focus and balance, but a rather short finish. I am probably just not the right person to evaluate wines such as this, as I almost always am left wanting more when I taste viognier. This wine is perfectly fine, but with cool climate vineyards such as this, I would think that chenin blanc or sauvignon blanc would yield far more interesting and complex juice than viognier. This is a very well-made viognier (by the standards of this grape), but it is not a wine I would drink through the meal (or even through the first course). Stewart Johnson is one of the bright young stars in California for pinot noir, but I would love to see this vineyard budded over to a more serious variety. Of course, others may like this a lot more than me! 2014-2016. **88+.**

2013 Leo Steen Chenin Blanc (Dry Creek Valley)

Leo Steen is a former sommelier and he has produced this lovely, dry chenin blanc from a parcel of thirty-three year-old vines in Dry Creek Valley that are planted on an old, stony, dried up riverbed. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and aged for four months in old oak barrels. The 2013 comes in at 12.7 percent alcohol and offers up a fine bouquet of green apple, gooseberry, white soil tones, citrus peel and a touch of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite succulent at the core, with fine focus and a long, primary finish. This is good juice and a very well-priced bottle of dry Sonoma white wine that shows all of the constituent components to age gracefully for a decade or so. 2014-2025. **89+.**

2013 Wind Gap Trousseau Gris (Russian River Valley)

The 2013 Trousseau Gris from Wind Gap is an excellent wine and it is quite easy to appreciate why this has such a cult following. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of wheat chaff, apples, dried flowers, a nice base of sandy soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with crisp acids and fine length and grip on the focused finish. At 12.25 percent alcohol, there are not many lower octane white wines in California! 2014-2019. **91.**

2012 Halcón Prado (Alder Springs Vineyard) Mendocino

The 2012 Halcón Prado is a fifty-fifty blend of roussanne and marsanne and tips the scales at 14.3 percent alcohol. Given that the Alder Springs Vineyard is located in the cooler

northern end of Mendocino, I would have loved to have seen this wine come in at a lower octane. The bouquet is a touch blowsy from its ripeness level, offering up scents of baked pear, dusty soil tones, some leesiness, acacia blossoms and a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty well-balanced, with only a whisper of backend heat poking out on the long finish. The core is good, but the wine is not particularly focused or complex, with the fruit having a slightly marinated profile on the palate, and though it is certainly rather unique in its personality from its *cépages*, it is more interesting than exciting. Perhaps this wine at 13.3 percent might be a whole different animal! 2014-2016. **85**.



Chardonnay grapes ready for picking in Napa Valley.

Rosé

2013 Bravium “Rosé of Pinot Noir” (North Coast)

The 2013 Bravium “Rosé of Pinot Noir” is a fairly dark-hued rosé, but with plenty of depth and bounce. The bouquet is an attractive mélange of cherries, dried rose petals, a nice base of soil tones and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. Sadly, given the obviously fine raw materials, this wine is bottled under screwcap, and texturally, the wine is already starting to be compromised, with a bit of backend “pinching” and a fairly short finish that seems directly related to its choice of closure. The wine is fullish, bright and succulent at the core, with good acids and focus, and if this wine were sealed under natural cork, it would have a vibrancy that would be most attractive. Derek Rohlffs’ Bravium is far too serious of a winery to be bottling wines under screwcap! 2014-2015. **85** (with 88+ raw materials).

2013 Grignolino Rosé- Heitz Wine Cellar (Napa Valley)

The 2013 Grignolino Rosé from Heitz Wine Cellar is really a lovely, dry rosé that works beautifully at the table. The color is a bit deeper than many rosés and is as much cherry red as salmon, and the wine offers up a bright and classy bouquet of pomegranate, roses, a touch of pepper, lovely soil tones and orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and a long, vinous and bouncy finish. Lovely juice. 2014-2019. **90.**

Pinot Noir

2013 Kutch Wines “Sonoma Coast” Pinot Noir

The 2013 Sonoma Coast bottling of pinot noir from Jamie Kutch is admirably low in octane, tipping the scales at a cool 12.3 percent alcohol and the wine is excellent. The youthful bouquet offers up scents of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of coffee, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and a very discreet base of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and tangy, with fine intensity of flavor, moderate tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. It is still very early days for this wine and I would tuck it away in the cellar for a couple of years and let it unwind a bit structurally, but it is a very good bottle and will certainly reward a bit of patience. 2016-2035. **90+.**

2013 Kutch Wines “Falstaff Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

The 2013 Falstaff Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Jamie Kutch is even lower in alcohol than his Sonoma Coast cuvée, coming in at a slim 12.1 percent alcohol. The outstanding aromatic complexity of the bouquet suggests that excessive ripeness may not be a necessary component of first class pinot noir, as the wine offers up scents of strawberries, beetroot, mustard seed, coffee and a first class base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with a fine core, moderate tannins, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the very well-balanced and youthful finish. Give this lovely bottle of pinot three or four years in the cellar to blossom from behind its classy structural chassis. High class juice. 2017-2035+. **93+.**

2013 Kutch Wines “McDougall Ranch” Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

The 2013 McDougall Ranch pinot from Kutch Wines is another very cool and classy customer, tipping the scales at 12.3 percent alcohol. The bouquet delivers a fine constellation of cherries, beetroot, a touch of cocoa, a fine base of soil, fresh herb tones and a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and tightly-knit, with a good core, a fair bit of ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and tangy finish. This is fine juice that needs a few years to blossom, but is impeccably balanced and should be a long-lived and very fine wine at its apogee. 2018-2040. **92+.**

2012 Alesia “Alder Springs Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Mendocino)

As readers no doubt are aware, Alesia is the label used by Rhys Vineyards for the wines they make from purchased grapes. The 2012 Alder Springs Vineyard bottling is true to the Rhys style, coming in at a cool and collected 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up a still quite primary bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, sarsaparilla, dark soil tones, a touch of herbs and a bit of cedary spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, youthful and quite promising, with a fine core, a fair bit of tannin to resolve and very good length and grip on the focused finish. Give this very good bottle three or four years in the cellar to really start to blossom- it should age well for twenty years or more. 2018-2035+. **90.**

2012 Bravium “Seppa Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

The 2012 Seppa Vineyard bottling from Derek Rohlffs’ Bravium winery is really a terrific, low fat and tangy example of pinot noir that delivers great aromatic precision and purity, coupled to a racy and intensely flavored palate that is quite exciting. The 2012 was aged primarily in four year-old barrels, with only ten percent of the rotation new, and this really shows off the lovely minerality of this Sonoma Coast vineyard. At 12.3 percent alcohol, this is low octane and very classy, as it offers up a complex and vibrant bouquet of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, a lovely signature of soil and a deft framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and quite tangy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and complexity, a bit of tannin to resolve and a very long, balanced and youthful finish. This very transparent middleweight will age as much on its acids as its tannins, and should prove to be quite long-lived, but it is not a bad drink out of the blocks and should really start to hit on all cylinders with only a couple of years bottle age. But, the real fireworks here are going to get started in about ten years! Great juice. 2016-2035. **93.**

2012 Bravium “Signal Ridge Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Mendocino Ridge)

The 2012 Bravium “Signal Ridge Vineyard” Pinot Noir is a fine example of the vintage, coming in at 13.4 percent alcohol and offering up a ripe and harmonious nose of black cherries, dark plums, a bit of chicory, dark soil tones, fresh thyme, a bit of meatiness and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthful, with fine mid-palate intensity, tangy acids, ripe, well-measured tannins and fine length and grip on the nascently complex and sappy finish. This is going to be lovely wine, but I would be strongly inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a couple of years and let its secondary layers of complexity emerge- despite the fact it is certainly quite approachable today. Fine juice that fits seamlessly into the paradigm of new, grown-up pinot noir from California. 2016-2030. **91.**

2012 Drew Family Cellars “Fog-Eater” Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

This was my first wine from the Drew Family Cellars and I was quite impressed. The wine is made of a blend from four different vineyards in the cool northern end of Anderson Valley and is raised in mostly older oak barrels, with only fifteen percent of the cooperage new in a given year. One third whole clusters are used and the wine is fermented with native yeasts. The 2012 Fog-Eater tips the scales at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, red plums, a touch of cocoa, Mendocino herb tones, a fine base of soil and a very discreet touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, impressive complexity and just a bit of backend tannin perking up the long and tangy finish. At 13.5 percent, this is still fairly ripe, and while it does not lose any delineation on the palate, there is just a gentle touch of backend heat poking out on the tail end of the wine. But all in all, this is very well-made juice and I would love to taste some of the domaine’s single vineyard bottlings, of which they produce three distinct pinot noir cuvées. 2014-2035. **90+.**

2012 Domaine Drouhin Pinot Noir “Dundee Hills” (Willamette Valley)

The 2012 vintage for Domaine Drouhin’s regular bottling of pinot noir is very lovely, offering up a ripe and elegant personality that will offer both early appeal and the ability to age gracefully. The pretty nose wafts from the glass in a complex, red fruity mix of cherries, strawberries, fresh thyme, lovely soil tones, a bit of coffee, woodsmoke and a deft base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovely focus and nascent complexity, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the velvety finish. At

fourteen percent alcohol, this is a fairly ripe bottle of pinot, but it is impeccably balanced and shows off plenty of breed and elegance. Fine juice. 2014-2035+. **92.**

2012 Kutch Wines “Sonoma Coast” Pinot Noir

The 2012 Kutch Wines “Sonoma Coast” Pinot Noir is an excellent bottle, offering up a deep, pure and cool fruit bouquet of cherries, red plum, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, a bit of backend tannin and excellent length and grip on the finish. A lovely bottle that is still pretty primary in personality and could do with a few years in the cellar to develop its secondary layers of complexity, but for those interested in drinking this in the blush of youth, it is already very tasty. 2016-2035. **91.**

2012 Kutch Wines “Falstaff Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

The 2012 Falstaff Vineyard bottling of pinot is a touch lower in octane than the straight Sonoma Coast bottling (12.9 percent versus 13.2 percent) and is really an outstanding example of this fine vintage. The wine wafts from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, a touch of gamebird, a complex base of soil, cocoa, woodsmoke, a bit of mustard seed and a stylish framing of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent soil signature, tangy acids, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. High class juice here! 2016-2040. **93+.**

2012 Kutch Wines “McDougall Ranch” Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

The 2012 McDougall Ranch pinot noir from Jamie Kutch is another excellent bottle in the making, offering up a pure and sappy bouquet of red plums, cherries, a bit of nutskin, cocoa, a fine base of soil tones, fresh herbs and a bit of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more structure out of the blocks than the 2012 Falstaff Vineyard bottling, with a good core, ripe, firm tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, poised and youthful finish. This will need a couple years longer in the cellar to blossom, but it too is a very strong, low octane and classy bottle of pinot. 2018-2040. **93.**

2012 Pinot Noir “Estate Vineyard”- Masút Vineyard and Winery

I wrote about the fine 2012s from Jake and Ben Fetzer’s Masút Vineyard and Winery back in February, but as they had kindly sent me second bottles of these wines, I thought I would revisit them six months down the line and see how they are blossoming now that they are a bit further out from their bottling. The 2012 Estate bottling is really starting to come into its own, as it offers up a deep and classy nose of dark berries, black cherries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a hint of chicory, cola and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and still fairly primary, but starting to show the complexity that is coming on, with a lovely core, seamless balance, moderate tannins and a very long, focused and tangy finish. This is very classy juice, but give it a year or two to allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to really come to the fore. 2016-2035+. **92+.**

2012 Pinot Noir “Block Six”- Masút Vineyard and Winery

The 2012 Pinot Noir “Block Six” from Masút Vineyard and Winery is just a touch higher in octane than the Estate bottling (14.4 versus 13.9 percent- I erroneously reported this wine at 14.1 percent in February), and this has given the wine a bit more early succulence and a bit more mid-palate sappiness, but it too is still a very nicely shaped and focused bottle of pinot noir. The wine offers up a pure and classy bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, cola, espresso, dark soil tones, a hint of the gamebirds to come and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more plush on the attack than the above, with a sappy core, lovely soil signature, fine complexity, well-measured tannins and a long, tangy and more wide open

finish than the Estate bottling today. This carries its alcohol level beautifully, and there is only the faintest hint of heat hovering on the backend, but the higher octane is probably going to make this the more forward of the two bottlings from the Fetzer brothers, and I suspect that the Block Six will also not last quite as long in the bottle. In January, I had a pretty clear preference for this bottling, but six months later, the 2012 Estate bottling has nicely closed the gap- not that the Block Six is not exceptional pinot in its own right! 2014-2030. **93.**

2012 Porter Creek “Russian River Valley” Pinot Noir

The 2012 Russian River Valley bottling of pinot noir from Alex Smith is one of the ripest wines I can recall tasting from him, as it tips the scales at a hefty 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine retains good focus and aromatic precision at this octane, wafting from the glass in a fresh and complex nose of cherries, pomegranate, mustard seed, cocoa powder, a nice touch of soil, woodsmoke, gamebirds and a discreet touch of new oak. In fact, the nose is stellar and really had me questioning my prejudices against high octane pinots! However, on the palate the wine has sacrificed a bit of purity and focus from its level of ripeness, with a bit of backend heat poking out on the finish. The wine is full-bodied and complex, with a good core, a fairly light footprint, nice detail on the attack, but with the backend getting a bit sloppy from its level of octane. The finish is still long, but the backend heat here detracts a bit from the very good raw materials. I hope this is simply the demands of the vintage that made this high octane, rather than a change of gears here, as Porter Creek has been one of my favorite Russian River pinot producers for many years! This is very well done at its octane, but why so high? 2014-2025. **88.**

2012 Rhys Vineyard “San Mateo County” Pinot Noir

I assume that the San Mateo bottling is from some of the younger vines that were planted in Home Vineyard in 2007, as this very pretty and stylish wine is a bit more fruit-driven than a typical Rhys pinot noir and suggests rather younger vine fruit in the blend. The complex bouquet is a very pretty blend of black cherries, beetroot, a touch of underbrush, cola, bonfire, mustard seed and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a sappy core, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the classy finish. T Good juice. 2014-2030. **89+.**

2012 Rhys Vineyards “Home Vineyard” Pinot Noir (San Mateo County)

The 2012 Pinot Noir from Home Vineyard is really a lovely wine, wafting from the glass in a very refined aromatic mix of pomegranate, cherries, dried eucalyptus, mustard seed, venison, coffee, cola and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, precise and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, a nice signature of soil and a long, nascently complex and classy finish. There is more than a bit of a stylistic nod to Morey St. Denis in this wine this year, which is very enjoyable. 2016-2035+. **92+.**

2012 Rhys Vineyards “Family Farm Vineyard” Pinot Noir (San Mateo County)

The 2012 Family Farm Vineyard bottling of pinot from Rhys is another outstanding example of the vintage, delivering an excellent and exotically spiced bouquet of dark berries, black currants, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, mustard seed, dried eucalyptus, beef stock, dark soil tones and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary, with moderate tannins, lovely focus and grip, tangy acids and a long, classy and light on its feet finish. Beautiful juice. 2018-2040. **93.**

2012 Rhys Vineyards “Bearwallow Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

The Bearwallow bottling of pinot noir is always a bit of an outlier in the Rhys lineup, as this wine hails from Anderson Valley and I always sandwich in my lineup between the San Mateo County bottlings and those from the Santa Cruz AVA. However, this is an excellent wine

year in and year out, with the black fruity personality of Mendocino pinot very much in evidence in the 2012 version. The excellent bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of dark berries, espresso, dried eucalyptus, chicory, dark soil tones, botanicals and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, deep and primary, with a good core, moderate tannins and a very long, classy and soulful finish. This may not be the most complex of the Rhys pinot noir bottlings, but there is great personality here and this is a wine that is going to age beautifully. 2018-2035+. **92+**.

2012 Rhys Vineyards “Horseshoe Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 pinot noir from Horseshoe Vineyard came in pretty ripe in this vintage, tipping the scales at 13.5 percent, and of all the Rhys bottlings this year, this was one of my least favorites, as it seemed to have sacrificed just a bit of precision to the ripeness. This is still a very good wine, but by the high standards of this winery, just a tad disappointing this year, as it offers up a ripe and black fruity bouquet of black cherries, plums, chocolate, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, botanicals and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced on the attack, with a plump core, nice complexity and just a suggestion of backend heat on the long and velvety finish. This is not bad at all, but the bar has been set pretty high here by the Rhys team in the last several years, and this vintage of Horseshoe will never be one of my favorites. 2014-2025+. **90**.

2012 Rhys Vineyards “Skyline Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 Skyline pinot noir from Rhys is utterly spectacular. The magical nose soars from the glass in a blaze of cherries, very complex minerality, pomegranate, mustard seed, a touch of orange zest, beetroot, woodsmoke, gamebirds, a touch of lavender and a very sophisticated framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and intensely flavored, with a lovely core of fruit, moderate tannins, nascent complexity and a very, very long, tangy and laser-like finish. This is a brilliant bottle of young pinot noir. 2020-2050. **95+**.

2012 Rhys Vineyards “Alpine Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 Alpine Vineyard has also turned out superbly well in this vintage, as the wine delivers a pure and complex nose of black cherries, fresh thyme, cigar smoke, espresso, stony soil tones and a lovely mix of savory elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely reserved in personality, with fine soil signature, lovely concentration at the core, well-measured tannins and a very long, tangy and first rate finish. All this beauty needs is some time in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to begin to emerge. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2045+. **93+**.

2012 Rhys Vineyards “Swan Terrace” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The Swan Terrace, from an easterly-facing section of Alpine Vineyard, is utterly stunning in 2012. The wine is one of the lowest octane of the Rhys pinots this year, coming in at a cool 12.6 percent (most of the range are in the thirteen percent range this year), and the wine is magical. The nose is a pure and utterly superb mélange of black cherries, dark berries, black minerality, coffee bean, a potpourri of complex botanicals, woodsmoke, a touch of gamebird, cola and a gentle base of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and marvelously soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and a very, very long, complex and tangy finish. Beautiful wine. 2019-2045+. **95**.

2012 Wind Gap “Sonoma Coast” Pinot Noir

The 2012 Wind Gap “Sonoma Coast” bottling of pinot noir is a lovely wine that includes twenty-five percent whole cluster fermentation and was raised in a combination of old oak and

concrete eggs, after the wine had undergone its malolactic fermentation entirely in concrete. The wine is 12.75 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely, black fruity bouquet of dark berries, saddle leather, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a whiff of medicinal overtones that are vaguely reminiscent of Hermitage. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This very good bottle of pinot noir is wide open and ready for business right out of the blocks, but a few years in the cellar will allow its secondary elements to start to blossom. Fine juice. 2014-2035+. **92.**

2011 Arnot-Roberts “Coastlands” Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

The 2011 Arnot-Roberts “Coastlands” pinot noir is a lovely example of the vintage. This cool microclimate vineyard was planted in 1989, so the vines are now over thirty years of age and really starting to come into their prime. The wine is superb, offering up a “cool” aromatic mélange of black cherries, woodsmoke, lovely botanicals, raw cocoa and a nice signature of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and light on its feet, with modest tannins, lovely focus and grip and fine length on the seamless and quite elegant finish. This is quite ripe for the 2011 vintage, coming in at an even thirteen percent, but the balance here is impeccable and the ripeness seems to simply have translated into early accessibility, so that the wine is delicious to drink right out of the blocks- though I would be inclined to tuck it away for at least a couple of years and let its secondary layers of complexity begin to emerge. 2016-2035+. **92+.**

2011 Bravium “Beau Terroir Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Carneros)

The 2011 Beau Terroir Vineyard bottling from Bravium was the first that I had tasted from this fine winery produced from this Carneros vineyard. The wine comes in at a very civilized 13.7 percent alcohol and offers up a very pretty bouquet of black cherries, cola, fresh herb tones, a nice base of soil, a deft framing of cedary new oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the tangy and ripe finish. While this wine is quite approachable today, it is still quite primary in personality, but has all of the constituent components in place to blossom with secondary elements with a bit of bottle age. Good juice. 2014-2025+. **91+.**

2011 Wenzlau “Santa Rita Hills” Pinot Noir (Santa Barbara)

This 2011 Santa Rita Hills bottling from Wenzlau is the winery’s first release of pinot noir, and it is a very auspicious beginning! The wines here are made by Justin Willett of Tyler Wines, and the 2011 pinot includes twenty percent whole clusters and is raised in thirty percent new wood. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and offers up a really classy bouquet of black cherries, plums, fresh herb tones, cola and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a lovely core of fruit, a nice base of velvety tannin and impressive length and grip on the succulent and classy finish. Fine juice and obviously, a name to watch! 2014-2030. **92+.**

2010 Copain “Kiser En Haut” Vineyard Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

The 2010 Kiser En Haut bottling of pinot noir from Wells Guthrie is a terrific bottle of wine that channels Morey St. Denis with great aplomb. The wine tips the scales at a very grown up 12.8 percent alcohol and wafts from the glass in a deep and complex aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, a touch of venison, cocoa, lovely soil tones, fresh herbs, woodsmoke and a deft touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex,

with excellent mid-palate intensity, well-measured tannins, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This is still quite a bit more primary on the palate than on the nose, and I would be inclined to tuck this away for another three or four years before having at it in earnest. It is a lovely and very classy bottle of Mendocino pinot noir that should age with style and grace. 2017-2035+. **93.**

1990 El Molinõ “Napa Valley” Pinot Noir

Having had the pleasure last year to taste the 1991 bottling of El Molinõ “Napa Valley” Pinot Noir, I was very happy to cross paths with the 1990 at a recent tasting. This is a blend of fruit from Rutherford and Carneros and the 1990 is quite good, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, herb tones, woodsmoke, quince, *sous bois* and venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows a nice touch of autumnal leafiness to its flavor profile, with a good core, still a bit of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the finish. This is a very well done Napa pinot noir, with a bit less transparency than one would find from today’s Sonoma Coast bottling from El Molinõ, but still fine focus and balance. Good juice with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2014-2035. **90.**



Syrah and Other Rhône Varietals

2013 Los Pilares (San Diego County) Screwcap

The Los Pilares bottling is produced by Vinavanti Wines in San Diego County, and is a fifty-fifty blend of grenache and carignan. The 2013 tips the scales at a cool 12.3 percent alcohol

and is fairly pale in color. The wine offers up a fairly reductive nose of raspberries, venison, damp herbs, a bit of struck match, sandy soil tones and pepper. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and intriguing, with a good signature of soil, moderate tannins and a slightly pinched backend from its closure. I would love to taste this wine under natural cork, as it seems to have some fine attributes in its raw materials, including lightness of step and good intensity of flavor, but it is a bit weedy/ stewy from the screwcap and already getting a bit shredded on the backend from the closure. ????

2012 Arnot-Roberts “Clary Ranch” Syrah (Sonoma)

The Clary Ranch is located in the Petaluma Wine Gap and is one of the coldest microclimates in Sonoma County, with the syrah here routinely harvested in November! The 2012 manages an octane of 11.5 percent and the wine is lovely in a low fat and very aromatic style, wafting from the glass in a youthfully complex and exceptional blend of cassis, grilled meats, stony soil tones, black pepper, espresso and a gentle topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full and intensely flavored, with fine focus and grip, a tightly-knit, tangy and beautifully balanced finish of excellent length and bounce. This wine is still on the young side and needs a few years in the cellar to blossom, but it will be excellent and will age very well. 2017-235. **92.**

2012 Calder Wine Company “Colombini Vineyard” Carignane (Mendocino)

The 2012 Carignane from the Calder Wine Company is a fine bottle of wine that tips the scales at 13.4 percent and offers up a lovely combination of ripe and generous fruit and fine structure and a cool mouthfeel. The deep and black fruity nose wafts from the glass in a very classy blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, roasted venison, Mendocino herb tones, a bit of charred wood and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, moderate, well-integrated tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, sturdy and complex finish. This is really an excellent bottle of wine! 2014-2030+. **92.**

2012 Halcón “Alturas” Syrah (Yorkville Highlands) Mendocino

The 2012 Alturas bottling of syrah from Halcón hails from one of the highest elevation vineyards in California, as it sits at 2500 feet above sea level. The 2012 syrah here is nicely balanced, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offering up a deep and youthful nose of black raspberries, cassis, grilled meat, pepper, stony soil tones, bonfires and a bit of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, chewy tannins, tangy acids and fine focus on the long, stony and still very primary finish. This is going to be excellent wine, but it is still a puppy and needs at least another three to four years in the cellar to really start to drink. Personality-wise, it is more Cornas than Côte-Rôtie, but it is a very well-made wine. 2017-2035. **91+.**

2012 Halcón “Esquisto” (Yorkville Highlands) Mendocino

The 2012 Halcón “Esquisto” is a blend of sixty-five percent grenache, thirty percent mourvèdre and five percent syrah, and this Mendocino nod to Châteauneuf du Pape tips the scales at 14.1 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a ripe and complex bouquet of red and black raspberries, lavender, venison, a bit of chocolate, woodsmoke and pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in personality, with a fine core of fruit, firm, slightly rustic tannins and very good length and grip on the chewy and youthful finish. The alcohol here is managed beautifully and the wine is not jammy in the least, but it needs a few years of bottle age

to emerge from its sturdy adolescence and start to drink with some generosity. But, everything seems in place for a long and rewarding evolution in bottle. 2018-2035. **90+**.

2012 Wind Gap “Sceales Vineyard” Grenache (Alexander Valley)

The Sceales Vineyard includes a parcel of ninety year-old grenache vines, planted on sandy Goldridge soils, and when Pax Mahle saw these vines, he immediately thought that here was a chance to craft a California homage to the wines of Jacques Reynaud of Château Rayas. The 2012 version is only his second vintage with these old vines, and came in at 13.75 percent alcohol, was not de-stemmed and was raised for eleven months in cement tanks prior to bottling. The wine is ripe, but not overripe, as it offers up scents of raspberries, coffee, sandy soil tones, hung game, pepper, celery seed and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively soil-driven for its octane, with a superb core of fruit, chewy tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and youthful finish. The wine needs a few years for its tannins to soften, but it is a lovely example of grenache that really shows off its old vine character. Impressive juice. 2017-2035. **92+**.

2012 Wind Gap “Nellsen Vineyard” Syrah (Sonoma Coast)

The 2012 Nellsen Vineyard bottling of syrah from Pax Mahle includes four percent viognier, which is co-fermented with the syrah in concrete, before being racked into old barrels for its fourteen month *élevage*. The wine is young and quite refined in its bright bouquet of black raspberries, dark berries, black pepper, woodsmoke, bitter chocolate, chicory and new leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary in personality, with a sappy core of fruit, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. This lovey, low octane (twelve percent) syrah needs a couple of years in the cellar to blossom and allow some of those secondary layers to start to emerge. Fine juice. 2016-2035. **93+**.

2011 Alesia “Alder Springs Vineyard” Syrah (Mendocino)

The 2011 Alesia syrah is a touch reductive when first opened, so give it a bit of coaxing in decanter before drinking it. However, once it has opened up, the wine is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of cassis, roasted venison, black olive, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, herb tones and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent complexity and grip, fine focus, ripe, firm tannins and outstanding length and grip on the young and beautifully balanced finish. This is terrific juice, but give it a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom from behind its structural elements. This is the best Alesia bottling I have yet had the pleasure to taste! 2017-2035. **93**.

2011 Donkey and Goat “Broken Leg Vineyard” Syrah “The Recluse” (Anderson Valley)

Donkey and Goat is the brainchild of Tracey and Jared Brandt, who spent a year working with red Rhône maven Éric Texier in 2002, before moving to Berkeley and getting started with their own winery. Their facilities are in Berkeley, and they source fruit primarily in cooler vineyard sites in Mendocino and El Dorado counties. The couple seeks to make wines as naturally as possible, using indigenous yeasts and eschewing extraction enzymes and new oak. 2004 was their first vintage of Donkey and Goat. The 2011 bottling of “The Recluse”, from this cool Anderson Valley vineyard came in at 13.1 percent alcohol and includes three percent viognier, with the wine including sixty percent whole clusters and being raised in a range of one to three year-old barrels. The wine is superb, jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of cassis, black raspberries, woodsmoke, venison, black pepper, some medicinal syrah overtones, a bit of mustard seed and a lovely signature of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex

and wide open in personality, with a great core of fruit, suave tannins and a very long, focused and complex finish. As the Brandts also practice a low SO₂ regimen for their wines, the projected window of drinkability is conjectural, as this is the first vintage I have had the pleasure to taste their wines and do not have any experience with how their low sulfur wines will evolve with extended bottle age. Excellent wine. 2014-2025+? **93.**

2011 Donkey and Goat “Fenaughty Vineyard” Syrah (El Dorado)

Tracey and Jared Brandt also purchase fruit from the Fenaughty Vineyard in El Dorado, that I first became familiar with from tasting some of Steve Edmunds superb syrahs from this source. Their 2011 Fenaughty syrah is a bit cooler in profile than “The Recluse” coming in at 12.2 percent and offering up a more structured wine out of the blocks, but with even more potential for down the road. The excellent and youthful bouquet is a blend of black raspberries, cassis, grilled venison, espresso, stony soil tones, black pepper, woodsmoke and medicinal syrah aromas. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and sappy at the core, with a tightly-knit personality, superb focus and grip, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the still quite primary finish. Give this excellent bottle of syrah a couple of years in the cellar to blossom. 2016-2025+? **94.**

2011 Rhys Vineyards “Horseshoe Vineyard” Syrah (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2011 Horseshoe Vineyard Syrah is a beautifully transparent and refined wine, offering up striking purity with its 12.9 percent alcohol format. The bouquet offers up a precise and complex constellation of cassis, black raspberries, black olive, fresh herb tones, a superb base of dark soil, grilled meats, chocolate and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven, with superb mid-palate intensity, tangy acids, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, pure and very well-balanced finish. This is a *tour de force* example of Santa Cruz Mountain syrah. 2019-2040+. **95+.**

2011 Rhys Vineyards “Skyline Vineyard” Syrah (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2011 Rhys Syrah from the Skyline Vineyard tips the scales at a robust 13.5 percent alcohol, which is pretty impressive for the cool 2011 growing season. The wine is absolutely stunning, soaring from the glass in a vibrant blend of black raspberries, smoked meats, a touch of black olive, black pepper, stony soil tones, dark chocolate, a discrete framing of spicy new wood and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with a superb core of fruit, ripe tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. This is very Hermitage-like and stylistically harkens back to the great old days at Chave. 2019-2040+. **96.**

2011 Wind Gap “Sonoma Coast” Syrah

The 2011 Wind Gap Sonoma Coast syrah is a great example of just how beautifully this grape can do in cooler climate vineyards in California. The wine is produced from a blend of fruit from several vineyards, with forty-five percent hailing from the Nellsen Vineyard, forty percent from the Armagh Vineyard and fifteen percent from the Majik Vineyard- all very cool microclimates and the resulting wine tips the scales at a very grown up 11.4 percent alcohol. The bouquet is a majestically pure and vibrant mélange of cassis, black raspberries, dark chocolate, black olives, a touch of pepper, venison, woodsmoke and a nice, classic note of syrah’s medicinal in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and surprisingly plush on the attack for its low octane, with a great core of fruit, excellent complexity, moderate, ripe tannins and a very long, pure and palate-staining finish. This is a great, great bottle of syrah that harkens back stylistically to the northern Rhône salad days of yesteryear. 2014-2035. **94+.**

2009 Copain Wines “Halcon Vineyard” Syrah (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2009 Halcon Vineyard syrah from Wells Guthrie’s Copain Wines is outstanding, with a refreshingly low octane personality of 12.8 percent alcohol. The wine offers up an excellent and impressively complex bouquet of black raspberries, black cherries, smoked meats, a bit of new leather, dark chocolate, black pepper, a touch of violet, dried eucalyptus and a superb base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a lovely core, great transparency, ripe tannins and a very long, complex and mineral finish. It is interesting that the wine shows dramatically more minerality on the palate than the nose suggests, and in combination with the excellent acidity here, the wine ends up showing off great backend energy. This is dynamite syrah! 2019-2040. **93+.**

2009 Copain Wines “Hawks Butte” Syrah (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2009 Copain Wines “Hawks Butte” syrah is a bit riper than the ’09 Halcon Vineyard bottling, coming in at 13.9 percent alcohol, but the wine handles its octane very well and is perfectly balanced and still cool on the backend. The fine, exuberant bouquet offers up a complex blend of black raspberry, grilled venison, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil, a touch of chocolate and a bit of black olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open, with ripe tannins, a fine core of fruit, lovely focus, still some good acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. I like the precision and dramatic backend minerality on the Halcon bottling and have to give it a slight nod over the Hawks Butte cuvée in ’09, but this too is a very serious glass of syrah. 2017-2030+. **92.**

2009 Copain Wines “Baker Ranch” Syrah (Anderson Valley)

The 2009 Baker Ranch syrah from Wells Guthrie falls in the middle of the range for octane of this three stellar 2009 syrah bottlings, coming in at 13.6 percent alcohol and offering up simply brilliant aromatic and flavor complexity. This is the most red fruity of his three syrahs this year, and if you will, the most Côte-Rôtie-like (in an old Robert Jasmine sort of way), jumping from the glass in a superb constellation of raspberries, grilled meats, pepper, coffee, lavender, beautiful minerality and a topnote of delicate spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully soil-driven, with a superb core of fruit, tangy acids, ripe tannins and stellar focus and grip on the very long, pure and outstandingly complex finish. This is another simply superb bottle of syrah! 2017-2040. **94.**

Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Bordeaux-Inspired Blends

I had to chuckle after seeing reviews from another professional of some of the wines listed below, as a few of these outstanding wines have been characterized as “medium-bodied” and lacking in “mid-palate depth and pliancy.” The wines in question, which I will allow to remain anonymous, as well as the identity of the critic who mis-characterized them, are simply cabernets that are not made with residual sugar, extraction enzymes, selected yeasts and the various other cellar techniques that have come to plague and define so many California cabernet sauvignon bottlings in the last few decades of the dark ages in the California wine world. For those who cannot spot these elements in the wines that they are tasting, unadulterated, properly-structured and tightly-knit cabernets in their youth may well come across as thin and lighter in body, but they are in fact simply real cabernet sauvignons that will not become emaciated and implode with bottle age (as the fashionable parlor tricks fade in the more manipulated wines with cellaring), but will actually blossom, developing more complexity, breed and palate authority as the years go by. Wines of this sort, which are always the focal point of these bi-

annual reviews of California's finest old school and neo-classical producers, are what made the state famous for its vinous prowess in the first place and are the epitome of what continues to be infectiously exciting about west coast wines today, but they are not facile wines that are crafted to overwhelm immediately out of the blocks, and require some aging to properly show all their qualities. It is interesting that thirty or forty years ago, when California wines were really starting to gain worldwide attention for their excellent quality, cabernet sauvignon was the standard bearer for all that was good and positive about these varied wine-producing regions, and today, it is probably the laggard (along with zinfandel) of the best-known grapes in abandoning the sinking ship of over the top and heavily-manipulated winemaking, as there seems to be a lot more outstanding "old school" reds being made these days from pinot noir and syrah than from the old workhorse of cabernet sauvignon. There are still a handful of long-standing stars like Cathy Corison, Philip Togni, Heitz Cellar, Mount Eden Vineyards and Ridge Vineyards who continue to stay the course and make cabernets every bit as beautiful and classic as they did back in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, and there are now some excellent new producers who have also mastered cabernet-based wines and are making stellar examples, such as Arnot-Roberts and Calluna Vineyard, so there is a lot to choose from still for lovers of the classic style of California cabernet sauvignon, but there is also immeasurable room for improvement and I keep waiting for the day when many of these young and lauded cabernet winemakers in charge of many of the finest Napa vineyards start picking at lower Brix, throw out their box of cellar parlor tricks and start staking their claim to the rich historical legacy that is North Coast cabernet sauvignon. But, first it is going to require that some of these wine journalists learn to discern the difference between concentration from the vineyard and extraction from the cellar cookbook, so that we can get a more proper professional description of the efforts of some of these pioneers. For the record, Beaujolais-Villages (most places) is a medium-bodied wine, mountain cabernet sauvignon is a structured, full-bodied wine that needs bottle age to blossom.

2011 Arnot-Roberts "Bugay Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma)

The Bugay Vineyard is located on the Sonoma County side of the Mayacamas range, and the 2011 is a beautiful bottle. The wine is fermented in the fashion that is typical of all of Duncan Meyers' and Nate Roberts' wines, with indigenous yeasts, no extraction enzymes and twenty percent whole clusters, with the wine raised in forty-five percent new wood for twenty-two months prior to bottling unfiltered. The wine is fairly ripe for an Arnot-Roberts bottling, coming in at 13.75 percent alcohol, but this is really quite low by today's standards for North Coast cabernet sauvignon, and includes five percent each of cabernet franc and merlot in the blend. The wine is absolutely exceptional, wafting from the glass in a very refined blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark chocolate, a lovely base of soil, a touch of chipotle peppers and a nice framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a great core of fruit, moderate tannins and superb length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. The 2011 is so well balanced that it is already quite tasty, but I would be inclined to give it at least a few years of bottle age and let it develop its secondary layers. This is a very fine, old school cabernet sauvignon for those with grown up palates. 2016-2040. **94.**

2011 Arnot-Roberts "Fellom Ranch" Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The Fellom Ranch's cabernet sauvignon vines are now thirty years of age, and this fine site on the Montebello ridge has turned out a fine wine in the hands of the Arnot-Roberts team in the cool and classic vintage of 2011. Not surprisingly, given its Santa Cruz Mountains origin,

this is more closed and structured out of the blocks than the very fine Bugay Vineyard cabernet, offering up a deep and primary nose of dark berries, cassis, tobacco leaf, a strong vein of stony soil, gentle spice tones and a cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite primary in personality, with a superb core of fruit, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very promising finish. This one hundred percent cabernet sauvignon will need some time alone in the cellar to come into its own, but it will be excellent and long-lived. 2020-2050+. **93+**.

2011 Calluna Vineyard Calluna Vineyard Cuvée (Chalk Hill)

The 2011 Calluna Vineyard Cuvée is comprised of a blend of forty percent merlot, nineteen percent cabernet franc, seventeen percent cabernet sauvignon, thirteen percent petit verdot and eleven percent malbec. The wine is a bit riper than I would have expected from the cool vintage of 2011, as the wine comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, pure and beautifully refined, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, cigar smoke, a touch of cocoa powder, tobacco leaf and a bit of lead pencil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant on the attack, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and balance, ripe, beautifully integrated tannins and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. This is young and needs four or five years in the cellar to start to blossom, but it is a very classy, old school wine that should age marvelously and offer up great complexity once it blossoms. 2019-2040. **92+**.

2011 Calluna Vineyard “The Colonel’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Chalk Hill)

The 2011 “The Colonel’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon from David Jeffrey’s Calluna Vineyard is composed entirely of cabernet and tips the scales at a very old-fashioned (and amazingly satisfying) 13.2 percent alcohol. The wine soars from the glass in a magical bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a hint of mint, cigar wrapper, lovely floral tones, a superb base of soil and a very discreet framing of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is simply stunning, with its full-bodied format utterly refined and balanced, ripe tannins perking up the long finish, nascent complexity readily in evidence and stellar focus and grip on the pure, youthful and utterly sophisticated finish. When I was in Napa and Sonoma in September of 2011, I was hoping that the cool growing season might produce wines of this great quality and structural integrity, and it is great to see that David Jeffrey, unlike some of his cabernet sauvignon-centric colleagues in Napa Valley, seized the opportunity that 2011 presented and has made a brilliant wine for long-term cellaring. This does not have any of the lazy plumpness of modern, “blockbuster” cabernet, but it does have great depth, intensity and purity and is going to be an absolute cellar treasure in the fullness of time! 2021-2040+. **94+**.

2011 Calluna Vineyards “Calluna Estate” (Chalk Hill)

The Calluna Estate bottling from David Jeffrey is his flagship wine, and in 2011 the wine is comprised of a blend of forty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-six percent merlot, nineteen percent cabernet franc, seven percent petit verdot and four percent malbec. The wine is a vineyard selection of the best raw materials of a given year, and in 2011, the wine comes in at 13.7 percent alcohol. The bouquet is simply stunning, wafting from the glass in a superb mélange of cherries, red plums, Cuban cigar wrapper, woodsmoke, gentle herb tones, a superb signature of soil, allspice and a nice base of elegant new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and supremely elegant, with a great core of sweet fruit, strikingly soil-driven and perfectly balanced, with firm, ripe and integrated tannins, laser-like focus and a very, very long, refined and complex finish. Sheer brilliance! 2021-2045+. **96**.

2011 Calluna Vineyards “aux Raynauds” Merlot (Chalk Hill)

David Jeffrey has fashioned a simply excellent merlot in the 2011 vintage, with the wine coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and including fifteen percent cabernet franc in the *cépages*. The bouquet is deep, pure and very Pomerol-like (La Conseillante-like?) in its aromatic constellation of black cherries, a bit of black raspberry, fresh herb tones, tobacco leaf, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of balsam bough and a very discreet base of new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and utterly refined, with a superb core, excellent youthful structure, impeccable balance and a very long, moderately tannic and very complex finish. This is structured like a young 1985 Bordeaux, with youthful complexity coupled to classic structural reticence, and this exemplary Sonoma merlot really deserves at least four or five years of bottle age to start to blossom. It will age long and gracefully and is one of the best examples of this varietal that I have tasted in ages! 2019-2040. **94+**.

2011 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Cathy Corison’s 2011 cabernet sauvignon is her twenty-fifth harvest at her own winery, and not surprisingly the queen of Napa Valley elegance has produced a stellar wine in the cooler year of 2011. The wine is a ripe, but suave 13.7 percent and wafts from the glass in a stellar constellation of red and black cherries, a fair bit of Rutherford Dust, tobacco leaf, beautiful soil tones, a hint of eucalyptus, fresh herb tones and a very refined base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, a superb core of fruit, absolutely seamless balance, great focus and complexity and a very long, youthful and ripely tannic finish of impeccable focus and grip. This is a very young and refined Napa cabernet that will be spectacular in the fullness of time and is very much worthy of marking Madame Corison’s twenty-fifth anniversary at her own property. What I love about the Corison cabernets, year in and year out, is that they inevitably take me back to my formative years in the wine trade, when I bought and cellared a ton of Napa cabernets and fell in love both with the style of the region (back in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s) and with the larger wine world in general. The 2011 is one of Cathy Corison’s finest young vintages that I have had the pleasure to taste, which is saying something, considering this remarkable woman’s superb track record for classic Napa cabernets! 2023-2050+. **95**.

2011 Forman Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 2011 vintage of cabernet sauvignon from Ric Forman is one of the finest I have tasted from him in recent years, as the cooler character of the year has really translated into a wine of lovely complexity and breed. This is still a wine from Ric’s current, riper style, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol, but the flavors and aromatics here are very pure and there is absolutely no signs of backend heat or imprecision on the palate. The wine is a blend of seventy-five percent cabernet sauvignon, fifteen percent cabernet franc and five percent each of merlot and petit verdot and was raised in fifty percent new wood in this vintage. The bouquet is superb, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, currant leaf, a touch of meatiness, dark soil tones and a judicious framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, moderately tannic and complex finish. Stellar juice. 2017-2040+. **94**.

2009 Heitz Wine Cellar “Napa” Cabernet Sauvignon

I love the Heitz family’s Napa bottling of cabernet sauvignon, which I have plenty of older vintages happily resting in my cellar. The new release of this classic wine is from the 2009 vintage, and it seems a tad riper out of the blocks than I am accustomed to on this wine, but it may just be still on the young side and in need of a bit of bottle age to mellow out. The alcohol is

14.5 percent, which is typical of this wine for the last decade or two, but it seems a bit more exuberant on the nose than customary, as it offers up scents of red and black cherries, a bit of eucalyptus, woodsmoke, gentle notes of fruitcake, allspice and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe in personality, with a fine core, ripe tannins, very good acids and just a whisper of backend heat poking out on the long finish. This may just needs some time to settle in, but today, it seems just a touch less precise on the palate than I am used to with this cuvée. But, it is still a baby and will age long and gracefully, so this is a very early snapshot and I would not be surprised to see my score climb up significantly as the years go by. 2018-2040+. **88+**.



The Heitz Cellar tasting room down on Highway 29- this is a very good place to take a break from the traffic.

2009 Heitz Wine Cellar “Martha’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 2009 Martha’s Vineyard from the Heitz family is one of the finest young vintages of this wine in recent times. Cathleen Heitz and her brother (and the estate’s winemaker since 1974) David Heitz rank this vintage right up there with the legendary Martha’s Vineyards, and it is easy to see why, as this is a wine of bottomless depth, great purity and focus and magical nascent complexity, all tied to the signature Martha’s personality that has made this such an iconic wine in Napa Valley for more than forty vintages. The bouquet is deep, pure and beautifully focused, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of red cherries, red plums, eucalyptus, woodsmoke, beautiful soil tones, a touch of allspice and a suave base of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep,

full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, perfectly integrated tannins and stunning length and grip on the ripe, but balanced finish. As has been the case for a couple of decades, the 2009 Martha's Vineyard tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol, and the wine is certainly ripe, but it shows no signs out of the blocks of heat on the backend and I have little doubt that this wine will age beautifully. That said, I would still give my left arm to see this wine hover below fourteen percent alcohol, as this would only increase the signature complexity and purity that has defined Martha's Vineyard since its inaugural vintage of 1966. However, it may well turn out that twenty years from now, the 2009 will be the second coming of the 1970 or 1978 Martha's (both ripe vintages), as this does have great constituent components! 2020-2060+. **95.**

1999 Ridge Vineyards "Monte Bello" Cabernet Sauvignon (375 ml.)

The 1999 Monte Bello is a classic vintage of this superb cabernet sauvignon, with a deep and nascently complex personality, plenty of structure and superb balance for long-term cellaring. The deep and classic nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, cigar smoke, stony soil tones, a discreet and youthful touch of sweet bell pepper, tobacco leaf and a lovely framing of American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tightly-knit and sweet to the core, with ripe tannins, outstanding focus and grip, ripe tannins and a very long, perfectly balanced and superb finish. All this excellent vintage of Monte Bello needs is a bit more time. 2022-2060. **93+.**

1988 Dunn Vineyards "Napa" Cabernet Sauvignon

Randy Dunn's 1988 Napa bottling of cabernet is starting to drink very well indeed and is impressively complex and soil-driven in personality. The deep and very pure nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, black cherries, dried eucalyptus, lovely minerality and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a fine core, superb focus and grip and outstanding length and grip on the long and classy finish. There is still a bit of backend tannin here, but the wine is now entering its plateau of peak maturity, where it should delight for the next three decades. A superb wine from a rather difficult vintage. 2014-2040. **94.**

1983 Dunn Vineyards "Napa" Cabernet Sauvignon

Both the 1988 and 1983 Dunn Napa bottlings are from cooler vintages, and to my palate, the 1988 is the more successful of the two. In contrast to the beautifully balanced 1988, the 1983 is just a bit marked by the vintage's unspectacular ripening on the backend, with the tannins likely to always have a slightly hard edge from moderate ripeness. The aromatics are good, but not quite as impressive as the 1988, offering up scents of cassis, dried red currants, a bit of meatiness, cigar ash, stony soil tones and a medicinal overtone. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still slightly angular, with a good core, fine complexity, resolving tannins and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This is still a very good wine, but it does not possess the same seamless balance as the 1988 version. 2014-2035. **89.**

1975 Cabernet Sauvignon "Fay Vineyard"- Heitz Wine Cellars

This most recent example of the '75 Heitz Fay Vineyard bottling was simply outstanding. I had not tasted the wine in five years, and the additional bottle age has simply allowed the wine to blossom more fully, without losing any of its superb structural integrity. The deep and exceptional bouquet is a blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a hint of petroleum jelly, Rutherford soil tones, delicate mintiness, a fine array of upper register spices and a touch of chocolate. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and sappy at the core, with excellent soil signature and complexity, melting tannins, great focus and balance and a very long, suave and

seamless finish. This is at its apogee, but like so many of the top 1975 Napa cabernets, it has decades of life still ahead of it. 2014-2035. **94+**.

1973 Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon (served from magnum)

I had last tasted the 1973 Mayacamas cabernet back in 2007, so it had been a while, and I had never had the pleasure to taste this superb wine out of magnum. Having now tasted this pristine magnum, it seems pretty clear that the last bottle of the '73 that I tasted was not one hundred percent pristine, as this magnum was simply stunning. The celestial bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of sweet red and black cherries, black truffles, a bit of eucalyptus, cigar wrapper, incipient notes of chipotles, a superb base of mountain soil tones and a bit of tariness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with great focus and balance, still a bit of ripe tannin to resolve and great soil drive on the very long and complex finish. A California icon! 2014-2040. **96**.

Zinfandel (More or Less) and Charbono

2012 Nalle Vinum Clarum (Ninety Percent Zinfandel) Dry Creek Valley

The 2012 Nalle Vinum Clarum contains a ten percent blend of carignane and petite sirah to go along with its zinfandel component, with the vintage coming in at a cool 12.8 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a lovely and vibrant bouquet of raspberries, bonfires, black cherries, lovely soil tones, a bit of pepper, lavender, dried eucalyptus and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and complex, with a fine core of fruit, a bit of backend tannin and a long, tangy finish. This is fine juice that is eminently drinkable out of the blocks, but will probably be even more interesting with a couple of years of cellaring. 2014-2025. **90**.

2012 Nalle “Sonoma County” Zinfandel (Dry Creek Valley)

Since I first got to know Doug Nalle’s wines back in the latter half of the 1980s, I have always liked them for their traditional styles and excellent quality, and though a stretch of vintages went by when I did not have the opportunity to taste them regularly, I have always found them to be amongst the most consistent zinfandels produced in California these days. The 2012 Nalle Zinfandel includes nine percent each of petite sirah and carignane and tips the scales at a very civilized 13.5 percent alcohol in this vintage, offering up a classic nose of brambly raspberries, *garrigue*, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil, a bit of venison and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a lovely core, fine focus and balance, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and promising finish. This is still early days for this fine bottle, and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for three or four years to allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. It is quite drinkable today, but the real fireworks will come when it has had a chance to blossom with bottle age. 2017-2035. **92+**.

2012 Wilde Farm Wines “Bedrock Vineyard” Heritage Red (Sonoma)

The Heritage Red from Wilde Farms Wines is made from the very old Bedrock Vineyard, which was first planted in 1854. The vineyard is one of the sources championed by Morgan Peterson in the Heritage Vineyard project that seeks to identify and protect some of these very old vines planted in pre-prohibition California and still extant. The vineyard is planted primarily to zinfandel, alicanté bouchet and mourvèdre, but it is a field blend and may include as many as twenty-five more grape varieties. The wine is made by Pax Mahle of Wind Gap, but is harvested a bit later than would be the case with one of his own wines, so that the 2012 comes in at a rather generous 14.5 percent alcohol. Nonetheless, the wine is quite good, offering up a deep and

complex nose of black cherries, blackberry pie, woodsmoke, *garrigue*, roasted game and black pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and delivers excellent mid-palate amplitude, with suave tannins and a long, complex finish. The wine is ripe, but beautifully balanced and shows no signs of backend heat, though one does lose a bit of aromatic precision at this octane, no matter how careful the winemaking is from Pax, and I am sure at 14.5 percent, it is not going to make old bones in the cellar. But, this is still a very good wine- though I can only imagine how stunning it could be if it came in a full point lower in alcohol. Let's start picking these grapes at 22.5 Brix, instead of waiting for twenty-five! 2014-2020+. **90.**

2011 Calder Wine Company "Meyer Vineyard" Charbono (Napa Valley)

I cannot remember the last time I had a wine from Napa that was 12.1 percent alcohol, but that is the octane level on this superb Charbono from Calder Wine Company. The wine offers up superb precision and complexity in the nose, wafting from the glass in a mélange of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a bit of cola and coffee bean. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely chewy, with a fine core, ripe tannins and a long, complex and robust finish. This is a terrific throwback style of wine and while it is quite drinkable now with a bit of air, it will be even better with a couple of years of bottle age. Fine juice. 2014-2030+. **92.**

1982 Ridge Vineyards "York Creek" Zinfandel

The 1982 York Creek Zinfandel from Ridge is a lovely wine that tips the scales at 12.8 percent alcohol and is comprised of a blend of eighty-six percent zinfandel and fourteen percent petite sirah. At age thirty-two the wine is still bright and tasty, with no signs of slowing down anytime soon, as it wafts from the glass in a suave mélange of raspberries, fruitcake, saddle leather, baking spices and a touch of grilled venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite seamless on the attack, with a good core of fruit, still a whisper of remaining tannin and a long, tangy and well-balanced finish. This is not overly complex, but it remains well-preserved and will continue to drink well for at least another decade. 2014-2025. **87.**

1978 Ridge Vineyards "York Creek" Zinfandel

The 1978 Ridge "York Creek" Zinfandel was made from a blend of eighty-five percent zinfandel and fifteen percent petit sirah, and was pretty ripe by the standards of this era in California wine, as it came in at 13.9 percent alcohol. At age thirty-four, the wine is still drinking quite well, offering up a deep and ripe nose of black cherries, chocolate, leather, briary spice tones, cigar smoke and a touch of chipotle pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core, melted tannins and good length on the ripe and slightly jammy finish. The higher octane here has robbed the wine of a bit of precision and focus, but it is still fairly cool in the mouth and the wine is well-preserved and quite enjoyable to drink. 2014-2020+. **89.**

**A SLEW OF BAROLO AND BARBARESCO VERTICAL REPORTS
FOR TOO MUCH OF A GOOD, OLD THING IS NEVER ENOUGH**



I have the good fortune to drink older Barolo and Barbaresco with some frequency, and this good luck often extends to vertical or vintage-oriented tastings in which I am invited to participate. Over the last couple of years, I have had several of these tastings in which I have taken part, and the notes so far have not found their way into the newsletter. Therefore, I thought it might be interesting to group them together in an article, with shorter historical background sketches for each estate, followed by the notes from the tastings. A couple of the events that I have attended in these last couple of years were verticals of producers whose historical profiles have already been featured in past issues of the newsletter, but often the tasting might include a few wines that were not in the original article, or may be enough years removed from the original domaine article that it makes sense to post more recent tasting notes to mark how the wines are evolving with a bit more bottle age. Besides, I am certainly not the type of wine enthusiast that says “no thank you” to a vertical tasting of Marcarini or Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio wines simply because I have already written an historical feature on the producer! A great many of the tastings reported on below were organized by the Rare Wine Company, or their founder, Mannie Berk, whose passion for the wines of Piemonte is already well-known. I have been very fortunate to be invited to participate in several Rare Wine Company events over the years, and it is a great

honor to be able to share so many great wines with someone like Mannie Berk, whose taste for great, mature and classically-styled wines very much mirrors my own predilections. A few of these tastings were private events that Mannie organized with his regular tasting group up in Connecticut, where he lives when he is not trotting around the globe unearthing pristine cellars of great old wines, and as the notes below will attest, they were well worth the drive north from the New York metropolitan area to participate in- though it was quite painful on occasion to have to spit out every single wine, knowing that the drive back south was waiting at the end of the tasting!

The article that follows includes vertical reports on the wines of the now defunct, but superb traditionalist *négociant* firm of Franco Fiorina, which has now been gone more than twenty-five years, the still underperforming and very large house of Marchesi di Barolo, the fine old school producer of Roagna, the wines of Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio and another round of Marcarini Brunate tasting notes. Additionally, I also found tasting notes from a vintage to vintage comparative tasting of the 1967, 1964 and 1961 Baroli and Barbaresci, which I had forgotten I had attended in San Francisco back in January of 2011. Some of the notes from that tasting had found their way into domaine profiles in newsletters after the tasting, but I found that probably sixty percent of the wines tasted at that event I had never written up, so those wines bring up the rear of this feature. I have also included here a few notes on some younger Barolo or Barbaresco bottlings, if they hail from one of the estates that are included in the vertical tasting reports, but the majority of the notes I have on wines from relatively younger vintages in the Langhe will appear in next issue's general report on Italian wines, as I have tasted a lot of excellent wines from all over the Italian wine map in the last year or so and want to do a feature on those wines soon, and will include notes on recent releases from other Piemonte producers in that article.

Franco Fiorina

Franco Fiorina was an old *négociant* firm in Piemonte, which was founded in 1925 and never owned any of its own vineyards. Back in this era in the Langhe, it was not uncommon at all for merchants such as Franco Fiorina to set up cellars and purchase fruit from local farmers, as the vast majority of Barolo and Barbaresco bottled in this era were made in just such a fashion and were not estate bottled wines made by the farmers who grew the grapes. In fact, if one looks at seminal estates of today like Giacomo Conterno and Bruno Giacosa, they also started out way back when without their own vineyards and relied on purchasing grapes from the best growers in the best crus for many long years. In any event, Franco Fiorina was founded in 1925, but sold the first couple of decades' worth of their wines in cask or demi-johns, rather than in bottle, and it was not until the 1947 vintage that the very first bottles of Franco Fiorina Barolo and Barbaresco were released into the slowly blossoming market of those difficult, post-war times in Italy. They were a very traditionalist-minded, old school Barolo and Barbaresco producer during their days, practicing the art of blending grapes from specific villages in each region to build in specific attributes to the finished wines, and aging the wines in *botti* prior to bottling. Fermentations for their Baroli back in the day used to be long and classical, with a full six weeks of maceration with a submerged cap and then assembling the wines in very old, Slavonian oak *botti* (or occasionally cement tanks) for several years of cask aging prior to bottling the wines and preparing them for market. The wines are structured, deep and very long-lived in the classic sense of top Piemontese producers, and though they may not be quite as elegant as the very top

tier of estates, these are superb, authentic and complex wines that are very rewarding to drink and come highly recommended.

For a great many years, the winemaker here was the well-respected Armando Cordero, who is now nearly ninety years of age and still alive and well in the region and probably still drinking some of his old wines from his days at Franco Fiorina. He would oversee the purchase of fruit for their Barolo and Barbaresco bottlings, and he always purchased where possible from the same vineyards and villages to craft what he viewed as proper, long-lived expressions of each region. For Barolo, his philosophy was to always take fruit from four villages for the specific characteristics that each would lend to the finished wine, which Mannie Berk describes thusly: “La Morra fruit for delicacy, Barolo fruit for backbone, Castiglione Falletto for body and strength and Serralunga fruit for perfume.” The Franco Fiorina Barbaresco bottlings came from the crus from two different villages, again following the philosophy that was so prevalent at this time in the Langhe that the whole would be greater than the sum of its parts, so that fruit was purchased from both the village of Barbaresco and also the village of Treiso, where today’s under the radar star, Cantine Rizzi can be found with their substantial vineyard holdings in the village. According to *Signor* Cordero, one of the priorities for him during his years at Franco Fiorina was to purchase fruit from the Michét clones of Nebbiolo, as he viewed this strain of the grape as producing the finest wines. I was first introduced to the fine wines of Franco Fiorina at a comparative tasting of the 1958, 1964 and 1971 Piemonte vintages organized by the Rare Wine Company out in San Francisco back in the fall of 2010, and I wrote a bit about this estate as part of the report on that vintage comparison. As I noted at the time, the style of the Franco Fiorina wines, which were bottled unfined and unfiltered back in the day, included a bit of “noble rusticity” to them across the board in those three vintages, and having now enjoyed a vertical tasting of their wines in January of this year that encompassed a great many more vintages, it is clear that this old school style of Barolo and Barbaresco never changed during the period when this small house was one of Piemonte’s best-kept secrets. The firm has been out of business now for twenty-five years, with the last vintage that I am aware of their having produced being the 1988. They can still be found in the market, as there was a sturdy cache of their wines unsold in Italy for a long time, and I recommend the Franco Fiorina wines unhesitatingly for their strong and very classic expressions of Barolo and Barbaresco.

I should note that in our tasting, we were treated to a couple of vintages where we could taste two different Barbaresci produced by *Signor* Cordero- one selected for the truffle organization, the Cavalieri del Tartufo to be bottled under their special label (as many top producers from the ‘60s and ‘70s also did at this time, including Bartolo Mascarello), and another bottled under the Franco Fiorina label as a Riserva. I do not know that the two wines were from different origins originally, or if they were effectively the same wines, with the Cavalieri cuvée just bottled on the earlier side, but the two bottlings were consistently different in the vintages where we had a chance to compare them side by side. The Cavalieri del Tartufo bottling tended to be the slightly more forward of the two versions, with a more red fruity personality and a very classic profile. In contrast, the Barbaresco Riserva bottlings were uniformly more structured, more black fruity and tarry, and a bit more nobly rustic in personalities. The Riservas will clearly be the longer-lived wines (not that the Cavalieri bottlings are short on structure!), but they are not quite as elegant, and if one’s taste in older Barbaresci runs in one direction or the other, it would make sense to search out the style that is most

appealing to your own personal palate. It is entirely possible that the wines started out life in the cellars exactly the same and the differences are from the Riservas spending more time in *botti* or cement tanks prior to bottling, or it could be that they were from fruit sourced from different vineyards and/or farmers back in the day. *In the notes that follow, I have reprinted the tasting note on the 1958 Franco Fiorina Barolo that was tasted back in September of 2010, as we did not have this in our vertical tasting in January of this year.*

1985 Barolo- Franco Fiorina

This was one of the last vintages produced by *Signor Cordero*, and the possibility of buying top flight fruit was not the same in 1985 as it was back in the '50s or '60s, but the wine is excellent and just starting to really drink in its prime. The bouquet is a fine and mature mix of dried black cherries, leather, licorice, bonfires, gentle tariness and roasted game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit chewy, with an excellent core of fruit, modest, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and a long, balanced and decidedly old school (in the best sense of the term) finish. This has decades of life still ahead of it, but it is drinking very well today. 2014-2035+. **90.**

1982 Barolo- Franco Fiorina

The 1982 vintage in Barolo is far more serious than 1985, and this is readily apparent when one tastes the 1982 alongside the 1985 Franco Fiorina Barolo. This is a dynamite wine and one of the very best of the more recent vintages from the estate, delivering a pure, complex and vibrant nose of black cherries, cassis, a bit of red curry, licorice, discreet notes of road tar, Italian herbs, orange peel, camphor and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with a nice sense of sappiness to the fruit element, lovely soil signature, suave tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and perfectly focused finish. This is a very high class bottle of Barolo and has to be one of the best values out there in the market for mature, top flight blended Barolo from this superb vintage. 2014-2045. **93.**

1979 Barbaresco Riserva- Franco Fiorina

The 1979 vintage in Piemonte produced some lovely wines that continue to drink well, and I still look for this vintage often for current consumption. The '79 Barbaresco Riserva from *Signor Cordero* is a lovely wine that is still in the heart of its plateau of maturity, wafting from the glass in a complex and autumnal blend of dark berries, roasted squab, *sous bois*, camphor, dried herbs and just a bit of barnyard. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with perhaps a bit more angularity than the Baroli from this producer, but a fine core, good balance and impressive length and grip on the finish. This wine possesses that slightly rustic, but quite satisfying house style that defines the wines of Franco Fiorina. 2014-2030. **90+.**

1979 Barolo Riserva- Franco Fiorina

The 1979 Barolo Riserva from Franco Fiorina is an outstanding wine, with excellent depth and vigor and all of the positive attributes of a very well-made Barolo at its zenith. The exceptional bouquet delivers a fine aromatic constellation of desiccated cherries and plums, forest floor, camphor, curry, a touch of gamebird, oregano, a bit of nutskin and the first vestiges of the sweet onion to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, mature and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core of sweet fruit, tangy acids, moderate, buried tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very complex, classy finish. Great juice and another stellar value for old Barolo. 2014-2035. **93.**

1978 Barbaresco Riserva- Franco Fiorina

The 1978 Barbaresco Riserva is a very good wine, but given the structure of the vintage, it is not surprising that it is drinking with less generosity today than the 1979 version and really could use a bit more time in the cellar to fully blossom. The still youthful, but promising bouquet is a blend of dark berries, road tar, charred wood, anise, a touch of celery seed and a complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly tarry in personality, with a fine core of fruit, a firm chassis of old school tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, chewy and well-balanced finish. This will be a fine bottle of Barbaresco, but it still needs at least a handful of years in the cellar to really start to hit on all cylinders. 2018-2045+. **90+**.

1971 Barbaresco “Cavalieri del Tartufo”- Franco Fiorina

It was a lot of fun to compare two different bottlings of Franco Fiorina Barbaresco side by side at this tasting, with the casks chosen by the Cavalieri del Tartufo for bottling under their special labels showing just a hair better than the 1971 Riserva. This is really a beautiful bottle of Barbaresco at its peak, jumping from the glass in an excellent aromatic mix of dark berries, licorice, coffee, nutskin, fennel seed, a nice touch of sweet onion, road tar and a smoky topnote redolent of bonfires in the distance. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and tangy, with excellent mid-palate concentration, fine complexity, melting tannins and a long, focused and *à point* finish. Superb juice. 2014-2035. **93**.

1971 Barbaresco Riserva- Franco Fiorina

The 1971 Barbaresco Riserva from Franco Fiorina is another fine example of the vintage, but this wine is a bit more structured and nobly rustic than its counterpart bottled for the Cavalieri del Tartufo. The deep and still slightly youthful nose delivers scents of black cherries, dark berries, curry, gamebirds, road tar and forest floor. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus, a fair bit of chewy tannin and excellent length and grip on the tangy and promising finish. I know this sounds crazy for a forty-three year-old Barbaresco, but this wine is really not yet ready for primetime drinking and I would not hesitate to give it another five years in the cellar prior to popping it in earnest! 2019-2040. **92+**.

1971 Barolo Riserva- Franco Fiorina

The 1971 Franco Fiorina Barolo Riserva is another excellent example of the vintage, and this too is still a bit on the young side and deserves more bottle age to allow the wine to fully blossom. The deep and impressively sweet nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of black cherries, game, sweet onion, fennel seed, road tar, *sous bois*, saddle leather and a nice, classically Italian topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still chewy, with nascent complexity, an excellent core, ripe, perfectly integrated tannins and a very long, tangy and focused finish. All the constituent components are in place for a long life for this wine, but I would still leave it alone for another six or seven years' worth of hibernation! 2020-2050+. **92+**.

1970 Barbaresco “Cavalieri del Tartufo”- Franco Fiorina

The 1970 Franco Fiorina Barbaresco bottled for the Cavalieri del Tartufo is a superb wine that is fully at its apogee and offers up no rough edges and excellent complexity on both the nose and palate. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a mixture of dried red and black fruit, leather, fresh herb tones, coffee, celery seed, *sous bois*, curry and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, excellent focus and breed and a long, soil-driven and nicely autumnal finish. Classic Barbaresco at its apogee! 2014-2025+. **92**.

1970 Barbaresco Riserva- Franco Fiorina

As was the case with the two 1971 Barbaresco bottlings, the 1970 Riserva from Armando Cordero is still on the young side and could do with a bit more bottle age to allow the tannins to more fully soften. The deep and still quite youthful nose offers up a promising mix of sweet dark berries, road tar, a touch of barnyard, gentle notes of anise and a nice topnote of roasted venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and more old-fashioned in personality than the Cavalieri bottling from 1970, with good structure, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the still fairly chewy finish. Old school juice on an old school timetable, this wine is going to be even better with a bit more bottle age, so that the tannins can more fully resolve! 2018-2035+. **91+**.

1970 Barolo Riserva- Franco Fiorina

I am not sure if it was just our bottle of the 1970 Barolo Riserva, but this wine was more tarry in personality than either of the Barbaresci from this vintage and did not possess the same freshness of fruit that defined so many of these old Franco Fiorina bottles. The nose is a complex, but older blend of dried black cherries, leather, road tar, hung game, dried herbs and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really a bit dense in the mid-palate, with chewy tannins, plenty of complexity and very good length and grip on the finish,. This is a good, solid wine, but it is not typical of the wines from Franco Fiorina, as its fruit component seems to be a bit in advance of its structural softening. Maybe it is just this bottle? 2018-2035. **88+?**

1964 Barolo- Franco Fiorina

I reported on this wine back in the article on the comparative tasting of the 1971, 1964 and 1958 vintages organized by the Rare Wine Company, but the bottle we had back in San Francisco in September of 2010 was not as good as this most recent bottle, and clearly I underrated the wine a bit. This particular bottle was stellar, jumping from the glass in a vibrant mélange of black cherries, dark berries, camphor, gentle notes of road tar, woodsmoke, forest floor, fennel seed and onion skin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its apogee, with lovely depth at the core, beautiful resolution and a very long, focused and tangy finish that closes with lovely detail and grip. High class juice and a great value for a 1964 Barolo. 2014-2040. **94**.

1961 Barbaresco- Franco Fiorina

For readers that thought I was being a bit optimistic about the 1978, 1971 and 1970 Barbaresco Riserva bottlings that still needed a bit more bottle age, witness just how beautifully the 1961 Barbaresco has resolved and how this remains smack dab in the middle of its apogee! The superb nose offers up a complex mélange of dried cherries, anise, gamebirds, *sous bois*, a lovely base of soil, oregano and sweet onion skin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with excellent balance and breed, melted tannins, lovely grip and a long, vibrant and classy finish. 2014-2025+. **92**.

1961 Barolo- Franco Fiorina

I am not sure if it is the bottle or the wine, but the 1961 Franco Fiorina Barolo is just a touch more oxidative in style than the bottle of '61 Barbaresco paired up with it, though this too is drinking very well indeed, just without quite the same vibrancy and sense of being at its apogee. The tertiary bouquet is a mix of dried cherries, orange peel, red curry, onion skin, dried roses and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave and resolved on the attack, with a fine core, lovely intensity of flavor, very good grip and

lovely balance on the long and mature finish. This is still very tasty, but my gut instinct tells me that there are even more vibrant bottles out there. 2014-2025+. **92.**

1958 Barolo- Franco Fiorina

Of the three very fine bottles of Franco Fiorina Baroli that we sampled at the tasting at Acquerello in September (of 2010), the 1958 was the finest and (ironically) the youngest of the three. The bouquet is deep, pure and flat out beautiful, as it offers up a classic old Barolo blend of cherries, roses, road tar, *sous bois*, a touch of gamebird, curry and camphor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with just a whisper of remaining tannin, fine mid-palate depth, impeccable focus and balance, and a long, complex and dancing finish. Just a lovely, lovely bottle of Barolo at its zenith. 2010-2030+. **93.**

1955 Barbaresco- Franco Fiorina

Interestingly, the 1955 Barbaresco from Franco Fiorina is darker than the 1961s! This is a great old wine, soaring from the glass in a deep and complex blend of red and black cherries, forest floor, curry, anise, oregano, a beautiful base of autumnal soil tones, sweet onion and an exotic topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays great mid-palate depth, with a lovely sense of sweetness to the fruit, great transparency, suave, melting tannins and great length and grip on the complex and simply gorgeous finish. This really gets me excited to see wines like the '71s and '78s with many more years of bottle age, as it seems likely that they could be every bit as remarkable as this magical '55 Barbaresco at a similar age. This wine still has decades of life ahead of it. 2014-2035. **94+.**



In the market in Alba, white truffles just picked and ready for immediate shaving. (Courtesy D. Beckwith)

Marchesi di Barolo

Marchesi di Barolo has some absolutely fantastic vineyard holdings, and on paper, one would expect this to be one of the crown jewel estates in all the Langhe, but I have never had much luck with their wines. Recently, the intrepid Piemonte specialist, Mannie Berk, decided to put together a tasting of the Marchesi di Barolo's wines to see if there might be some hidden gems to be found here, but to my palate, the results of this tasting were pretty consistent with my previous experience with the estate's wines, with most everything showing decidedly second division in quality. Even the best wines here are simply not as exciting as comparably well-made wines from other producers from the same era. The estate has been owned by the Abbona family since 1929, when they acquired a significant portion of what had been the Marchesi di Barolo's property at the tail end of the nineteenth century and dates all the way back to the start of Barolo as we know it today, for this property was originally part of a larger estate owned by the Marchioness Giulia Falletti, who was really responsible for the creation of Barolo as a dry wine in the middle of the 1800s. Today, the Marchesi di Barolo property is run by Ernesto Abbona, who is the fourth generation of his family to head the estate and he has set about trying to raise the overall level of the wines produced at winery. Marchesi di Barolo is the second largest producer of Barolo in the region, with its three million bottle production of recent times second only to another important historic estate, Fontanafredda. However, Ernesto Abbona has sought to cut that production figure by half in the last several years, turning his focus to single vineyard bottlings and attempting to raise the overall quality of all the Baroli and Barbaresci releases that were the Marchesi di Barolo label.

The estate produces wines from nearly one hundred and ten hectares of vineyards in Piemonte, with forty-five hectares owned outright by the Abbona family, and the vast majority of them located in the villages of Barolo proper, La Morra, Castiglione Falletto and Serralunga. *Signor* Abbona is not averse to blending certain traditional aspects in the cellar like old Slavonian oak *botti* with some of the modern trends in Piemonte, like small French *barriques*, as he is quoted in Maurizio Rosso's indispensable book, The Mystique of Barolo, as saying that "for me, the word traditional must necessarily be relative," for "in twenty years' time, today's innovation will have become tomorrow's tradition." He likes to give his oenologist options in the cellar, and has moved in the last decade to also improve the estate's viticulture and has started to take advantage of their very considerable vineyard patrimony by bottling some of his best crus on their own, rather than only producing blended Baroli. The vineyard holdings here are truly superb, with sizable plots in Cannubi and Cannubi Valletta (4.5 hectares split between these two sections of the vineyard), Sarmassa (6.5 hectares) and Coste di Rose (2.5 hectares), but to my palate, the firm is yet to realize the quality of their *terroir* in their finished wines. With a willingness to embrace the modern side of Piemonte, admittedly in relative moderation, my gut instincts is that this estate will continue to be stuck in the middle of the pack for the foreseeable future, as the use of French *barriques* here is not adding anything positive to the vinous equation. The winery is located in the center of Barolo, next to one of the old castles once owned by the Marchioness Giulia Falletti, and the Abbona family has an amazingly deep cache of ancient Baroli in their cellars, as befits an estate based on so much history in the region.

2010 Barbaresco- Marchesi di Barolo

The 2010 Barbaresco from Marchesi di Barolo is decidedly overripe in style, with the combination of chocolaty overtones and a rather *fluide* mid-palate not particularly inspiring. The

quite simple bouquet is a blend of black cherries, chocolate, dark soil tones and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is fullish, soft and overripe, with really very modest mid-palate density (particularly for a young Barbaresco) and a flabby, flaccid finish. Not much here. 2014-2025. **82.**

2004 Barolo Riserva- Marchesi di Barolo

The 2004 Barolo Riserva from Marchesi di Barolo is far more serious than the 2010 Barbaresco, but it is still not top drawer juice. The youthful bouquet offers up a very proper blend of black cherries, dark berries, road tar, a bit of roasted game and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off good mid-palate concentration, with ripe tannins and pretty good length and grip on the balanced, but slightly rustic finish. This is a perfectly solid example, but it lacks a bit of breed and complexity. 2017-2035. **87+.**

1998 Barolo “Vigna di Proprieta”- Marchesi di Barolo

The 1998 Barolo “Vigna di Proprieta” from Marchesi di Barolo (which I assume is a blend of their crus in this less than stellar year) is another good, solid Barolo that fails to really excite my palate. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, espresso, woodsmoke, road tar, herbs and hung game. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, solidly structured and shows off pretty good mid-palate depth, with a bit of firm tannin still perking up the backend and perfectly respectable length on the finish. Probably a small step above the 2004 Riserva, but again, not a special wine and still in need of a bit of time to resolve a bit more tannin. 2018-2035. **88.**

1990 Barolo “Coste di Rose”- Marchesi di Barolo

The 1990 cru Baroli from Marchesi di Barolo come in very modern bottles, which probably signifies that they were made in the most modern style practiced by the estate. The '90 Coste di Rose is quite good, as it has not seemingly seen the same amount of new French wood as some of these other crus, offering up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, camphor, game, fresh oregano, road tar and a good base of soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just about at its apogee, with a good core, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and ripe finish. This manages the ripeness of the vintage quite well and is really a very good bottle. 2014-2030+. **90.**

1990 Barolo “Brunate”- Marchesi di Barolo

The estate does not own its vineyards in Brunate, but buys them under long term contract. I wondered about this particular bottle, which I thought might be very slightly corked, but I was the only one at the tasting that had this impression, so perhaps it is just the wine. In any case, this particular bottle seemed surprisingly devoid of fruit tones for what should be a Brunate just starting to consider drinking well, as it offers up a very tarry aromatic profile of camphor, woodsmoke, dark soil and the aforementioned road tar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite chewy, with a modicum of dried black fruit laying flaccidly on top of the tarry and smoky elements. Can this really be the wine? ???

1990 Barolo “Cannubi Valletta”- Marchesi di Barolo

Cannubi Valletta is on the lower part of the slopes of the hill of Cannubi, with Cannubi Muscatel just to the southwest of Valletta and San Lorenzo lying above it on the hill. The filel section of Cannubi lies adjacent to Valletta, on the northeastern side of the hillside, and in practice, the Marchesi di Barolo's two Cannubis could be blended together if they so chose and simply sold at Cannubi, but the estate prefers to keep the two separate. The 1990 Valletta is a perfectly solid wine, but lack breed and pizzazz, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of dried black cherries, coffee, *sous bois*, game, just a touch of anise and leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still pretty reserved for a 1990, with moderate tannins, okay depth and

solid length on the tarry and rather four-square finish. This wine is still on the young side, but one misses a bit of fresh fruit at the core. No great shakes here. 2018-2040. **86.**

1990 Barolo “Cannubi”- Marchesi di Barolo

The straight 1990 Cannubi bottling from Marchesi di Barolo was my favorite of this roster of crus, as it offers up a fine and still quite youthful nose of red and black cherries, road tar, oregano, a fine base of soil, game, camphor and a bit of anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly reserved in personality, with a good core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the promising finish. This still needs at least five or six years in the cellar to fully blossom, but it will be the top wine produced by the estate in the 1990 vintage. 2020-2040+. **92.**

1985 Barolo “Riserva”- Marchesi di Barolo

In the mid-1980s, the estate was not yet bottling its crus on their own, and the '85 Barolo Riserva has clearly benefited from the inclusion of Cannubi and Brunate fruit in the blend. This is a very good wine, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, anise, gentle tarry notes, a fine base of soil, camphor and a gentle topnote of gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tangy, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, blossoming complexity and very good length on the classic finish. There is still a touch of rusticity to the style here, but in this case it serves the wine quite well. Good juice. 2015-2040. **92+.**

1982 Barolo “Riserva”- Marchesi di Barolo

The 1982 Barolo Riserva from the Marchesi di Barolo estate is another very good wine, but it is quite a bit more tertiary in its aromatic profile than the 1985 and is probably going to want drinking up over the next decade, despite a formidable base of tannin. The mature nose offers up scents of cassis, camphor, dried herbs, tar, leather and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with very good focus, a rock solid core and a long, chewy and tangy finish that is decidedly old school in personality. There is still a serious chassis of tannins and acids here to carry the wine, but I do not get the sense that the fruit is going to stay the course over the long haul and I would be inclined to drink this wine over the next decade (particularly in light of how the 1978 Riserva is showing today), while it is still quite good. 2014-2025+? **91.**

1978 Barolo “Riserva”- Marchesi di Barolo

The 1978 Barolo Riserva from the Abbona family is another very good, sturdy example of Barolo that is drinking well today, but is just starting to witness its fruit component begin to dry out. The nose is complex and tertiary, wafting from the glass in a mix of desiccated black cherries, woodsmoke, chicory, beef bouillon and roasted venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still shows a bit of tannin, with a good core and fine length and grip on the wide open, autumnal and chewy finish. This is a tad on the rustic side, but it is a pretty good drink for the moment, but I would suspect the fruit to fade over the next decade. 2014-2024. **90.**

1971 Barolo- Marchesi di Barolo

I like the overall balance a bit better on the 1971 Barolo *Normale* from Marchesi di Barolo than I do on either the 1978 or the 1982 Riservas, but this too is going to want drinking up over the next decade. The fine and *à point* nose delivers scents of dried cherries, cassis, gentle notes of road tar, oregano, camphor and bonfires in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and fully mature, with good mid-palate concentration, solid complexity and very good length and grip on the slightly rustic, but sturdy and pleasurable finish. Good, mature, Tuesday night Barolo. 2014-2025. **90.**

1970 Barolo- Marchesi di Barolo

The 1970 Barolo from the Marchesi di Barolo is cut very much from the same cloth as the 1971 version, but it does not have the benefit of the superior vintage quality and is already starting to dry out a bit on the palate. The bouquet is a good and tertiary blend of dried dark berries, road tar, dried herbs, leather and damp, dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and starting to witness the structure get the upper hand on the remaining black fruit, with still a bit of chewy tannin, sound acids and good length and grip on the tarry finish. Drink up. 2014-2020? 87.

1964 Barolo- Marchesi di Barolo

Given how youthful and superb so many 1964 Baroli are today, this bottle was a disappointment, if it was representative. The nose is already drying out and is quite raisiny, offering up notes of dried black cherries, prunes, animal, dried herbs and soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and eviscerated in terms of fruit, with a bare-boned chassis of tannin and acids still remaining. Maybe it was just an off bottle? ???

Roagna Azienda Agricola I Paglieri

Roagna is one of the fine old estates in the village of Barbaresco, though the Roagna family has been as well-known for its Baroli as its Barbaresci over the years. The estate was founded early in the twentieth century by Vincenzo Roagna, and has passed from father to son for four generations now, with the current head of the domaine, Luca Roagna having taken over the reins here after finishing his oenological studies in 2001. The Roagna style has been to produce very traditional and sturdy wines since the outset of the family business, but to my palate, the quality here has stepped up a level with the arrival of Luca Roagna as the head of the property, with the wines adding a greater degree of elegance to their sturdy chassis and not sacrificing one iota of traditional style in the process since his debut. For many years, the family's vineyard holdings were exclusively in the commune of Barbaresco, and included a prime, 1.84 hectare parcel in the cru of Pajè, augmented by a small, quarter of a hectare plot of vines in Montefico and a slightly smaller slice of Asili that was purchased by Luca's grandfather, Giovanni Roagna in the 1960s. In the past, the family made all of their Baroli bottlings from purchased grapes, but in 1989 they purchased a fine parcel of eight hectares of vines in the cru of la Pira in Castiglione Falletto, to augment their holdings in Barbaresco. The la Pira vineyard is now a *monopole* for the Roagna family. They also have made wine from the legendary cru of Vigna Rionda in Serralunga, buying grapes for a period of time from the Canale family, who owns nearly two hectares in this great *terroir*. The Canale parcel of Vigna Rionda was planted with fifty-five to sixty-five year-old vines, but when *Signor* Canale passed away in the spring of 2007, the vineyard was split up between his three heirs, the old vines were promptly dug up, and Luca Roagna stopped producing this bottling.

The winemaking here is very traditional, and has not been changed much, if at all, since Luca Roagna took over the day to day management of the estate. This includes a full sixty day maceration, with a submerged cap and long aging in old, Slavonian oak *botti* prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The wines these days will typically spend anywhere from three to five years in *botti* before bottling, depending on the style and quality of the vintage, and here perhaps Luca Roagna has made a few changes, as the wines a generation ago at the property it was not uncommon for the wines to spend up to eight or even ten years in large cask, so perhaps some of the new found precision that I sense in the Roagna wines under Luca's tenure have to do

with a bit less time aging in *botti* prior to bottling. The Roagna family has also had a tradition of keeping back a significant percentage of their production for aging in bottle prior to release, so this is one of the very good sources for older wines in Piemonte today, and there are still many old Riservas resting comfortably in their cellars in Barbaresco to be released at ages twenty, thirty or even forty years of age. The wines back in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s that I have tasted from the Roagna family have all been very classic, old school wines that are a bit “nobly rustic” along similar lines to those of Franco Fiorina from the same era, with fine signatures of soil, very good depth of fruit and rather chewy personalities that tend to persist through much of their long and fruitful lives. Perhaps the long-time practice of no fining or filtration here was responsible a bit for these types of personalities in the wines? In any case, the wines from this era are long on complexity and very true to their origins, so it is more a stylistic distinction, rather than a qualitative one. However, since Luca Roagna has taken over the reins of the family winery, I clearly sense that the wines have gotten more refined, a bit less rustic and improved in quality over the past generations, without losing any of their authenticity or traditionalist roots. They are just moving up the ladder in quality, and this was quite clear at the vertical Roagna tasting I attended organized by their New York importer, Polaner Selections. My top scoring wines were the more recent wines made by Luca, which were a step up from the very good wines produced by this father. As is the case with a few other of these tastings reported upon here, the notes on the Roagna wines from 1990 back to 1978 that were served at this event were already included in a previous article in the newsletter, and I have not repeated them here.

I should make a quick observation about the labeling on some of the cru bottlings from Roagna. Their monopole of la Pira in Castiglione Falletto has just had its name codified by the DOCG in the last few years, and previously the vineyard was known under several idioms, with the most frequently used being Rocca e la Pira. For sake of finding the same bottling as I tasted, I have used the designation that appeared on the label at the time the wine was sold, to make it simpler, but all of the wines from this vineyard will appear in the future labeled simply as “la Pira”. The Roagna family has also made an old vine cuvée from La Pira from time to time, from a section of the vineyard that is planted with seventy-five to one hundred year-old vines, and which is labeled as “Vecchie Viti”. Additionally, the family also produces up to four distinct bottlings from their fine holdings in Pajè in Barbaresco, if the vintage’s quality allows. These include a Pajè *Normale*, an old vine bottling, a “Riserva Black Label” and a “Crichet Pajè” from the old vines planted at the very crown of the hill of Pajè. Each of these bottlings is made from different aged vines, as the vineyards at the top of the hill used for the Crichet Pajè are seventy years of age, those used for either the Riserva or the Vecchie Viti bottlings are from nearly eighty year-old vines further down the slope, and the *Normale* from the vines in the fifty year range. There are also occasionally old vine bottlings from the Roagna family’s holdings in Asili and Montefico. This is a very fine estate whose wines are only getting better with each passing vintage.

2000 Barbaresco “Pajè”- Roagna

The 2000 Barbaresco “Pajè” from the Roagna family is one of the last wines not produced by Luca Roagna, and the wine is cut a bit more in the old-fashioned style of the estate’s wines prior to his arrival. The bouquet is a complex mix of cherries, quince, coffee bean, nutskins, a fine base of soil and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, long and nicely transparent (particularly for a 2000), with a good core, firm tannins and a long,

soil-driven finish. This wine is not as elegant as current releases, but there is still a lot to like here. 2012-2030+. **88+**.

1999 Barbaresco “Crichet Pajè”- Roagna

The 1999 Crichet Pajè is a superb bottle of young Barbaresco, with the inherent elegance of this superb vintage working very nicely with the “nobly rustic” style of the wines at this epoch at Roagna. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, orange zest, cigar smoke, a superb base of soil, nutskins, fresh oregano and a dollop of road tar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a sappy core, outstanding soil signature, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the tangy and focused finish. High class juice that is still in need of several years in the cellar to reach its apogee. 2020-2055. **93**.



The beautiful summer mosaic of the of Vigna Rionda in Serralunga d'Alba. (courtesy of Massolino).

2003 Barolo “Rocca e la Pira”- Roagna

The 2003 Barolo “Rocca e la Pira” from Luca Roagna is a very refined and classy example of this vintage, delivering a superb bouquet of cherries, strawberries, road tar, incipient notes of forest floor, anise, violets and a nice spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, most impressively transparent, with firm tannins, tangy acids, fine mid-palate intensity and a very long, complex and soil-driven finish. An excellent young Barolo. 2017-2050. **90+**.

2001 Barolo “Rocca e la Pira”- Roagna

One could not ask for a better inaugural vintage than 2001, and Luca Roagna did not waste his opportunity, as this is a beautiful young vintage of Rocca e la Pira. The wine offers up an absolutely classic and vibrant nose of cherries, camphor, woodsmoke, forest floor, gamebirds

and nutskins. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely sappiness, superb soil inflection, ripe, firm tannins and fine grip and on the tangy and very long finish. This is a classic in the making, but give it some time in the cellar. 2020-2070. **92+**.

1996 Barolo “Rocca e la Pira” Riserva- Roagna

The 1996 Barolo “Rocca e la Pira” Riserva from Roagna is still a very closed wine, like so many 1996s today, but it should prove to be a very strong and long-lived example of the vintage in the fullness of time. The deep and classic nose offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, road tar, *sous bois*, grilled venison and dried herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit reserved in personality, with a fine core, firm, ripe tannins and a long, youthful and gently tarry finish. This will be an excellent vintage of the previous generation’s style at Roagna, without the same transparency as the wines being crafted today by Luca, but with plenty of stuffing, soil signature and personality. 2018-2045+. **91**.

1995 Barolo “Rocca e la Pira” Riserva- Roagna

Roagna’s 1995 Rocca e la Pira Riserva was really showing well at our tasting back in the fall of 2012, and at that time, it seemed like this might even nose out the 1996 version. This wine had just been released a few months prior to the tasting, after having spent fully a dozen years in *botti* prior to bottling, and the wine is superb. The great nose is far more sappy in its expression of fruit than the sterner 1996 version, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, lovely soil tones, road tar, woodsmoke, incipient notes of onion skin and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and chewy, with fine mid-palate intensity, excellent focus and grip and a very long, beautifully balanced and quite classy finish. A great example of the 1995 vintage. 2020-2060. **93**.

1993 Barolo “Rocca e la Pira” Riserva- Roagna

I very much like the 1993 vintage in Barolo, which I find one of the great sleepers of the decade, but the Rocca e la Pira Riserva from the Roagna family is getting a bit on in years and probably should be drunk up in the next decade or so. The nose is lovely and quite tertiary in its mélange of coffee, dried cherries, road tar, damp earth and roasted game. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and fully mature, with autumnal flavors, still a bit of chewy tannin and good, but not great length on the complex finish. The fruit seems to be fading here a bit and the wine seems twenty years older than the 1995 Riserva, rather than just two! A solid wine, but not one of the best vintages for the Roagna family. 2012-2022+? **87**.

2005 Barolo “Vigna Rionda”- Roagna

It is too bad that the Roagna family only had the opportunity to make wines from Vigna Rionda for the four vintage stretch from 2003 to 2006, as they really made outstanding wines during that period of time from these old vines. The 2005 Vigna Rionda is stellar, soaring from the glass in a young and beautifully refined aromatic constellation of sappy cherries, roses, camphor, road tar, a touch of fennel and a fabulous base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and sappy at the core, with great focus and grip, tangy acids, impeccable balance and a very long, nascently complex and refined finish. Great juice. 2022-2075. **94**.

2003 Barolo “Vigna Rionda” Riserva- Roagna

The 2003 Barolo “Vigna Rionda” Riserva from Luca Roagna is another stunning bottle of Barolo. The deep and brilliantly transparent bouquet delivers a mélange of cherries, strawberries, roses, camphor, nutskins, fresh herbs and a gentle base of road tar. On the palate the wine is very pure, full-bodied and utterly refined, with a superb core of fruit, moderate, well-

integrated tannins, sound acids and a very, very long, complex and soil-driven finish. Other than the slightly more forward structural elements here, it is hard to believe that this utterly classic bottle of Barolo hails from a torrid vintage such as 2003! Great juice. 2020-2065. **94.**

Marcarini's Barolo "Brunate"

I was invited to participate in this tasting only a short time after having completed my profile of the Marcarini estate, but was not crazy enough to turn down an invitation to drink a fine vertical selection of their beautiful Brunate bottling. I hope that the future will see a similar retrospective of their other top Barolo bottling, from the vineyard of La Serra, as it would be fascinating to compare the evolutions of the two crus. However, the La Serra bottling is the smaller of the two cuvées, and as it comes forward a bit sooner than the Brunate, it is far more difficult to come across cellars that include older vintages of La Serra, as a lot of the bottles of La Serra tend to get drunk up by Marcarini enthusiasts while they are waiting for the same vintage's bottles of Brunate to blossom in the cellar. The full estate profile on Marcarini appears in Issue Thirty-Seven (January-February 2012) and can be found in its entirety in the database, or feel free to email me if you are a new subscriber have not yet seen a copy.

1998 Barolo "Brunate"- Marcarini

I had not tasted the 1998 Brunate from Marcarini since the fall of 2008, and I was very happy that this underrated wine was included in our vertical tasting past April. This is a lovely vintage for this wine and one that will drink well from a fairly early age, as it is already showing some secondary layers of complexity in its aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, a touch of nutskin, a bit of chocolate, gentle meatiness, fresh oregano and a road tar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very well-balanced, with a fine core, ripe tannins and lovely length and grip on the youthful, but blossoming finish. With time in decanter, this wine is very approachable today, but it really deserves a half dozen more years in the cellar to really reach its apogee. A lovely wine. 2020-250. **92+.**

1996 Barolo "Brunate"- Marcarini

The 1996 Marcarini Brunate is going to be a great bottle in the fullness of time, and this most recent bottle was deeper and more structured than the last one I crossed paths with and I would suggest keeping this wine in the cellar for at least another decade and really let it get where it is going! The deep, primary and very, very promising nose offers up scents of black cherries, tar, fresh almond, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, cigar wrapper and a great base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, primary and absolutely rock solid at the core, with firm, ripe tannins, tangy acids and great length and grip on the youthful and palate-staining finish. This is going to be a legendary vintage of Marcarini Brunate, but I seriously underestimated before how long it is going to need in the cellar to really start to hit on all cylinders. 2025-2075+. **94+.**

1995 Barolo "Brunate"- Marcarini

The 1995 Brunate from Marcarini is a very good wine that is at least a full decade more advanced than the 1996. This is a wine that will probably always be just a touch hard-edged in style, but it will offer up good drinking over the course of its peak of maturity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of underbrush, black cherries, woodsmoke, roses, a touch of gamebird and camphor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, tangy and gently autumnal finish. I suspect the tannins here are always going to be a touch chewy, even as they fade more fully, but paired up with food,

this is not a big deal. This vintage of Brunate is getting pretty close to its plateau of peak maturity, but it is not quite there yet. 2018-2040. **92.**

1989 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

Our 1990 Brunate was corked, but the 1989 was utterly pristine, and I would have been crushed if it had been the 1989 that was off and the 1990 that was in good condition, as the difference in quality between the legendary 1989s and the overrated and simply solid 1990s is very, very large. The 1989 is the greatest young Brunate I have ever tasted from Marcarini, offering up a magical bouquet of black cherries, raw cocoa, beautifully complex soil tones, woodsmoke, just a touch of camphor, dried roses, fresh almonds and a dollop of road tar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and magically pure, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, seamless, ripe tannins, superb acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long, refined and powerful finish. This has everything one could ever ask for in a great bottle of Brunate, and today, all this legend in waiting needs is a bit more hibernation time in the cellar. 2020-2060+. **96+.**

1982 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

Readers may recall that the bottle of 1982 Brunate that I reported on as part of the feature on the estate was not handled ideally prior to a vertical tasting that I attended in preparation for that report, so I was very happy to cross paths with a perfect bottle that had not been shaken up on the way to the dinner on this particular evening. This is clearly a great vintage of Marcarini Brunate and the wine is drinking at its apogee today, delivering scents of cherries, camphor, underbrush, road tar, fresh oregano and a lovely topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure and beautifully focused, with its full-bodied and very complex personality still showing a bit of moderate tannin, great focus and grip, superb complexity and marvelous length and balance on the finish. This has just reached the beginning of what will be a long period of peak drinkability, and unless one was smart enough to buy multiple cases of this wine, there would be no harm in letting this sit still a few more years in the cellar and let a touch more of its tannin fall away. But, it is an absolutely delicious glass of Barolo today and I fully understand that some folks may not want to wait any longer to enjoy this great wine! 2014-2040. **94.**

1978 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

I love the 1978 Marcarini Brunate and this most recent bottle was another stellar example of both the vintage and this great *terroir*. The beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a vibrant and fully mature mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of spiced meats, raw cocoa, *sous bois*, camphor, fresh almond and oregano in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and into its apogee, with a rock solid core of sweet fruit, great soil inflection, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, well-balanced and modestly tannic finish. Great juice in its prime, but with decades and decades of life still ahead of it. 2014-2055. **95.**

1974 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

I like the 1974 Baroli, but it is a vintage that probably needs drinking up in the next decade or so, except for the most structured bottlings. The '74 Brunate from Marcarini is quite tertiary in its aromatic constellation of dried cherries, forest floor, gamebirds, anise, oregano, road tar and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now fairly tarry in personality, with still a good, solid core, fine complexity and a bit of old school tannin still perking up the backend and likely to be there for the remainder of this wine's life on the plateau. 2014-2025+. **89.**

1971 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

I could drink wines like the brilliant 1971 Marcarini Brunate once a week and never get tired of them, as this is a brilliant bottle of Barolo in full bloom. The deep, complex and simply stunning nose delivers scents of red and black cherries, cocoa, gamebirds, nutskin, woodsmoke, a nice touch of licorice and a gloriously complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and magically complex, with a sappy core, great transparency, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused, poised and intensely flavored finish. A brilliant wine! 2014-2040+. **95+**.

1970 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

The 1970 vintage of Marcarini’s Brunate has reached a beautiful moment in its evolution, as it is very, very transparent and elegant in profile and really is quite “Burgundian” in its synthesis of fruit and soil elements. The refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex mix of cherries, sweet almonds, autumnal soil tones, dried herbs, camphor and a dollop of spiced meats in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very soil-driven in personality, with fine intensity, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and tertiary finish. Lovely juice at its peak, but with still some life ahead of it. 2014-2025+. **92**.

1968 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

I was very impressed how good this wine was for an off vintage. There is a certain four-square nature to the palate, but other than that, this is a really tasty bottle of mature Barolo in its prime. The bouquet is deep and impressively complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, road tar, camphor, charred wood, beef bouillon, bitter almond, onion skin and heather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fairly tarry in personality, with a good core, still a bit of tannin and fine length and grip on the fine finish. A superb wine for the year. 2014-2030. **89**.

1967 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

The 1967 Marcarini Brunate is one of my favorite wines of this very underrated vintage. This most recent bottle was lovely, offering up a complex and still quite vibrant nose of red and black cherries, camphor, nutskins, a nice touch of road tar, raw cocoa and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a touch on the young side, with a sappy core of fruit, great soil signature, moderate, beautifully-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. As I noted in my article on Marcarini, I have had the pleasure to drink many bottles of the 1967 Brunate, but this is the first one in many years that I have encountered that still seemed a bit youthful! A beautiful vintage for this cru. 2014-2035. **94**.

1967 Barolo “Brunate” Riserva Speciale- Marcarini

As I noted in the article on Marcarini, the couple of bottles of the 1967 Barolo “Brunate” Riserva Speciale that I had previously tasted were good, but I wondered if there might be better examples out there than the few that had crossed my path. Well, this pristine bottle answered that question rather convincingly in the affirmative! This is a great wine, soaring from the glass in a display of aromatic fireworks, delivering notes of cherries, cocoa, anise, nutskins, gamebirds, a beautifully complex base of soil, gentle notes of tar and herbs, as well as a pronounced and very beautiful topnote of truffles. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and brilliantly complex, with a sappy core, great transparency, superb focus, melting tannins and magical length and grip on the pure and vibrant finish. A great, great wine. 2014-2035. **95+**.

1964 Barolo “Brunate” Riserva di Famiglia- Marcarini

At our tasting, the bottle of the 1964 Brunate was not a perfect example, but the bottle of the very, very rare '64 Riserva di Famiglia was absolutely brilliant. I had only had the opportunity to taste this wine on one previous occasion, many years ago in Napa Valley (with of course, Mannie Berk of the Rare Wine Company!) and that bottle had not been pristine, so I was delighted to find this bottle in absolutely perfect condition. This is a gorgeous wine that delivers a magical bouquet of cherries, summer truffles, camphor, nutskin, a marvelously complex base of autumnal soil tones, gamebirds and a nice touch of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and brilliantly balanced, with tertiary layers of complexity, a fine core, great focus and grip and superb length on the refined and stunning finish. One of the legends of the post-war years in the Langhe! 2014-2040. **96.**

Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

This tasting of the wines from Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio, organized by the Rare Wine Company, took place back in the late autumn of 2010, and several of the wines that were served at this tasting found their way into articles about specific Piemontese vintages such as 1982, 1978, 1964 and 1961 in the year or two after the dinner. However, there were still several wines from this tasting whose notes were sitting here in my files, and either were written up way back in the spring of 2008 in the profile of Mauro Mascarello and his son Giuseppe, or have never previously appeared in the newsletter. For new subscribers who may not have seen the article on Cantine Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio, it can be found in Issue Fifteen (May-June 2008) in the database or you can email me and I will send you a copy manually.

2007 Barolo “Monprivato”- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

The 2007 Monprivato was not part of the vertical tasting, but as I crossed paths with this wine recently and had not yet posted a note on the vintage, I thought I would include it here. This is a very ripe wine for Monprivato, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol, and the wine suffers a bit in terms of focus and precision from its slightly heady octane- though it is impressively red fruity and shows no signs of backend heat. The bouquet is complex and accessible mix of baked cherries, orange peel, coffee, gamebirds, woodsmoke, *sous bois* and rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly plush on the attack, with a good signature of soil, softish tannins, relatively low acids and a long, slightly blurry finish. This is a perfectly good bottle of Barolo that will drink well on the early side, but it is not a great vintage of Monprivato. 2016-2035+. **88+.**

2006 Barolo “Santo Stefano di Perno”- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

The 2006 Santo Stefano di Perno from the Mascarellos was likewise, tasted outside the confines of the Rare Wine Company tasting, and is a very promising, young bottle of top flight Barolo. The deep and youthful nose offers up a nascently complex blend of cherries, gentle notes of road tar, orange peel, spit-roasted gamebirds, fresh oregano, the first vestiges of *sous bois* and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with firm, ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip, excellent potential for complexity at maturity and a very long, youthful and beautifully balanced finish. All this superb young Barolo needs is time in the cellar. 2020-2075. **93+.**



Mauro Mascarello decanting old Monprivato prior to a tasting I attended in Los Angeles in 2008.

2001 Barolo “Monprivato”- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

It had been three years since I had last tasted the beautiful 2001 Monprivato when this vertical tasting popped up, courtesy of the Rare Wine Company, and I was delighted to see our evening would begin with the 2001s. The '01 Monprivato is well on its way to being one of the legendary recent vintages of this great vineyard, as the wine offers up a simply stellar bouquet of cherries, roses, a touch of orange peel, woodsmoke, a bit of camphor and a fabulous base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave and elegant on the attack, with a great core of fruit, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and very pure finish. This will be a great wine, but give it a bit more time. 2018-2050+. **94+**.

2001 Barolo “Cà d’Morrizio” Riserva- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

Whereas I had tasted the 2001 Monprivato on several occasions prior to this autumn tasting, I had never had the pleasure of tasting the 2001 Cà d’Morrizio. The wine’s color is notably deeper than the Monprivato, and the deep, young and stunning nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, bonfires, a touch of game, road tar, new leather, fresh herb tones and another superb signature of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with a rock solid core, tangy acids and exceptional length and grip on the focused and still very primary finish. This will need more time than the 2001 Monprivato to blossom, but it will be a monument in the fullness of time! 2022-2070. **96**.

1996 Barolo “Monprivato”- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

The 1996 Monprivato is also noticeably darker in color than its 2001 counterpart, and the wine is destined for greatness in the not too distant future. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of black cherries, camphor, gamebirds, *sous bois*, bonfires, fresh thyme and a marvelous base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plenty structured, with bottomless depth at the core, firm, old school tannins and stunning grip and focus on the very, very long, still fairly chewy finish. This may well need as many years as the 2001 Monprivato to soften up structurally- though it is already starting to show the first signs of secondary complexity in its aromatic profile. 2018-2060+. **95.**

1996 Barolo “Cà d’Morrisio” Riserva- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

As was the case with the 2001, this was the first opportunity that I had found to taste the 1996 Cà d’Morrisio and the wine is brilliant. The deep, pure and very flamboyant nose jumps from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, orange peel, game, stony soil tones, a gentle touch of road tar, camphor and herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and almost sappy at the core, with great, sturdy and seamless structural elements, stellar focus and brilliant length and grip on the youthful, but expansive finish. This will be one of the legendary wines of the 1996 vintage. 2022-2075+. **97+.**

1958 Barolo- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

While I had tasted the beautiful 1958s from the Mascarello family on a couple of previous occasions, this was the first time that I had ever had the *Normale* and the Riserva side by side at a tasting. The 1958 Barolo includes a very significant percentage of Monprivato in its blend, as this was still twelve years before Mauro Mascarello would convince his father to bottle the Monprivato on its own, and the wine shows some of the inherent elegance of that great *terroir* in its aromatic constellation of dried cherries, exotic spice tones, orange peel, coffee, *sous bois*, sweet onion, rose petals and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its apogee, with lovely mid-palate intensity, tangy acids, beautiful transparency and great length and grip on the pure, wide open and dancing finish. A great wine by any measure. 2010-2030. **95.**

1958 Barolo Riserva- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

The 1958 Giuseppe Mascarello Barolo Riserva is every bit as brilliant and refined as the *Normale* from this great vintage, which is intriguing, as back in this era, one often will encounter Riserva bottlings that are more powerful in personality, but without the same great transparency as the regular Barolo from the same vintage. However, this is emphatically not the case with this beautifully refined and elegant 1958 Riserva, which soars from the glass in a mélange of cherries, blood orange, spice tones, old leather, *sous bois*, bonfires and nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully resolved, with a fine core, amazingly, still a touch of backend tannin, bright, perfectly-integrated acids and stunning length and grip on the focused and very complex finish. A great, great wine, but it is impossible for me to pick a favorite amongst these two magical 1958 Barolo bottlings, as they are simply a tad different in personality, but equal in quality. 2010-2030+. **95.**

Assorted Other Old Piemontese Gems

I probably would have included these notes in the article on older vintages of Barolo and Barbaresco that appeared in Issue Forty-Eight, but I had misfiled these notes and found them tucked in with my vertical tastings from Langhe producers, so they are a couple issues late in getting into print. Better late than never I guess. Several of these notes go back to 2011 and a

Rare Wine Company event in San Francisco in which I participated, where we compared the 1967, 1964 and 1961 vintages in the Langhe. If one includes the (again, very underrated) 1970 vintage in the decade of the 1960s, this was probably the most successful decade in the region in the twentieth century until global warming started to throw its weight around and the great decades of the 1980s and 1990s came along. There are a few other, recent notes on impressive Barolo or Barbaresco bottlings included here as well.

1990 Barbaresco Riserva- Bruno Giacosa

This was the first time I had ever seen a bottling of Barbaresco simply labeled as “Riserva” from Bruno Giacosa, with no mention of a vineyard designation, so I have to assume that he decided to blend the production from a couple of different vineyards to make this cuvée in 1990. The wine in any case is young, complex and very promising, as it offers up a nose of cherries, a very discreet touch of anise, tar, violets, complex soil tones and surprisingly, an overt touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fairly full-bodied, deep and currently quite tarry in its adolescence, with tangy acids, very good, but not great mid-palate depth, and good length and grip on the finish. At this point the wine is still decidedly on the young side and still a bit pinched on the palate, but it should be quite good with another five to seven years of cellaring. It is in that slightly “dulled” period that many Giacosas go through at this stage, and I may well be underrating it a tad. 2013-2035+? **89+?**

1990 Barbaresco “Santo Stefano” Riserva- Bruno Giacosa

The 1990 Santo Stefano Riserva has continued to cruise along as if time will never touch it, and in the interim of two years since I wrote up my historical piece on Bruno Giacosa and last tasted the wine, it seems even younger than it did at that time (though it may well just be a reflection of this particularly youthful bottle). The bouquet remains, deep, pure and youthful, as it offers up scents of red cherries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, road tar, herbs, a great base of soil and a developing topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the finish. This still needs a few years more of cellaring before it really starts to hit on all cylinders. 2016-2050. **93+.**

1990 Barolo- Bartolo Mascarello

It had been several years since I last opened a bottle of the 1990 Bartolo out of my cellar, and as several of the 1990s I have tasted in recent times were really starting to drink very well, I thought the same might be true for this wine. Wrong! This is still a fairly young bottle of old school Barolo that has not yet started to blossom and remains at least five years away from beginning to drink with some of the generosity of maturity, but it is also one of the purest and most precise wines that one is likely to find from this fairly roasted vintage. The bouquet on the '90 Bartolo is excellent, offering up a youthful blend of black cherries, cassis, oregano, road tar, roasted game and bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very precise for a 1990, with a rock solid core, nascent complexity, tangy acids and still a fair bit of firm tannin perking up the very long, perfectly balanced finish. This has to be one of the wines of the vintage in 1990! 2020-2050+. **94.**

1967 Barolo- Cappellano

The 1967 Cappellano Barolo is a really fine example of this underrated vintage, offering up outstanding transparency and complexity in its aromatic blend of dried cherries, orange peel, sweet onion, coffee, gentle tariness, *sous bois* and dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very, very long, with fine focus and complexity, an impressive signature of soil,

tangy acids and fine length and grip on the still moderately tannic and spicy finish. Fine, old school juice, that it is a bit more elegant in the '67 vintage than many of the older Cappellano wines that I have tasted. 2012-2030. **92.**

1967 Barolo- Oddero

I wrote a fair bit about the superb Oddero Baroli from this era back in October of 2010, when reporting on a comparative tasting of the legendary 1971, 1964 and 1958 vintages in the Langhe. I love the Oddero wines from this era (not that the new releases are not anything but superb as well!) and these are some of the best-kept secrets out there today for Barolo from this era. The 1967 is a beautiful and utterly refined bottle of mature Barolo, offering up a very complex and captivating bouquet of cherries, oranges, woodsmoke, gamebirds, coffee, oregano, gentle tariness and leather. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and seamless, with its full-bodied format perfectly resolved today. The wine has superb intensity at the core, excellent complexity and focus and a very long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This is a superb bottle of Barolo at its peak of maturity. 2011-2030+. **93+.**

1967 Barolo- Giacomo Conterno

The 1967 Barolo *Normale* from Giovanni Conterno is a masterpiece. I once owned quite a bit of this wine and drank every bottle with great pleasure, but I have finished my cache up now and only cross paths with the wine when fortune smiles my way. After a bottle reported on back in December of last year that was good, but not one hundred percent pristine, I was very, very happy to drink from another perfect example of this magical wine. This most recent bottle was another absolutely stellar showing for the wine, soaring from the glass in a beautiful mélange of black cherries, game, white truffles, orange rind, glorious autumnal soil tones, woodsmoke, leather, a bit of road tar and a pungent topnote of roses and violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and absolutely complete, with a sappy core of fruit, great soil inflection, melting tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. Just a glorious bottle of Conterno Barolo. 2014-2035+. **95.**

1964 Barolo- Cappellano

The 1964 Cappellano Barolo is a beautiful example of the vintage, and it too shares a real sense of elegance and refinement with the 1967 Cappellano that I have not usually associated with this estate's more broad-shouldered wines, and perhaps this is just an indication that I have not been aging my Cappellanos long enough? In any event, the 1964 is stunning, jumping from the glass in a beautiful and complex mélange of cherries, blood orange, gamebirds, tobacco ash, herb tones, leather and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly seamless in its resolution today, with a lovely core, beautiful focus and balance, nearly melted tannins and superb length and grip on the tangy and very classy finish. A beautiful, beautiful bottle of fully mature Barolo from a great vintage! 2011-2035. **94.**

1964 Barolo- Giacomo Conterno

For whatever reason, the last couple of bottles of the 1964 Barolo *Normale* from Giovanni Conterno that I have crossed paths with have been in the very good, but not great camp. Ironically, half a dozen years ago, I had a small pile of bottles of the 1964, all of which were in splendid shape and superior to the most recent bottles I have tasted. As is so often mentioned, when one is buying bottles at this age, particularly in the realm of Barolo, it is luck of the draw on how older bottles were stored. In any event, this bottle was very good and better than the last one I wrote up back in October of 2010, as it offered up a bit more vibrancy than the last bottle, but still not the profound depth and purity of my earlier cache. The bouquet is a lovely

and quite ready blend of desiccated cherries, gamebird, road tar, forest floor, oregano and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and tangy, with fine mid-palate concentration, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the fairly tarry finish. (Pristine bottles of this wine merit a score four or five points higher). 2011-2030. **91.**

1964 Barolo- Bartolo Mascarello

In 1964, Bartolo Mascarello was still working alongside of his father, Giulio, and the two generations fashioned one of the legendary wines of the post-war era in the Langhe in this vintage. This is an utterly magical wine that perfectly captures the blended style of Barolo that the Mascarello family still champions, as the pure and sappy fruit of their Cannubi holdings are beautifully synthesized into the more serious structural elements of some of their other vineyard sources. The bouquet is utterly brilliant, soaring from the glass in a sappy blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gentle notes of tar, forest floor, orange peel, oregano, a bit of dried red fruit and a topnote of heather. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still shows marvelous mid-palate depth, with stunning focus and complexity, impeccable balance, modest tannins and a very long, vibrant and tangy finish that shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon! A beautiful wine in passionate defense of Barolo's traditional, blended style- just like father and son Mascarello would have hoped for this great vintage! 2011-2040+. **96.**

1964 Barolo- Oddero

This was the second time I had drunk the 1964 Oddero Barolo in the span of six months, and the wine was once again stellar. The bouquet is very elegant and superbly complex, delivering a very refined, vibrant constellation of cherries, tobacco ash, coffee, gentle notes of road tar, oregano, anise, a complex base of soil and a nice touch of camphor in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great focus and complexity, still a bit of backend tannin to carry it far into the future, excellent focus and grip, tangy acids and a very, very long, vibrant and utterly poised finish. This is a great, relatively unknown '64 Barolo! 2011-2035. **94.**

1964 Barolo- Francesco Rinaldi e Figli

After writing my feature on the superb wines of Francesco Rinaldi e Figli back in the summer of 2010, I have continued to drink their wines with great pleasure, with this superb bottle of 1964 Barolo one of the more recent oldies of theirs to cross my path. The wine offers up a superb and complex nose of black cherries, road tar, a bit of roasted game, gentle balsamic overtones, fresh herbs, forest floor and a lovely topnote of licorice. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sports excellent mid-palate depth, with a fine signature of soil, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and still slightly chewy finish. A fine, fine 1964! 2013-2030+. **94.**

1961 Barolo- Cappellano

The 1961 Cappellano Barolo is another fine example of the vintage, but it does not show quite the same focus and precision as the 1967 or 1964 from this house. The bouquet is a superb blend of cherries, bonfires, roasted game, orange peel, dried herb tones, coffee and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite robust structurally, with a good core, a nice vein of minerality, suave tannins and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is a very good bottle of old Barolo that is drinking very well and will continue to hold nicely for several more years, but it has probably been at its peak already for twenty-five years. 2011-2025+. **91.**



1961 Barolo- Giacomo Conterno

The 1961 Barolo from Giovanni Conterno is a great wine and will make no one pine for Monfortino when this natural beauty is in the glass. I have been fortunate to drink this vintage of Conterno Barolo with some frequency over the years, and this most recent bottle was everything one could have asked for in a perfectly mature, superb Barolo, though this bottle was more black fruity than the last couple I have drunk. The bouquet here is a deep, complex and meaty blend of dark berries, black cherries, beef broth, bonfires, roasted venison, fennel seed, nutskins and forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a fine core, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and robust finish. The more red fruity and pure bottles of this I have had over the years are more my paradigm for this wine, but this particular bottle still delivered plenty of pleasure. 2011-2030. **93.**

1961 Barolo- Bartolo Mascarello

It had been nearly a decade since I last tasted a bottle of the 1961 Bartolo Mascarello Barolo and the wine has seemingly not been touched by time in the interim. Perhaps this most recent bottle was just in even better condition than the previous bottles I have enjoyed, but my projected window of drinkability for this wine back in the article on Bartolo in the fall of 2007 now seems rather ridiculously conservative. The utterly brilliant bouquet shows plenty of Cannubi character in its complex blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, gentle tariness, tobacco ash, spiced meats, coffee and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a sappy core of fruit, stunning soil inflection, melting

tannins, bright acids and stunning length and grip on the very complex and refined finish. Clearly, the last few bottles of this wine that I tasted were a touch more advanced, and this wine still has many, many years of life still ahead of it. A beautiful bottle of Barolo. 2011-2025+. **94.**

1961 Barolo- Oddero

While I have had the pleasure to taste several bottles of Oddero Barolo from this era, this was the first example of the 1961 that I had crossed paths with and the wine was absolutely splendid. The deep, pure and very refined nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of red and black cherries, road tar, tobacco ash, forest floor, a gentle note of anise and an autumnal note of charred wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very vibrant, with a lovely core of sweet fruit, fine focus and grip, melted tannin, good acids and excellent balance on the complex and very long finish. There is a touch more of the “noble rusticity” to the 1961 Oddero than is found in the more elegant 1964 and 1967 versions, but this too is an outstanding bottle of old Barolo with decades of life still ahead of it. 2011-2035+. **93+.**

1961 Barolo- Francesco Rinaldi e Figli

The 1961 Barolo from Francesco Rinaldi is a fine example of the vintage and one of the more red fruity vintages of this wine that one will find from the decade of the 1960s. The really lovely and complex nose wafts from the glass in a constellation of red and black cherries, the customary Rinaldi meatiness, road tar, forest floor, balsam boughs, a touch of curry and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very long, with still a bit of old school, chewy tannin, good acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and fully mature finish. This is cut in the classic, robust Francesco Rinaldi style, but has plenty of life still in it and is drinking beautifully today. 2013-2035. **93.**