

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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**MARGUET PÈRE ET FILS- AMBONNAY’S “EXHIBIT A”
IN TODAY’S CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN CHAMPAGNE**



Benoit Marguet has made so many positive changes in recent years at this fine old family domaine in Ambonnay that it is hard to even think of this as the same estate today as it was a decade ago. Benoit first began to run the family property back in 1999, but has changed things rather dramatically here since the year of 2009, when he decided to convert the family’s vineyards (or the vast majority of them) over to *biodynamique* viticulture and, in the process, utterly transform the wines of this fine estate. Today Benoit Marguet farms ten hectares of vines, all within the Grand Cru villages of Ambonnay and Bouzy, and eight of these are farmed under biodynamics, with the other two hectares of vines in Ambonnay still farmed with some chemical treatments and the fruit sold off under long-term contract to Champagne Krug. I am not sure why these two hectares are not farmed *biodynamically*, and it will be interesting to see in the future if Krug and Benoit Marguet decide to convert these two hectares over to biodynamics as well. The Marguet family has been important vineyard owners in the Ambonnay area since the middle of the nineteenth century. In fact, Benoit’s great, great grand uncle was one of the first *vignerons* in all of France to come up with today’s solution to the scourge of phylloxera that devastated the country’s wine-producing regions in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as he hypothesized that American rootstocks would protect his vines from the louse back in the early 1870s and had replanted all of his own vineyards onto American rootstocks by 1875. Sadly, at that time, the local *Préfet* ordered him to grub up the vineyards and replant them again on French rootstocks, as it was not yet legal to use American rootstocks in the vineyards of Champagne, and twenty-

five years later, after all of the Champagne *vignobles* had been wiped out by phylloxera, the authorities in the region finally relented and allowed American rootstocks into the vineyards! Like so many small and middle-sized *vignerons* in the Champagne region at the end of the nineteenth century, phylloxera was a financial disaster for the Marguet family, who could not afford the cost of replanting all over again and all of their vineyards were sold off. It would not be for another generation until the family could once again start to piece together some vineyard parcels and return to their previous lives as grape growers in the region.

When the Marguet family had to sell off their original vineyard parcels in the aftermath of phylloxera, they were all sold to the house of Henriot and the Champagne from the *Grande Marque* was actually known as “Henriot-Marguet” for the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century. The Marguet family, one generation down the road, eventually started to cobble together some small parcels of vines as opportunity allowed prior to the first world war, with plots purchased in the villages of Verzenay, Mailly and a few other communes and they began to bottle a bit of their own bubbly under their own name again in 1905. The marriage of Benoit’s mother and father in 1970 brought about the current vineyard configuration for the family domaine, as Madame Marguet (*née* Mademoiselle Bonnerave) had come from a family with superb vineyard holdings in Ambonnay and with her marriage, she brought back to the Marguet family a very firm vineyard foundation in this most important Grand Cru village. Today, the family parcels in villages such as Verzenay and Mailly have all been sold off and the Marguet family farms their ten hectares of vines solely in the two villages of Ambonnay and Bouzy, with eight hectares of their production used for the wines under their own label, and as noted above, the production from the other two hectares (in the village of Ambonnay) sold under contract to Krug. From 1970 until 2005, the family domaine was known as Marguet-Bonnerave, reflecting both sides of the family heritage in Champagne production. In 2005, the name was simplified to Marguet Père et Fils.

A seminal moment in the history of the estate came in 2006, when Benoit’s young daughter, Valentine, was diagnosed with leukemia at the age of two and a half. Valentine’s school was in the village of Mesnil-sur-Oger (situated quite close to the vineyards) and it seems very likely that her cancer can be linked to the heavy use of chemicals in the vineyards in the village by many *vignerons*. Happily, Valentine, who just celebrated her eleventh birthday, is now in complete remission and happy and healthy today, but as Benoit recalls, “it was quite a shock when she was first diagnosed.” Valentine’s illness seems to have been the tipping point for the very reflective Benoit to finally push hard for changes on how he was working in the vineyards and in the cellars at the domaine and finally get his parents to accede to his wishes. However, as Monsieur Marguet recalls, “I had already decided to start organic farming before that event,” as “I had been studying (this form of agriculture) since 1997”, but “I had to wait until my parents would allow me to farm the way I wanted to, and it was quite a battle!” Finally, in the wake of the remission of Valentine’s illness, Benoit went to his extended family and told them that if he was not given *carte blanche* to change anything and everything that needed to be altered to bring the farming and winemaking into harmony with nature, then he was simply done running the estate. Happily, the Marguet family acceded to his wishes (probably with plenty of reservations at the outset, as one should not underestimate how uncommon organic farming still is in the region!) and Benoit began to systematically change over eight hectares of vines to *biodynamique* viticulture immediately, with only the family’s two hectares where the fruit is sold to Krug left

alone to be farmed under more conventional methods that include some chemical treatments. He has since expanded his organic farming regimen to start plowing his vines only by horse in the last couple of years, which is less invasive in the vineyards, as most tractors tend to compact the soil far more profoundly than the big work horses Benoit now uses to plow his parcels. The impact of the changeover to *biodynamique* farming cannot be overstated, as his wines have skyrocketed upwards in quality since this transition and it seems very clear that he is getting far better quality fruit to work with these days than was the case in the past.

The changes that Monsieur Marguet has finally been able to institute in his viticultural regimen at the family domaine are of vital importance, and this is something that more *vignerons* in Champagne really need to do as well, as one cannot overstate just how unhealthy some of the farming practices used in the region over the last fifty years have been (and continue to be) for the local population. Benoit Marguet has also undertaken equally fundamental changes in the cellar since 2009, eschewing commercial yeasts in favor of utilizing solely indigenous yeasts for fermentations, vinifying more and more parcels on their own in small, used Burgundy casks or larger oak *foudres* (a couple of these are shaped like eggs and designed by Benoit himself), bottling with lower or no *dosage* and often cutting back dramatically on the amount of sulfur he uses during the *elevage* and bottling of his wines. It is as if he has left the vinous life he led prior to 2008 completely behind him, as his holistic approach to farming and winemaking clearly is all part of a life philosophy of balance for Benoit and finding one's destined place in the world at large. Benoit Marguet is a deeply philosophical and serious *vigneron* and one cannot help but be caught up in his intensity and passion when visiting the cellar or tramping out in the vines with him. One of the most impressive things about all of the changes that Benoit has instituted at the family domaine since 2009 is that the quality of the wines has soared upwards since that time, and this is unequivocally now one of the greatest sources for Champagne to be found in the entire region. The Marguet wines prior to the grand transition that took place here were perfectly good, solid examples of Ambonnay and Bouzy fruit, with broad shoulders, good depth and structure and quite fine complexity and potential of aging. I was always content to drink them in this era, as the Marguet wines at this time were in the "very good, but not great" camp of bubbly. However, all of that has changed here manifestly since 2009. However, as Champagne is a wine that needs several years of aging in the cellar before it is ready for release, we are only just now starting to see just how profound the changes have been here and we are still only looking at the tip of the iceberg of the quality revolution at Champagne Marguet.

Of the ten hectares of vineyards that the Marguet domaine farms today, only seventy *ares* are in Bouzy, with 9.3 hectares in their home village of Ambonnay. In Ambonnay, they have parcels in the *lieux à dits* of Les Saints Remys, Les Beurys, Les Crayères, La Grande Ruelle, Les Bermonts and Le Parc, with five of these now planned as single vineyard bottlings and already resting *sur latte* in the cellars for future release, or having just been placed in the market in the last year or two. The first of the single vineyard bottlings that Benoit Marguet released was the Les Crayères from the 2008 vintage, which I reported about in last year's Champagne feature. This is an absolutely brilliant wine that I had a chance to drink again this past April while in the region and the extra year's additional bottle age has not taken any luster away from this stunning bottle. The 2009 follow-up vintage of Les Crayères is another gorgeous bottle of cellar-worthy Champagne and has already firmly cemented this cuvée as one of the finest single vineyard bottlings in the firmament of Champagne. The other four single vineyard bottlings that Benoit

has aging in the cellars from various vintages are the Les Bermonts, which will be a Blanc de Blancs in its first release, Le Parc, La Grande Ruelle and Les Saints Remys. The 2010 vintage of Les Bermonts was just being released in the shops in Reims when I was here in April and will soon ship to export markets, with the other three single vineyard bottlings still aging on their fine lees in the Marguet cellars and at least a year or two away from release. The inaugural vintages of Le Parc and La Grande Reulle will be from 2011 and the first Les Saints Remys will hail from the 2014 vintage. As Benoit is quick to point out, “there is nothing systematic” about deciding if a specific vineyard will be bottled on its own in a given year, but “only when I have a *coup de Coeur*” regarding a certain parcel, as “it is always the tasting that decides” if a certain wine will be bottled each year. He continues, “in some years the perfect picking time might be missed—picking two days too early or too late” so the wine will go into one of the blended bottlings. Ultimately, it is the quality of the wine itself and how it reflects its underlying *terroir* that decides if it will stand on its own. Monsieur Marguet notes that some of the *lieux à dits* bottlings may also vary in its *cépages* depending on the year, as, for example, “the les Crayères could be a blend of pinot noir and chardonnay in some years (as is the case in both 2008 and 2009), or a Blanc de Noirs (as is the case in 2014) or a Blanc de Blancs,” depending on the specifics of each growing season. There are no rules, other than the wine must be stellar in quality.



Benoit Marguet (center), with two of his American importers, Michael Carleton (left) and Jeffrey Hellman.

Additionally, Monsieur Marguet has also begun to produce a line of *terroir* bottlings that he is making from friends' grapes that he has purchased in a few villages outside of his home vineyards in Ambonnay and Bouzy, which are made entirely from organically-farmed grapes. These very small batch "Cru" bottlings allow Benoit to work with a few different great *terroirs* which intrigue him, such as chardonnay grapes from Mesnil-sur-Oger or pinot noir from Aÿ. As is the case with the single vineyard bottlings from the Marguet family's own vineyards, this project is still in its infancy and the only *terroir* bottling I have had a chance to taste so far and have seen in the marketplace in Reims is the 2010 vintage Blanc de Blancs from Mesnil-sur-Oger, with the others still aging in the cellars. The 2011 vintage will see another Blanc de Blancs released under this project from a combination of fruit from Avize and Cramant, and then Blanc de Noirs bottlings from the villages of Aÿ and Bouzy in the 2013 vintage to further expand this series. The *Lieux à Dits* and Cru bottlings augment the standard lineup of cuvées from Marguet Père et Fils, which include an exceptional non-vintage Brut, which has been renamed as "Elements" starting with the 2010 base year, a non-vintage Extra Brut Rosé and vintage-dated Extra Brut bottlings of both Rosé and a blended wine, which is now be labeled under the name of "Amboniacus" (the ancient Roman from whom the village of Ambonnay takes its name). The great new lineup of bottlings from Benoit Marguet is rounded out by his completely organic *Tête de Cuvée*, "Sapience", which is also made entirely from grapes that he purchases from three of his close friends in the region.

As I noted at the outset, Benoit Marguet's daughter's illness has inspired transformation in the way he lives his life, and this very fundamental change extends far beyond farming and winemaking for Monsieur Marguet. When one visits with Benoit, one quickly sees that he takes a very philosophical approach to every single facet of his life today, and everything that he does happens after he has spent considerable time reflecting upon a proper course. A visit with Benoit Marguet is not a typical tasting in the region, with the *joie de vivre* that is so easily found in Champagne tasting rooms elsewhere defining a visit here, as Benoit takes a very serious approach to all elements of his life and this easily comes across to visitors. This is not to say that he is not very warm and gracious with guests, but the ebullient mirth that one finds when visiting with one of Benoit's close friends, Vincent Laval, for example, is not the *modus operandi* when visiting in the Marguet cellars, as there is a current of intellectual and philosophical rigor here that is very much in evidence. Champagne has been, for much of the last seventy years, somewhat of an industrially-made wine, with astonishingly high quality often found in the bottle, but behind the scenes, a wine that has been very much defined by low risk decision making in the cellars and vineyards. Given this well-established culture in the region, Benoit Marguet's passionate approach to *biodynamiques*, natural winemaking in the cellars and a very holistic approach to life in general can come as a bit of a shock, as it has heretofore been far from typical in Champagne. However, from my perspective, Benoit Marguet is not a *vigneron* that has fallen in love simply with the methodology of "natural winemaking" (which can happen with some frequency in the world of "natural wines", where the methods are sometimes seemingly valued over end results), but someone who has embraced important fundamental changes in the vineyards and cellars with the ultimate goal of making far better wines. The driving force behind these changes may not have to do ultimately with the quality of the wines produced at Marguet Père et Fils, as one assumes that since Valentine's illness, Benoit has been looking at far bigger metaphysical questions, but this has most emphatically been the result of all the changes he has

made at the family domaine since that time, and as a consequence, the quality of the Marguet wines today is amongst the very finest to be found in all of Champagne.

When it comes to passion for biodynamics, Benoit Marguet is certainly one of the most eloquently outspoken proponents of this method of farming in the Champagne region, and his zeal for this approach to agriculture is not really dissimilar to Vincent Charlot's, which I outlined in the last issue. He meticulously prepares his plant blends for treatments in the vineyards during the cycles of the growing season, uses essential oils as well to aid the vines in fighting off predatory diseases and pests, and, as alluded to above, he has plowed his entire eight hectares of vines that are farmed under *biodynamique* principals by horse since 2010. The Marguet family vineyards are beautifully healthy microsystems today, though one of the prices that must be paid for this type of farming is lower crop yields, which of course, would not have been an endearing aspect of the changeover to this method of farming to his initially resistant family. However, there can be little doubt that the exponential climb in overall quality of all the Marguet wines since the transition first began here in 2008 has won the allegiance of the house's expanding clientele and today it seems, no one concerned with the family domaine has any regrets about taking the plunge over to *biodynamique* viticulture. One imagines that this reality will not be lost on a growing number of *vignerons* in Champagne in the coming years (as was the case in Burgundy fifteen years ago), as better wines from superior grapes mean more clients.



In the cellars, several of the changes that Benoit Marguet has undertaken here can be found in the winemaking practices of a growing number of other star Grower-Récoltants in the region, such as the use exclusively of indigenous yeasts, barrel-fermentation of the *vins clairs*, using gravity for the movement of wines in the cellar, greater and greater reliance on isolating individual parcels for fermentation on their own (as opposed to producing large, blended tanks of *vins clairs* for fermentation, as was absolutely standard operating procedure in Champagne ten or fifteen years ago) and longer aging on the lees prior to disgorgement. All of these small steps in the cellars collectively lead to higher quality wines, and this has clearly been the case at Champagne Marguet since 2008. As noted above, Benoit Marguet's first vintage as head of the domaine was in 1999, and he made very, very good wines by the

inherited methods of his father right from the outset, but when one revisits one of the wines from the period of 1999 to 2007, one can see just how profound the differences in quality have become with all of the positive changes in the cellars and vineyards here since they began wholesale in 2008.

The Champagne Marguet *vins clairs* are now all barrel-fermented in what Benoit terms “rather young barrels, from new to nine years old”, with the average being three to five years of age for the casks. In addition, as I noted above, Benoit likes the shape of cement fermentation eggs, but prefers to use seasoned oak for his wines, so he has designed a pair of oak vats that are egg-shaped to augment his selection of older casks. All of the *vins clairs* here since 2009 now go through full malolactic in their casks or vats and then spend fully nine months aging *sur lies* prior to the *assemblage* in the June following the harvest. This is an extended aging period in barrel for the *vins clairs* by traditional Champagne standards, and again, this is something that one is seeing with some regularity in the cellars of the very finest *vignerons* in the region these days. As I noted above, only indigenous yeasts are used for the fermentation and little or no sulfur for the *elevage*, with no filtration and no pumping of the juice in the cellars, as everything is now moved by gravity by Benoit and his team at Champagne Marguet. As Monsieur Marguet observes, “the idea was born that the best wines could only be produced from naturally-grown grapes, followed by a great care in winemaking” and “we were convinced that (the combination of the two) led to wines with the most energy and harmony.” With this in mind, he has also extended how long his wines spend aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and preparation for market as well. In short, every step in both the vineyards and in the cellars these days at Champagne Marguet is predicated on doing things meticulously and as naturally as possible, so as to leave the least disruptive footprint on the planet and produce the very highest quality wines.

Like many of his contemporaries, Benoit Marguet has also moved to lower the level of *dosage* for all of his bottlings- not that he was ever particularly aggressive with adding back sweetness at disgorgement, but today, one will typically find that even his bottlings labeled as Brut will have only three to five grams per liter of *dosage*, and he has increased the number of *non-dosé* bottlings in the last couple of years as well. Consequently, all of his wines, whether it states so on the label or not, are effectively Extra Brut or Brut Nature. As he is compensating for lower *dosage* by longer time aging *sur latte*, the structural elements of the wines are still nicely rounded off with harmonious bottle age prior to release, so the need to balance youthfully brisk acidity with more sweetness is not evident in most of the Marguet wines today. As he is also now barrel-fermenting all of his *vins clairs* in older Burgundy casks or his egg-shaped *foudres*, the wines do not start out life as sharply defined by their spines of acidity as those fermented in stainless steel, and this seems to further diminishes the need for buffering sweetness in the wines. In addition, as noted above, all of the Marguet wines are produced from *vins clairs* that go through full malolactic fermentation these days, for Benoit echoes the philosophy of Marie-Noëlle Ledru that “malolactic fermentation is a natural step for the wines and I wish to make them with as little intervention as possible” and this further obviates the need for a bit more buffering sweetness from the *dosage*. In 2004 he began a solera for his reserve wines, but as this was prior to his wholesale adoption of *biodynamiques* in 2009, he has taken the extraordinary step of starting a second solera in 2010, so that all of the wines in this blend of reserve wines will have been farmed organically in the future, and he has bottled up the entirety of his first solera in his next release of his non-vintage bottling, which is called “Elements 10”, and which is

comprised of one-third of reserve wines from the solera started in 2004. Benoit Marguet is very much a purist in the best sense of the word!

As I noted back in my article on Champagne in Issue Fifty-One, where I wrote for the first time about the changes that Benoit Marguet had begun to institute at the family domaine in Ambonnay, one of the easiest ways to denote whether one was buying a wine from the older styles at Marguet Père et Fils or one of the newer, organically farmed versions, was to look at the color of the glass. The previous regimen's wines were bottled in dark, emerald green glass, whereas the post-2009 wines are in bottles made of light brown glass. Not surprisingly, as no detail is too small to pay attention to here, the light brown glass is better at blocking out harmful ultraviolet rays and hence, protecting the wines. Louis Roederer has recently made a similar change in the color of their bottles of their wines as well for this same reason. Benoit has augmented the change in color of bottles by changing his labels as well, which seems only fitting, given how profoundly different the wines have become since 2009. For example, his non-vintage Brut bottling, which was formerly labeled as "Brut Réserve" is now called "Elements", with the base year for this wine also denoted on the label, so that the first iteration of this bottling will be called "Elements 10", as it hails from the base year of 2010. It comes as no surprise that Benoit Marguet has designed the beautiful label for Elements himself, with an original rendition of the "tree of life" gracing the labels (and which would make great T-Shirts or golf shirts if Benoit ever wants to branch out into merchandising his design!). I tasted both "Elements 10" and "Elements 11" during my visit to the cellars in April and they are going to represent some of the very finest values in non-vintage bottlings in the market as they find their way into distribution in the very near future.

As I mentioned above, Benoit Marguet has begun to produce a line of "Cru" bottlings from purchased organic fruit, with each bottling hailing from one or two sources in a specific village (with the exception of the Blanc de Blancs bottling made from a blend of fruit from Cramant and Avize from the 2011 vintage and which he is extremely happy with how it has come out, so I am very much looking forward to tasting it next year). As Monsieur Marguet reflects, the "Cru" bottlings were "developed as a line of other single crus produced exclusively from growers' grapes in organic or biodynamic farming- either officially in conversion or already certified" that would augment his own single vineyard bottlings from the Marguet family parcels in Ambonnay and Bouzy. The winemaking practices for these wines from purchased grapes are identical to the wines produced from the Marguet family vineyards. The "Cru" bottlings are made in very small lots, typically around two thousand bottles of each, and were originated so that small *vignerons* that were friends of Benoit and were farming their parcels organically could find a home where their fruit was not just blended in with fruit from other producers using more industrial farming methods. This started with a friend in Mesnil-sur-Oger, who is a young *vigneron* and wished to experiment with organic farming in one of his family's parcels in the 2010 growing season, and Benoit purchased the grapes from this plot of vines to produce the very his first of his "Cru" bottlings. These are not designed to be permanent fixtures in the Marguet lineup, as they will be produced if and when high quality, organically-farmed fruit is available from friends, so, for example, the inaugural bottling from the young producer in Mesnil was not replicated in 2011, as the growing season was so difficult that the *vigneron* did not feel it was possible to farm that parcel organically in that year and needed to use chemical sprays to keep the rot at bay. So, the cast of characters for the "Cru" bottlings will change as

opportunity allows in the future, but they are a very interesting extension of the work that Benoit Marguet is doing today in his own parcels and excellent wines in their own right.

I would be remiss in not talking a bit more about the Rosé cuvées being produced at Marguet Père et Fils in recent times, as Ambonnay and Bouzy are quite famous pinot noir villages, and this is a real sweet spot for the domaine today. Interestingly, despite the fact that Champagne Marguet is in the heart and soul of pinot noir territory, the Rosé bottlings here are predominantly chardonnay! Benoit Marguet is really making stunning Rosé Champagnes these days, with the non-vintage bottling from the 2010 base year, which also included a disproportionately high percentage of reserve wines (as he was using up the solera started in 2004 and starting a new one in this year from wines made solely by *biodynamique* farming methods) was truly exceptional and the follow-up 2011 base year wine is also excellent, particularly when viewed in the context of how difficult this particular growing season was in Champagne. The non-vintage bottlings of Rosé here will typically include between six and seven percent still pinot noir in the blends, with a touch more than sixty percent of the blend made from chardonnay. For the vintage-dated Rosés, which from the 2009 vintage forwards will be called “Amboniacus Rosé”, include a far higher percentage of chardonnay than the non-vintage bottlings, with the 2009 version fully eighty-four percent of this white grape. There is also a bottling of Rosé from the “Cru Series” in the works from the 2011 vintage that will hail solely from Ambonnay fruit and be delineated as such on the label (though I have not yet had a chance to taste it, as it was still resting *sur latte* at the time of my April visit to the domaine.)

To my palate, despite the excellent quality of the *terroir* “Cru” lineup at Champagne Marguet, the *Lieux à Dits* bottlings are the most exciting new projects in the cellars at Marguet Père et Fils, with the first two vintages of Les Crayères utterly stunning young Champagnes. This is of course one of the most famous vineyards in all of Ambonnay, as it is one of the finest hillside vineyards in the village, situated at an elevation of one hundred thirty meters above sea level and located in the direction of Trépail. The Marguet bottling of Les Crayères heretofore has been produced from a blend of sixty-two percent chardonnay and thirty-eight percent pinot noir in its first two releases from 2008 and 2009, but as I mentioned above, the 2014 vintage from this superb vineyard will be the first Blanc de Noirs release in the series. The vines here were planted between 1965 and 1970. Just under twenty-four hundred bottles of the 2009 vintage of Les Crayères were produced by Benoit Marguet, with the wine aged four years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. Les Bermonts is a smaller vineyard that lies on a flatter section of vineyard land in Ambonnay, on what is called “The Tongue” by *vignerons* in the village, as it is where soils that have eroded down from the hillsides around the town have collected over the centuries. The family’s parcel is planted entirely to chardonnay vines that date back to 1952. The 2010 will be the first vintage produced here by Monsieur Marguet, with just over two thousand bottles crafted of this Blanc de Blancs cuvée; the wine spent three and a half years aging *sur latte*. A bit further down the road, the 2011 vintage will be released from two additional *Lieux à Dits* bottlings from Champagne Marguet, Le Parc and La Grande Ruelle. Le Parc is also situated on “The Tongue” of Ambonnay, down closer to the village on the complex base of eroded soils from the hillside vineyards up on the southern flanks of the Montagne de Reims (the 2011 will be a Blanc de Blancs), and La Grande Ruelle is located on the lower hillsides on the western side of the village (in the direction of Bouzy), just above Les Bermonts on the slope, and its first vintage will be a Blanc de Noirs. Not surprisingly, given Benoit’s attention to detail, the background printing on

each label for the *Lieux à Dits* bottlings will reflect the *cépages* of a given year, with gold print used for blends of pinot noir and chardonnay, green for all cuvées made purely from chardonnay and purple printing for those comprised entirely from pinot noir.

The top of the line bottling currently being produced by Benoit Marguet is his Sapience *Tête de Cuvée*, which was first produced in the 2006 vintage and released in the summer of 2014. Ironically, given how beautifully the Marguet family vineyards are now farmed, this wine has been made entirely from purchased fruit in its first several iterations, as Benoit decided to make Champagne's first organic *Tête de Cuvée* a couple of years prior to his conversion over to *biodynamiques* in 2009, so the first several vintages have been produced solely from grapes purchased from friends who have been farming organically or biodynamically for a longer period of time than Benoit. As he recalls, Sapience came into existence because Benoit and his friends believed that only organically-farmed grapes, coupled with very precise winemaking could produce the highest expression of Champagne, as these *vignerons* were "convinced that this led to wines with the most energy and harmony." For grape sources for Sapience, Benoit Marguet could really not have done any better than the three friends he sought to purchase grapes from for the wine, as he is buying chardonnay for the bottling from David Léclapart in Trépail, pinot meunier from Vincent Laval in Cumières and pinot noir from Benoît Lahaye in Bouzy. He continues, "Sapience is in fact the first 'prestige' Champagne- in the world of Cristal, Dom Pérignon, Comtes de Champagne, Krug and Salon- to be certified organic, and also to be a vintage wine every year, as the exceptional quality of the grapes allows us to produce a special wine each and every year." Benoit Marguet will begin to use some of his estate-grown pinot noir fruit in future iterations of Sapience, but we will have to be patient, as the first Sapience to include fruit from the Marguet family vineyards will be the 2012 version, which will be half pinot noir from Benoît Lahaye and half from the Marguet family vineyards. Starting with the 2013 vintage, all of the pinot noir will come from Benoit Marguet's vineyards in Ambonnay, as he notes that 2012 "is the year when my grapes were certified, and also the time that Benoît Lahaye asked us if he could stop supplying grapes for the cuvée, as he did not have enough grapes for himself."

I have so far had the pleasure so far to taste two different disgorgements of the 2006 Sapience, with one finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter and the other *non-dosé*, as well as the soon to be released 2007 Sapience, which is also *non-dosé*. The wines are truly stunning, with great breed, complexity and elegance, and they have quickly become some of the most highly sought after bottles in the region. Interestingly, the *cépages* for the 2006 and 2007 versions of Sapience are not quite the same, as the 2006 was produced solely from chardonnay and pinot meunier, with two-thirds being chardonnay from Monsieur Léclapart and one-third Vincent Laval's pinot meunier, whereas the 2007 version has incorporated Monsieur Lahaye's pinot noir into the blend. As Monsieur Marguet notes, "2006 is the only vintage with two-thirds chardonnay and one-third pinot meunier, while each subsequent vintage has a *cépages* of fifty percent chardonnay, twenty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent meunier" and this will be its blend into the foreseeable future. It is not only the organic farming of the grapes that distinguishes Sapience from other top of the line bottlings, but the entirety of the creative process behind the wine. As Benoit observes, "Sapience is an organic wine not only based on its farming, but also in its winemaking," as we have used "new principles of enology based on homeopathy and energetics techniques" to produce the wine. In many ways, Benoit sounds quite a bit like

Jacques Lardière, the former *Chef de Cave* of Maison Louis Jadot, who would often talk about the “energy vibrations” that were unique to each vineyard in Burgundy and which a *vigneron* should seek to identify and pay attention to maximize the potential of his or her wines from a given plot of vines. Benoit Marguet speaks similarly when he says of the holistic approach to the crafting of Sapience, “this special attitude is a bit like in a modern monastery and serves the wine by a reflection of high level vibrations,” with “the result a Champagne of an exceptional complexity and pleasure, but also with a purity and energy,” as “Sapience is made in consciousness with very positive working attitudes and approaches, where time is not counted and every detail important.” At least based on the first two vintages that I have tasted, the results speak for themselves, as this is truly a stunning new addition to the firmament of Champagne’s prestige bottlings, and I have little doubt that the follow-up vintages resting comfortably in the Marguet cellars are equally magical bottles.



Benoit Marguet has made a dramatic change at his family’s domaine in the last several years, and this has been born of his holistic approach to his farming, winemaking and life in general and this transformation has produced dramatically higher quality wines at the estate. As he comments, “wine, in my opinion is like a natural medicine, and I think wine people should control more the use of pesticides in the vineyards and encourage a real, totally independent research (to protect the plant) that preserves the *terroirs* from pollution”, as this not only produces superior wines, but also is far better for the health of the vineyard and the health of the people who have to live and work around the vines in the villages. As he continues, this is not necessarily “understood by general opinions” today, “but, you know if you are ahead of your

time there can always be some misunderstanding” of your methodology, and this is can certainly be the case in Champagne today, where there is a very real inertia in some circles to hold onto the industrial farming methods that sprung up in the region in the 1950s and 1960s and which emphasize large crop loads and minimized workloads for *vignerons*. Benoit Marguet is one of the new wave of young *vignerons* in Champagne that is turning the tide against the petrochemical companies’ stranglehold on the viticultural practices in the region, transforming his own vineyard parcels into healthy ecosystems where plants, people and horses all thrive. Not coincidentally, all of this has also led to higher and higher quality wines issuing forth from the Marguet cellars in the last few years. As I mentioned above, we are only now seeing the tip of the iceberg at Champagne Marguet, as there are still many new cuvées quietly resting on their fine lees and waiting to be released in the years to come. Benoit Marguet is one of Champagne’s most eloquent ambassadors for the organic viticultural movement in the region, and as he concludes, “off course, we could talk longer about all of this another time...”

Marguet Père et Fils Extra Brut Rosé NV Disgorged May 2014

The new release of Marguet Père et Fils Extra Brut Rosé is from the base year of 2011, and given how challenging that vintage was in the Champagne region, this is really a very tasty bottle of wine. The wine is comprised of a blend of sixty-two percent chardonnay and thirty-eight percent pinot noir (with six and a half percent being still red wine) and was finished off with a *dosage* of 5.6 grams per liter. This is a lovely, understated wine that offers up a fine nose of peach, smoke, chalky soil tones and fresh-baked bread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still tightly-knit, with a good core, refined *mousse* and quite good length and grip on the youthful and vibrant finish. This could really do with a year in the cellar to more fully blossom and start to show some of its secondary layers of complexity. Good juice. 2016-2025+. **89+**.

Marguet Père et Fils Brut Rosé NV (served from magnum) Disgorged May 2013

This particular magnum of Brut Rosé from Benoit Marguet is base year 2010, which comprised eighty-seven percent of the blend. The remainder is reserve wines from the solera that Benoit Marguet started in 2004 (and which he has used up in its entirety with this bottling and his Elements 10 release). The wine spent two years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and the wine is drinking absolutely beautifully today. The first class bouquet delivers a constellation of ripe strawberries, tangerine, rye toast, chalky soil tones, smoke and a nice touch of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with lovely mid-palate depth, great focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a very long, vibrant and classy finish. Great juice and a terrific bargain in the realm of Brut Rosé! 2015-2030. **92**.

Marguet Père et Fils “Elements 10” Grand Cru Extra Brut NV

The “Elements 10” bottling is the first in the new series that replaces the non-vintage Brut and non-vintage Blanc de Noirs bottlings in the Marguet lineup. This is the bottling that absorbed most of the remaining solera started in 2004, so fully one-third of the blend is reserve wines. The *cépages* is sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay and the wine offers up an excellent bouquet of apple, tart orange, bread dough, a complex base of soil, smoke and a nice touch of salinity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined in personality, with a great core, refined *mousse* and superb length and grip on the focused and classy finish. Lovely juice. 2015-2030+. **91+**.

Marguet Père et Fils “Elements 11” Grand Cru Extra Brut NV

The “Elements 11” bottling is still a few months away from release into the market, but we had a chance to taste this wine during our visit to the domaine in Ambonnay in April. The *cépages* is essentially the same as in the previous year, at sixty-six percent pinot noir and thirty-four percent chardonnay, and the big difference is that this is using solely the organic solera started in 2010 as its *vin de reserve*, which will constitute fifteen percent of the blend. Ironically, given that the base year of 2011 was more difficult than 2010, and the reserve wines are nowhere near as old as in the Elements 10 release, the wine is even better and fully underscores how the wines have gotten better here since 2009. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of pear, apple, gentle musky floral tones, a very complex signature of soil, a touch of *patissière* and nice notes of brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, great focus and balance, bright acids and superb backend energy on the very long and very classy finish. This is stellar wine and will be a terrific value when it is released. 2015-2035. **92+**.

2010 Champagne Marguet “Le Mesnil sur Oger” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime

The first release of the *Terroir* Series from Benoit Marguet is his Le Mesnil sur Oger Blanc de Blancs from the 2010 vintage, and this wine is excellent. The deep and properly reserved nose offers up a fine mélange of pink grapefruit, lemon, bread dough, chalky minerality, a touch of citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and broad-shouldered, with a rock solid core, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and still quite youthful finish. This needs another year or two of bottle age to start to blossom, but is an excellent wine in the making. 2016-2035. **93**.

2010 Marguet Père et Fils “les Bermonts” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime

The first vintage of les Bermonts is from the growing season of 2010 and the wine is a lovely bottle in the making, but it will want a few years of bottle age to start to emerge a bit from behind its excellent structural elements. The bouquet offers up a fine bouquet of tart orange, bread fruit, a complex base of chalky minerality, an exotic touch of fresh coconut, bread dough and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and nascently complex, with fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and a superb, long and still fairly primary finish. Given this outstanding wine a bit more bottle age to blossom! 2018-2035+. **93**.

2009 Marguet Père et Fils “Amboniacus” Brut Millésime (Disgorged October 2014)

The 2009 vintage of Amboniacus is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, with the seventy *ares* of vineyards in Bouzy owned by the Marguet family finding its way into this bottling. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and a touch of warm biscuits. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still quite youthfully structured, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, primary and very promising finish. Give this excellent wine a few more years in the cellar to allow it to really start to drink with generosity. 2019-2040+. **92+**.

2009 Marguet Père et Fils “les Crayères” Extra Brut Millésime

Benoit Marguet is making absolutely stunning wines and his 2009, single vineyard bottling of les Crayères is starting to really show its pedigree, though I would still be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for several more years and really let it blossom fully! The stunning and still youthful nose soars from the glass in a blaze of apple, pear, a touch of acacia blossoms, *crème patissière*, gorgeously complex, chalky minerality, a touch of bread dough and a gently

smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really defined by its stony minerality with a bit of air. The core here is rock solid, the focus and balance simply impeccable, the *mousse* very refined and the finish, long, pure and utterly seamless. This is a brilliant young bottle of Champagne. 2019-2040+. **94.**

2008 Marguet Père et Fils “les Crayères” Grand Cru Extra Brut (Disgorged March 2013)

I have now had the pleasure to drink a few bottles of the 2008 les Crayères from Benoit Marguet and the wine is blossoming beautifully and looks poised to age long and very gracefully. The first vintage that Benoit Marguet has released of this a single vineyard bottling has a slightly different *cépages* from the follow-up vintage of 2009, as this wine is seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir. The wine offers up a stunningly youthful and refined bouquet of apple, tangerine, fresh-baked bread, a beautifully complex base of minerality, smoke and a topnote of caraway seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core, very elegant *mousse*, excellent balance and backend mineral drive on the very long, complex and vibrant finish. This is still a very youthful wine and it is really a shame to be drinking it now, but as evidenced by the fact that my cellar is now out of bottles, it is clearly irresistible right out of the blocks! 2015-2035. **94+.**

2007 Marguet Père et Fils “Sapience” Extra Brut (Non-Dosé)

The 2007 vintage of Sapience has a slightly different *cépages* from the inaugural release of 2006, as the 2007 version is comprised of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot meunier and pinot noir. As I noted above, the chardonnay comes from David Léclapart, the pinot noir from Vincent Laval and the pinot noir from Benoît Lahaye. The 2007 Sapience is still quite tightly-knit on both the nose and palate, but shows excellent potential in its aromatic constellation of apple, a touch of white peach, pastry, a very complex base of soil tones, dried flowers and a dollop of the smokiness to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and racy, with a fine core of fruit, very elegant *mousse* and a fine sense of reserve on the very long and snappy finish. This is still a puppy and needs at least a few more years in the cellar to fully blossom; it should prove to be long-lived and gorgeous at its apogee, and I would not be surprised to see its score move up as the wine starts to blossom a bit from behind its girdle of acidity. 2017-2035. **94.**

2006 Marguet Père et Fils “Sapience” Extra Brut (Non-Dosé)

This is a second disgorgement of the 2006 Sapience, which Benoit Marguet decided to give no *dosage* to after the *dégorgement*. I did not get a chance to taste the *non-dosé* version side by side with the three grams per liter version, so I cannot state a preference for one over the other, but both are extremely beautiful and elegant bottles of Champagne. The *non-dosé* version of 2006 Sapience offers up a very expressive bouquet of pear, apple, brioche, complex soil tones, orange peel, *patissière* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with very refined *mousse*, outstanding focus and grip and a very, very long, refined and vibrant finish. The difference in *dosage* here has not made any difference in the ultimate quality of the wine, and I have no idea which version I would prefer if tasted side by side, as both are brilliant wines! 2015-2035. **96.**



2006 Marguet Père et Fils “Sapience” Premier Cru Extra Brut (*Dosage 3 grams per liter*)

I do not know the date of disgorgement for the first vintage release of Benoit Marguet’s new organic *Tête de Cuvée*, Sapience, but I do know that the wine is absolutely magical! The wine was not produced from the family vineyards in Ambonnay, but rather from *biodynamique*-raised fruit purchased from two of Benoit’s friends in the region, as two-thirds of the blend is chardonnay he purchased from the David Léclapart in Trépail and one-third is pinot meunier bought from Vincent Laval in Cumières. One could do worse sourcing grapes! The wine is utterly breathtaking, wafting from the glass in a very refined aromatic blend of white peach, fresh almonds, beautiful meunier floral tones redolent of violets and delicate lavender, brioche, marvelously complex soil tones and an exotic topnote of cardamom. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and supremely elegant, with very refined *mousse*, an excellent core, zesty acidity and stunning length and grip on the complex, vibrant and very suave finish. This is probably Champagne’s first *biodynamique* Prestige Cuvée, and it is a very exciting harbinger of what the future may bring in this region, when viticulture in Champagne catches up with all the good things going on in the cellars! A brilliant wine that is extremely rare and priced accordingly, but well worth the price of admission for those of comfortable means and a penchant for extremely refined bubbly. 2014-2030+. **96.**

**GOYO GARCÍA VIADERO-
RIBERA DEL DUERO'S GREAT TRADITIONALIST HOPE**



Goyo García Viadero is a very bright, new shining star in Ribera del Duero, and in the half dozen years that have elapsed since he first began bottling his wines on his own, he has singlehandedly reignited my passion for the wines from this region. I came of age in the wine trade in the early days of Ribera del Duero's rising star on the international wine scene, and the wines that paved the way for today's fame in the region were truly exceptional wines of great purity, beauty and depth. However, somewhere along the way, much of that was lost, with many of the changes in Ribera del Duero brought in by the all too familiar tenets of vineyard expansion into unsuitable areas, and reliance on higher alcohol and invasive cellar techniques to cover up the lack of intensity in the wines from the ocean of young vine fruit from these new plantations. Add to this plenty of new arrivals in the wine-producing arena, flush with cash and set on making a name for themselves in the wine-producing world (though often far shorter on experience and expertise than ambition and money) and the attendant need of dependency on a few well-known consulting oenologists in Ribera, who quickly made the region awash with interchangeable modern wines of no particular distinction and it is easy to see how quickly true quality plummeted. To pile on further, add to this dynamic very large crop loads brought about by heavy irrigation and the need to pick fruit deep into the autumn to get those tannins ripe in all

of those bunches and a desire to whack the wines with very high percentages of new oak, as this is what many of the critics liked best about the wines, and it is not too surprising that Ribera del Duero was a region that fell off of my radar screen with some alacrity in the mid-1990s and did not reappear until I put my nose in the glass of the first Goyo García wine that crossed my path a year ago today!

Goyo García Viadero has been producing wines in the higher altitude sections of Ribera del Duero since 1984, but until 1992, this was under the label of his family's winery, Bodegas Valduero, rather than under his own name. In 1992, Señor García took a break from Ribera and moved on to the La Mancha region to manage a thousand hectare farm, where he oversaw the winemaking, olive oil making and cheese making, as the ranch included one hundred and fifty hectares of vines, nearly fourteen thousand olive trees and more than twenty-five hundred sheep. After a bit more than a decade in La Mancha, Goyo returned to Ribera del Duero in 2003 and again made wines at his family's estate of Bodegas Valduero for a few years, while he purchased a few choice parcels of vines and began the process "of detoxing the vineyards for my own project" of their chemicals and beginning to farm them organically, with his first releases under his own label commencing in the 2008 vintage. Today, he is based in the small village of Gumiel del Mercado, which lies about fifteen kilometers northwest of the town of Aranda del Duero, on the eastern end of the DO of Ribera del Duero. His family's winery of Bodegas Valduero has had a relatively long reputation for very good quality wines, as it was one of the first to be founded in the region back in 1984- keep in mind that the DO of Ribera del Duero only dates back to 1982! Señor García only began producing and commercializing his own wines in Ribera del Duero in 2008, looking to champion an older style of wines that were once prevalent in this region, with lower alcohol levels, less new wood and far more reflective of their underlying soil tones than one normally associates these days with Ribera. He is fortunate to be based on the eastern end of the plateau of Castilla y Leon, on which the DO is found, as it is quite a bit cooler than the vineyards that have sprung up around the regional capital city of Valladolid on the western end of the DO. Most of Señor García's vineyards sit at between eight hundred and fifty and a thousand meters in elevation, which is two hundred meters higher in altitude than those towards Valladolid, and this makes a rather dramatic difference in the ripening process for the grapes over the course of the growing season, with the nighttime temperatures in particular quite a bit lower than further to the west in the DO. The diurnal variations in temperature are of critical importance in Ribera del Duero, as during the growing season, daytime temperatures can be suffocating, with ninety to one hundred degrees hardly exceptional, but at the highest elevations in the DO, evening temperatures can fall into the fifties and safeguard acidity in the grapes.

Señor García farms only two hectares of vines in Ribera, making him absolutely tiny by today's Ribera del Duero standards, and his is also quite unique in the region in only producing wine from grapes grown in his own vineyards. Many of his most well-known neighbors buy in grapes far and wide in the DO. He farms all of this vineyards organically, which again is not standard operating procedure in Ribera del Duero, with all of his old parcels comprised of head-pruned, bush vines, rather than trellised in rows for ease of cultivation. Señor García's vines lie a few kilometers to the west of his hundred year-old winery in Gumiel del Duero, towards the town of Roa, which sits at the highest elevation in the entire DO. He has three distinct parcels of vines to work with, planted primarily to Tempranillo and (in two of the vineyards) some white varieties, which he co-ferments to produce his red wines. This was very much the style in Ribera

del Duero a generation or two ago, prior to the institution of the official DO and the influx of outside investors, and Goyo is looking to return to that era of unmanipulated wines which first put this region on the international wine map back in the late 1970s and early 1980s. His three vineyard parcels are Finca el Peruco, Finca Valdeolmos and Viñas de Arcilla (which has had its name changed since the 2010 vintage from Viñas de Anguix, so the first couple of releases appeared under the latter name). Señor García's Finca el Peruco is one of his highest elevation vineyards, sitting at nine hundred meters above sea level, and these are also some of his oldest vines as well, with the vineyard fully eighty years of age today. It is co-planted with eighty-five percent Tempranillo and fifteen percent of the white grape of Albillo, as was the custom back when the oldest vineyards in the Ribera del Duero were planted. There is a very high limestone content to the *argillo-calcaire* soils in Finca el Peruco, which Señor García describes as "white sand and river stones." The vineyard of Finca Valdeolmos lies just a touch lower down the hills from Finca el Peruco, comprised of two small adjacent parcels that lie between 850 and 880 meters above sea level. It was planted at the same time as Finca el Peruco, making the vines a bit more than eighty years of age today, with only ten percent of the field blend here comprised of Albillo and the remainder Tempranillo, or as it is known locally, *Tinto Fino*. The soils in Finca Valdeolmos are red sand over a subsoil base of hard limestone. His third parcel, the Viñas de Arcilla vineyard has a northeasterly exposition and sits at 810 meters above sea level, a couple of miles to the north of the village of Roa. These are fairly sandy soils and are planted with the youngest vines that Goyo García works with in Ribera del Duero, though this hardly translates to actually young vines, as the vineyards are fifty-six years of age. It is his only parcel that is planted entirely to Tempranillo, as there are no white grape varieties to be found co-mingling with the *Tinto Fino* here.

Additionally, Señor García also produces two wines from some very old vine parcels that his mother inherited from her family that lie outside of the DO of Ribera del Duero, in the rugged northern region of Cantabria, which he sells under the Cabero label. He first began this project with the 2010 vintage, as he was given these parcels of vines in 2007 and wanted to take a few years to allow his organic farming methods to take full effect before starting to bottle the wine. These vineyards are located up in the high foothills of the Picos de Europa Mountains, which lie near the northern edge of the Iberian peninsula, halfway between the cities of Oviedo and Bilbao. Goyo García works with a local winegrower in the region, Tomas Cobo Setien, who oversees the vines during the growing season for these vineyards, and then Goyo makes the wines in his cellars in Gumiel de Mercado. He has the grapes picked in small boxes and then transported by refrigerated truck from Cantabria to Ribera. There is a Cabero Blanco bottling comprised of one hundred percent Palomino grapes, produced entirely from one hundred year-old vines from his mother's family, and a Cabero Tinto bottling with a *cépages* of seventy percent Mencía and thirty percent Palomino. Both the Mencía and the Palomino vines are planted in high elevation vineyards of broken black slate, so it is no surprise that both the red and the white versions of Cabero show marvelous minerality, with the Mencía in particular just as much at home here in the Picos de Europas as it would be in the terraced canyon vineyards of Ribeira Sacra. Like his wines from Ribera del Duero, the red wines are raised in eight year-old barrels prior to bottling. The Cabero Blanco is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks, to allow this wild expression of Palomino all of its potential vibrancy and bounce. These small vineyard parcels in Cantabria currently grow enough grapes each year to produce twelve hundred bottles of the Cabero Blanco and twenty-five hundred bottles of the Cabero Tinto.

Starting in the 2013 vintage, he has also begun a new label which is co-produced by both Goyo and his wife, Diana Semova, who has worked side by side with him since 2003, called García Semova, and which is produced from a vineyard planted to eighty percent Tempranillo and twenty percent Albillo in the DO of Arlanza de Lerma. As Señor García notes, “this is a river valley that runs parallel to the Duero about thirty or forty kilometers to the north”, and though it is a smaller and less well-known region than Ribera, it is “higher in elevation and colder.” He received the vineyards in 2010 from several family members, as his father’s hometown is in the Arlanza de Lerma region and much of his family still lives here. He and Diana make the wines for this label at a winery in Arlanza, as there is not enough space in the cellars back in Gumiel del Mercado to accommodate the production of this wine. I had a chance to taste the first release of the García Semova Tinto 2013 during my visit to Goyo and Diana in October of last year and the wine is excellent and an exciting new addition to the lineup at the winery. Who knows, a decade down the road, we may all know the wines from this small DO significantly better than we do today, as the combination of cooler temperatures, higher altitude and old vines could make this a mecca for traditionalist producers in the years to come!



Goyo García Viadero and his wife Diana, in their cellars in the village of Gumiel del Mercado.

Since the outset of his own project in 2003, Goyo García has farmed his parcels of vines organically, and his commitment to producing naturally-made wines is very much in evidence in that he waited fully five years from the start of his conversion of the vineyards over to organic

farming to actually produce his first wine from the vineyards in 2008! Goyo is quick to give much of the credit for the fine viticultural work in his parcels in Ribera to his wife Diana, who has worked side by side with him since 2003. As he notes, “she spends more time in the vineyards and works the harvests” and has been quickly picking up winemaking as well when working in the cellars, and manages to do all of this while still tending to the needs of the couple’s daughters. Farming organically and making natural wines were the main inspirations for Goyo leaving his family’s winery and setting out on his own with his own small wine-producing project, and this passionate embrace for healthy farming practices and unobtrusive winemaking techniques has continued on with the addition of the the parcels of old vines in Cantabria and the new project in Arlanza de Lerma, as in each instance, he has taken three years from the time of taking over the vineyards for these wines and producing his first bottling from these vines.

Goyo García is also a quite a natural winemaker in his cellars in Gumiel, as the grapes arrive at the winery and are completely destemmed, prior to the Tempranillo and Albillo being co-fermented in old oak *foudres* for the Finca el Peruco and Finca Valdeolmos cuvées. At harvest time, the grapes are all picked by hand, as is required with these very old bush vines in the García vineyards in Ribera. The Viñas de Arcilla, of course, is comprised entirely of Tempranillo (with no white grapes), but it too is also fermented in old *foudres*. Only indigenous yeasts are utilized for the fermentations, with no cellar additives such as powdered tannins or enzymes used, and the wines do not have any sulfur added during their *elevage*. The Viñas de Arcilla bottling, being made entirely from Tempranillo, follows a slightly different *elevage* after its fermentation is complete, as it is raised in six to eight year old *barricas* prior to bottling. As Señor García likes to say (and clearly reflecting his preference for older wood), “I use the young barrels for this wine.” The Finca el Peruco and Finca Valdeolmos cuvées are raised in significantly older casks, which typically will run between twelve and twenty years of age, with all of the red wines spending sixteen to eighteen months in cask aging in the cellars prior to bottling. The older barrels are all of French origin, from the forest of Alliers, and are sourced as used barrels from the family winery of Bodegas Valduero. As Goyo observes, “I purchase the barrels from Valduero- the ones that are very old and of French origin- because they have a very fine grain and thin pores (for gentler micro-oxygenation),” and “also because these are the ones that we have control of the most (from the *tonneliers*) at Valduero, and for that reason, I know them well and I can choose the best-suited *barricas* for my own wines.” One the *elevage* is completed, the wines are bottled without fining or filtration, with only “a gentle decanting.”

To fully underscore just how different these wines are from the pack in Ribera del Duero, the Goyo García wines even come in Burgundy-shaped bottles, to further distinguish them from most of the wines in the region, which are bottled in heavy glass, Bordeaux-shaped bottles these days. Goyo tends to pick his grapes based on acidity levels, rather than sugars and phenolic ripeness, trying to bring the grapes in while the acids are still at a reasonably high level and before the sugars have soared out of control, so that most of his wines run in the 13.5 percent alcohol range. This is decidedly “cool” and low octane by modern standards in Ribera del Duero, as most wines these days fall between fourteen and fifteen percent alcohol in the region. Additionally, the oak regimen utilized by Goyo García is far different from most producers in Ribera, where a fairly high percentage of new wood is *de rigueur* almost everywhere, as he prefers to age his wines in older used oak barrels to minimize the wood influence in his wines. In my experience, only the Viñas de Arcilla will show any oak character at all in the aromatics of

the wine, as these “younger barrels” of six to eight years of age give the wine just a faint whiff of vanilla, which is certainly not found in either of the other two single vineyard wines, raised in their decidedly older casks. Goyo’s methodologies in both the vineyards and cellars allow the finished wines to show a level of *terroir* that is almost unheard of today in Ribera del Duero, even at the mecca of Vega Sicilia, and it is the great soil signature of his wines, coupled with the tangy acids and the superb purity of relatively low octane that makes the wines of Goyo García the most exciting wines produced in the region today. I went from my tasting with Goyo and Diana at the winery in October of last year to some of the other top estates in Ribera, finishing off the day’s tastings with Mariano García at Mauro (Mariano García is the former longtime winemaker at Vega Sicilia and one of the rock stars of Ribera today), and I had a very, very hard time finding anything at all worth drinking after having started the day tasting with Goyo García! His wines are just that special in the realm of Ribera del Duero today, exuding a purity, complexity and sense of balance that has no rivals in contemporary Ribera and I honestly believe that he is making the finest wines in the region by a wide, wide margin today! He is not yet well-known and I urge readers to seek his wines out now, as his production levels are quite modest and once word gets out to a wider audience, these wines are going to be very, very hard to find in the market.

The following wines were either tasted here in New York in the summer of 2014 (for a few of the 2009s) or the summer of 2015, from samples that were sent by Señor García for inclusion in this article, or during my visit to the bodegas back in October of 2014. Starting with the 2010 vintage, Señor García has slightly changed his labels, as for the vintages from 2009 and back, the wines were listed under “Goyo García Viadero”, but from 2010 forwards, he has simplified the labels to just say “Goyo García.” I have listed the wines below reflecting this, so that if subscribers are lucky enough to come across any of his older vintages in the market, they will not be confused by the slightly different labeling.

White Wine Bottlings

2012 Cabero Blanco- Goyo García (Cantabria)

The Cabero Blanco bottling from Goyo García is made from one hundred year-old Palomino vines that belong to his mother’s family up in the isolated mountainous region of Picos de Europa. I had never tasted a wine from this region and was very impressed with what I tried from Goyo. The wine is pretty ripe, coming in at a full 13.5 percent alcohol and offering up a lovely nose of tangerine, lemon peel, waxy overtones and a complex base of salty soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, good acids and very good length and grip on the focused and classy finish. Who knew Palomino could be this good as a dry white wine? 2014-2020+. **91.**

2011 Beâtum Blanco- Goyo García y Tomas Cobo Setien (Cantabria)

The 2011 Beâtum Blanco from Goyo García and Tomas Cobo Setien is the former name for the Cabero Blanco and is comprised entirely of hundred year-old vines of Palomino from his mother’s family vineyards in the Picos de Europa. This was the last vintage where he used this name for this bottling. The wine is starting to show plenty of secondary layers of complexity in its aromatic mélange of fallen apples, yellow plums, marinated orange peel, sea salts, lanolin and a lovely base of white soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite snappy, with a fine core, lovely, mature complexity and excellent length and grip on the vibrant and well-balanced finish. The varietal character of Palomino (or what I consider this to be, based

on my experience with this grape in Sherry) seems to really be coming to the fore- at least in comparison to the 2012, and the wine is really very impressive in its most unique aromatic and flavor profile. Wild juice of superb quality- for the intrepid! 2015-2020. **92**.



Red Wine Bottlings

2013 García Semova Tinto (Arlanza de Lerma)

The first vintage of García Semova Tinto is from the 2013 vintage, with the wine made up of a blend of eighty percent Tempranillo and twenty percent of the white wine grape of Albillo. The wine offers up a deep and musky nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, incipient notes of gamebird, an exotically floral topnote redolent of acacia blossoms (from the Albillo?) and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and tangy, with superb nascent complexity, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. The tangy acids here were just a touch volatile when I tasted this wine in October of 2014 in Señor García's cellars, but this was still very early days for this wine and I am very much looking forward to seeing it again in the coming year, as I may well be underrating it a touch out of the blocks. 2015-2025. **90+?**

2012 Cabero Tinto- Goyo García (Cantabria)

The 2012 Cabero Tinto from Goyo García, as mentioned above, is made up of a blend of seventy percent ancient Mencía vines and thirty percent hundred year-old Palomino, co-fermented like his Ribera del Duero bottlings, and raised in eight year-old *barricas* prior to

bottling. The wine came in at 13.2 percent octane in the 2012 vintage and is stellar, soaring from the glass in a complex mélange of dark berries, smoke, pomegranate, a touch of new leather and a great base of slate soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and quite light on its feet, with lovely intensity of flavor, great elegance and focus and a very long, tangy and supremely transparent finish. This wine will age gracefully for many years, thanks to its impeccable balance, but does not possess a whole lot of tannin and is already a very, very tasty bottle for drinking today! 2014-2030+. **92+**.

2011 Finca el Peruco- Goyo García (Ribera del Duero)

The 2011 Finca el Peruco from Goyo García was still a touch reductive when I tasted it at the *bodegas* in October of last year, but a bit of swirling in the glass allowed the wine to blossom nicely and this will be a terrific wine when it is released a bit later this year. The deep and still quite primary bouquet offers up a superb constellation of cassis, black plums, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a touch of cigar smoke and discreet notes of graphite in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and refined on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, lovely transparency, moderate tannins and a very long, complex and tangy finish. This is an absolutely classic vintage for Goyo García's Finca el Peruco. 2016-2035+. **94**.

2010 Finca el Peruco- Goyo García (Ribera del Duero)

Goyo García Viadero's Finca el Peruco is planted to eighty-five percent Tempranillo and fifteen percent Albillo, with the vineyards in excess of eighty years of age and sitting at a thousand meters above sea level on a bed of clay and limestone. The wine is fermented in old *foudres* and then raised in even older barrels prior to bottling, with no added SO₂. The 2010 Finca el Peruco comes in at a very reasonable 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a pure and complex nose of mulberries, red plums, cocoa powder, vinesmoke, a lovely base of soil tones and a potpourri of spice tones that include saffron, nutmeg and cardamom. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, superb intensity of flavor, moderate, skin tannins and a very long, complex and light on its feet finish. An outstanding wine. 2018-2040. **93**.

2010 Finca Valdeolmos- Goyo García (Ribera del Duero)

Goyo García's 2010 Finca Valdeolmos is an absolutely brilliant wine in the making! The wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and explodes from the glass in a stunning bouquet of black plums, black cherries, violets, dark chocolate, beautifully complex soil tones and a topnote of graphite. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with great purity and elegance, a sappy core of fruit, vibrant acids and a very, very long, ripely tannic and very suave finish. This will drink well in a few more years, but its real plateau of maturity is probably a good decade down the road. One of the greatest young bottles of Ribera del Duero I have tasted in a long, long time. 2018-2040. **95**.

2010 Viñas de Arcilla- Goyo García (Ribera del Duero)

The 2010 Viñas de Arcilla is the first vintage where Goyo García has labeled this wine thusly, as before, it was called 2010 Viñas de Anguix. As I am a fan of Señor García including Albillo in his other two single vineyard bottlings, I feel just a tad guilty that my favorite of his 2010s is the Viñas de Arcilla, which is comprised entirely of Tempranillo, but this is a profound wine in the making! The deep and utterly stunning nose delivers a brilliant and very complex blend of black cherries, cassis, graphite, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, violets, a touch of meatiness, gentle smokiness and a hint of vanillin oak. This is stunningly complex aromatically for such a

young wine! On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite a bit more primary in profile than the nose, with a great sappy core of fruit, marvelous soil signature, moderate tannins and a great length and grip on the tangy and perfectly balanced finish. I would not be surprised to see this wine in the league of something like the 1970 Vega Sicilia Unico in the fullness of time- it is simply that magical of a young wine! 2018-2040. **96.**

2009 Finca el Peruco- Goyo García Viadero (Ribera del Duero)

While I had the pleasure to taste previously both the Finca Valdeolmos and Viñas de Anguix bottlings from 2009, this was my first look at the '09 Finca el Peruco. At age six the wine is starting to show some really lovely transparency, as it wafts from the glass in a refined blend of red plums, cherries, rose petals, a touch of clove-like spices, a touch of mustard seed, chalky minerality, a nice, discreet touch of cedary wood and a very gentle topnote of cocoa powder. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and really defined by its soil tones, with a lovely core, tangy acids and still a bit of backend tannin to resolve on the long, complex and light on its feet finish. With food (lamb chops worked very well indeed!) this wine is drinking beautifully already, but in reality another four or five years in the cellar will really allow it to come into full bloom. A beautiful wine that is very Burgundian in architecture. 2018-2040. **94.**

2009 Finca Valdeolmos- Goyo García Viadero (Ribera del Duero)

The 2009 Finca Valdeolmos farmed by Goyo García Viadero is not quite as high in elevation as the Finca el Peruco, as the vineyard lies at about 850 meters above sea level. It too is planted to an old vine (more than eighty years of age) field mix of ninety percent Tempranillo and ten percent Albillo, which Señor García of course ferments together. This too is a cool Ribera del Duero, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offering up a superb aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, fresh nutmeg, a touch of wild fennel (from the white grape Albillo?), beautifully complex soil tones and a bit of graphite in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent soil signature, a slight touch of volatile acidity and a very long, ripely tannic and very complex finish. This needs some time to really blossom, but it is going to be terrific. 2019-2040. **93+.**

2009 Viñas de Anguix- Goyo García Viadero (Ribera del Duero)

As noted above, the Viñas de Anguix is a bit of an outlier for Señor García, as this vineyard is planted entirely to Tempranillo and is only fifty-six years of age. The wine is treated a bit differently in the cellar as result- still being fermented with indigenous yeasts in old *foudres*, but then being raised in French *Barricas* that are only four to five years old. The 2009 is again 13.5 percent alcohol and the wine is outstanding, with a much more “typical” Ribera del Duero bouquet of black cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, fresh nutmeg, lovely soil tones and a judicious touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and elegant, with a fine core of fruit, great focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding balance on the long, complex and very pure finish. This wine actually reminds me very strongly of the first wines I tasted from Ribera del Duero back in the early 1980s, and it takes me back to a time when I understood all the excitement about this region’s wines! Great juice. 2020-2040+. **94+.**

2008 Finca Valdeolmos- Goyo García Viadero (Ribera del Duero)

Goyo García’s first vintage of Finca Valdeolmos, the 2008 is an exceptional wine that is maturing beautifully and is reaching a very nice point in its evolution, where it is transitioning

from adolescence to young adulthood and starting to show some of its secondary layers of complexity. The wine is a bit more black fruity in personality than the 2009 version, offering up a superb bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, charred wood, lovely soil tones, a bit of grilled meat, fresh herb tones, incipient notes of cigar smoke, a bit of wild fennel and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impressively tangy, with a fine core, smoky complexity, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the still quite youthfully structured finish. This is a bit more defined by its structure on the backend today than the 2009 version, but it has impeccable balance and is going to be a superb wine with a bit more bottle age. 2020-2040+. **93.**

2008 Viñas de Anguix- Goyo García Viadero (Ribera del Duero)

The 2008 Viñas de Anguix from Goyo García Viadero is another outstanding effort for this first vintage at the bodegas, with the wine coming in at a cool 13.5 percent alcohol and offering up excellent depth and nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. As is typical for this bottling from Señor García, the 2008 Viñas de Anguix is a bit more “masculine” in style, as this is the only one hundred percent tempranillo bottling from him, and consequently, it will want perhaps a year or two more in the cellar to fully blossom than the superb ’08 Valdeolmos. The bouquet wafts from the glass in complex blend of black cherries, cassis, espresso, a fine signature of soil, a touch of clove-like spice tones, a hint of the nutskin to come, lovely savory tones and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still properly youthful in structure, with impeccable balance, with ripe tannins, those Goyo tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, nascently complex finish. This is great wine that may be somewhat like tasting an old-fashioned vintage of Vega Sicilia Unico when it was under ten years of age! Great juice in the making, but the 2008 Viñas de Anguix still needs some time to start to really blossom. 2021-2050+. **94+.**

1986 Ribera del Duero- Goyo García Viadero

The 1986 from Goyo García was made from different vineyards than he farms today and the wine was never commercially released, but it was produced under the same cellar philosophy that makes Señor García’s wines such standouts today. I asked him about the origins of this beautiful wine and he recalled that “it was a vineyard that we had at Bodegas Valduero back in ’86 that wasn’t going to be picked because of the rain and the difficult access” on the dirt roads in the mud. “So I asked my family if I could pick the grapes and make a wine for myself” he continues, as this was a very good parcel- “located north from the road that connects Gumiel de Mercado and Gumiel de Hizán, and at a very high elevation of around nine hundred meters, with a red sand and chalky soil base.” Obviously the grapes were not farmed organically back then, but this was the first chance Goyo had to put his natural winemaking philosophies in practice. The bouquet on the 1986 is deep, pure and beautifully evolved, wafting from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, red plums, nutty tones, a lovely base of soil, a touch of toasted coconut, fresh nutmeg and a lovely topnote of Ribera del Duero spice tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and still very fresh and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, melted tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and impeccably understated finish. This is a great wine at its apogee of peak maturity, but clearly still with plenty of life ahead of it. 2015-2025+. **94.**

THE SUMMER OF 2015'S FINE ASSORTMENT OF TRADITIONALIST AND NEO-CLASSICAL AMERICAN WINES



I continue to be more impressed with each passing year at the number of new (at least to me) producers in California who are making wines very much in the style of the good old days in the state, with lower alcohol levels, less new wood and beautiful structural balance to reward cellaring. Add to this impressive roster of newish wineries turning out beautiful wines the stellar cast of old school characters who never were tempted to walk away from the style of wines that made California famous back in the 1970s, and one really has to come to the conclusion that another golden age has begun for wines on the west coast of the United States. Certainly, there remain plenty of over the top, Monster Truck style wines produced in California, but the days when this style of wine dominated the market seem to be gone for good, and good riddance to those days! Subscribers will already be well aware of the old school estates who have never wavered from their traditional styles of wines, as legendary producers such as Kalin Cellars, Heitz Wine Cellar, Stony Hill Vineyards, Mount Eden Vineyards, Andrew Will, Joseph Swan Vineyards and Cathy Corison- to name just a few- have continued to produce absolutely stunning wines year in and year out for far longer than I have been writing [View From the Cellar](#), and these icons are likely to continue on in this vein for many, many years to come. Add to the significant number of these long-time producers more recent additions to the ranks of

traditionally-inspired wineries such as Rhys Vineyards, Arnot-Roberts, Masút Vineyards, Bravium, Calluna, Halcón, Kutch, Copain and Kendric Vineyards (again, this list is far from comprehensive) and it is very easy to be more than excited for the classical style of American wines. Given how dynamic these wines are today, I approach this time of year, when I get to taste through many of the new releases from some of my favorite American producers with more excitement with each passing vintage. And this year's crop of new releases has certainly fulfilled my very high expectations, as there are truly some stunning wines in the pipeline today from America's finest old school and neo-classical producers.

I have to relate a note I received from Ted Lemon of Littorai after last summer's article on American wines, as he objected to my using the term "Old School" for his wines at Littorai. He noted that Littorai was absolutely on the cutting edge these days in a number of facets of its viticultural and winemaking methodologies and he felt that his winery was emblematic of what was new and exciting in Sonoma, and with this in mind, he was not particularly excited with my lumping his wines in with the "Old School". Part of this is, of course, just semantics, but as I have been a very big fan of his wines for many, many years (with my first experience with his Littorai wines dating all the way back to my sommelier days here in New York in the early-1990s), I reflected upon his objections for quite some time and certainly see their merit. In many ways, so many of my favorite "Old School" wineries on the west coast are amongst the most dynamic producers in their respective regions today and really are the future of American wine, as well as luminaries from its illustrious past, and I really should come up with a better name for this camp of traditionalist producers of balanced wines. That said, I still like the moniker of "Old School" for their wines, as it seems to nicely convey the historical sense of continuity between the first great wines produced here by a sizable number of wineries in the US in the 1960s and 1970s and the superb wines that many of these same wineries continue to produce today.

I wish I had neatly filed Ted's note when it came in, rather than adding it the detritus in the office, as I would like to be able to quote it precisely, rather than paraphrase it, when it comes to some of the terms that he used in persuasively pointing out all of the very dynamic changes that are going on at this very moment at Littorai and why they should not be called "Old School". Certainly one of Ted's key points was how his team at Littorai has turned its back on the conventional farming methods of those earlier decades, as they now practice biodynamics and other sustainable farming methods for the cultivation of their own vineyards and the ones that they lease on a long-term basis, and this is of course both a very important distinction from days gone by and from many of the neighbors, who take a far more industrial approach in the vineyards (and in the cellars). As sustainable, organic farming methods are as much needed in the US today as they are in Champagne or Bordeaux or anywhere else where vineyards are planted, it is a facet of production in American wine that should be commented on more often and I will try to do so in future articles. In fact, when one looks at the food supply chain in much of western Europe and compares it with the United States today, it is quite clear that we in the US lag behind on several fronts in this theater, and this probably extends quite evidently to wine production in America as well and those who choose to farm their grapes organically and focus on sustainability over the long-term should be lauded for their decision and singled out (rather than just lumped into my camp of Old School producers), as it is not always the most financially rewarding tact to take over the short-term and its importance cannot be overstated.

I do not really know what farming methodologies were like back in California in the 1960s and 1970s, when so many of the wines I love from America were crafted, but I imagine that it was not a whole lot different from those used in Europe during this era, with plenty of chemical fertilizers and herbicides in use. Most likely there was lots not to like going on in the vineyards back in these days, and this is probably still the case across wide swaths of American vineyard land today. As has been the case in Champagne as well until very recently, the dynamic of so many farmers selling off their production of grapes in California wine country, rather than making the wines themselves, serves as a driving force to maximize production and minimize workloads in the vineyards- particularly those whose grapes are most highly sought after by wineries- rather than maintaining lower yields and farming in a more organically-oriented manner. I have no firsthand experience working at any vineyards or wineries, and so my view of this phenomenon is by definition speculative in nature, but it seems to me that many of the winemaking styles that I find objectionable in the world of modern wine are designed specifically to cover up a lack of intensity of flavor in the grapes that are harvested from vineyards with high yields. Characteristics such as high alcohol, residual sugar, high percentages of new oak and the like- not to mention some of those somewhat unsavory cellar techniques- all seem, at least to me, to be the solutions used to give the impression of concentration in a wine that lacks these traits naturally, due to the huge crop loads that so many vines are asked to bear. And of course, Ted Lemon's style of sustainable viticulture is not going to lend itself to producing very high yields in the vineyards and is not going to be particularly attractive to farmers selling off all of their grapes without some sort of incentive being eventually built into the market system.

So, it certainly seems that Ted Lemon's objection to having Littorai lumped in with the "Old School" is quite warranted in the realm of viticultural practices, but I still like to think that at least in terms of style and cellar-worthiness of his wines, whatever we choose to call that stylistic school that produces wines of balance and potential for longevity in the bottle, Littorai is most certainly a winery to be placed within those ranks. I will work on coming up with a more appropriate term for classically-inclined producers in the US by the next iteration of a report on North American wines. I should note that I do not have any tasting notes on new releases from Littorai in this article, as Ted answered my query for sending samples last year (and which led to our conversation) by commenting that I am welcome to stop by the winery in Sebastopol on any trip out west and he will be more than happy to put on a fine tasting for me, but that he would prefer not to send sample bottles cross country for review. However, I do have some notes on some older Littorai chardonnays in this piece, which I was very fortunate to taste at an event I spoke at a few months ago, so that this iconic Sonoma estate is represented in this feature.

In any event, this summer's report on American wines turned up some more wineries that were absolutely new to me and whose wines I found to be outstanding. In recent times, winery principals who are crafting wines of elegance and balance out west seem to be reaching out in this direction to sample their current releases, and on most occasions, they find a sympathetic audience here for the vast majority of their wines, as the ranks of traditionally-styled producers in the world of American wines seems to be growing with each passing vintage. New additions to these pages that merit particular attention from subscribers would include wines from The Withers, whose low octane pinot noir bottlings in particular from some of the top vineyard sites on the Sonoma Coast were absolutely stellar- pure, red fruity, transparent and vibrant with

complexity and breed- and will clearly age beautifully. Another first-time producer to me featured in these pages was Lexington, which is a new Santa Cruz Mountain estate created by Thomas Fogarty and his talented winemaker, Nathan Kandler, to focus on wines produced from Bordeaux varietals to augment their chardonnays and pinot noirs from their original vineyards and winery. The vineyards here were planted in 1999 and include all of the typical grapes found in Bordeaux. The first releases from Lexington are due out on the market sometime in September and hail from the 2011 vintage and will be worth a special search to find and add to the cellar, as these are clearly wines built to age long and gracefully.

I should note that this issue is not quite as complete as originally intended, as the early harvest in California this year stopped a few shipments of samples from getting out the door and heading my way, but I will be doing another feature in a couple of issues and so producers such as Joseph Swan and Edmunds St. John should have their new releases prominently featured in the next iteration of coverage on American wines. I should also make special mention of the range of 2013 wines that I tasted from Rhys Vineyards for this article, as this is very clearly a watershed vintage for this first class estate and readers should make a very special effort to latch onto some of these 2013s before they vanish from the market. By this time, Kevin Harvey's Rhys Vineyards is synonymous with excellent, *terroir*-defined examples of chardonnay, pinot noir and syrah, and for many lovers of soil-driven American wines, Rhys is at the very summit of what is possible in California today. However, get ready for the 2013s, as with the release of this vintage, Kevin and his extremely talented team at Rhys have taken things to a new level of quality, with simply stunning wines that lay down the gauntlet not only to the very best pinot and chardonnay producers in the states, but would not be out of place in the very rarefied air of the greatest wines from Burgundy. This is just a very, very special vintage at Rhys! To commemorate the stunning quality of 2013, Rhys has made its first "reserve bottlings" from two of its top vineyards- Alpine and Horseshoe, which are labeled as "Hillside" cuvées and denoted by special black labels. As Kevin Harvey notes, "we view these bottlings as a bit like a Champagne vintage declaration- in the old days!" and "we are only going to bottle them when 1) we feel the quality merits it; 2) we have sufficient quantities; and 3) there is a marked difference with the "regular" bottling." They are made from a selection of the best parcels in each vineyard, but raised the same as the regular cuvée from each parcel and Kevin expects to produce these three or, at most, four times per decade.

Riesling

2014 Riesling- Sprucewood Shores Winery (Ontario) Screwcap

The winemaker at Sprucewood Shores Winery is Jan Schulte-Bisping, who began his career making wine in California and lived and worked in Germany for several years, working with Klaus-Peter Keller amongst others during this stage of his career. He has settled in now on the north shoreline of Lake Erie in western Ontario and sent me some very, very impressive current releases. 2014 Riesling from Sprucewood Shores Winery is finished in a dry style (three grams per liter of residual sugar) and comes in at twelve percent alcohol. The wine offers up fine depth and nascent complexity on the nose, but it is already showing just a touch of reductive elements as well from its closure of choice. With some vigorous swirling, a fine bouquet is unlocked of pink grapefruit, petrol, a touch of tart orange, lovely soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, impressive focus and grip and a long, complex and really energetic finish. This

is really one of the finest New World rieslings I have had the pleasure to taste and seems like it would age really well under natural cork, but under screwcap, I would be inclined to drink this up in the next couple of years. When first opened, there is already just a touch of metallic minerality on the backend, but this vanishes with some extended aeration. At some point in the future, it will be back to stay and the wine will lose length and textural integrity from that point forward. But, for drinking over the near term, this is really a beautifully made wine. Let's see next year's version under natural cork! 2015-2017. **90.**

2014 Riesling “Sweet Select”- Sprucewood Shores Winery (Ontario) Screwcap

The “Sweet Select” bottling of riesling from Sprucewood Shores comes in at 8.5 percent alcohol in the 2014 vintage, making this a nice wine done in a generous Spätlese style, with seventy-five grams per liter of residual sugar. Again, there is already a touch of reductive stinkiness from the screwcap on the nose that needs to be swirled away, but once this is done, the wine delivers a lovely aromatic blend of tangerine, petrol, a touch of lavender, stony soil tones, spring flowers and a dollop of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and impressively light on its feet, with good acids, fine focus and good length and bounce on the finish. This is not quite as complex as the dry riesling bottling and does not show the same grip on the backend, but it is very tasty and I would love to see this too under natural cork in the future, just to see what might be lurking here under the closure. Good juice. 2015-2017. **87.**

2013 Riesling “Hawk’s Flight Reserve”- Sprucewood Shores Winery (Ontario)

The 2013 Hawk’s Flight Reserve bottling is another dry riesling from Sprucewood Shores, coming in at an even twelve percent alcohol and happily, sealed up under natural cork. This was finished dry, with fifteen grams per liter of residual sugar and seven grams per liter of acidity. The wine delivers excellent nascent complexity on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet comprised of a blend of grapefruit, tart orange, lemongrass, an impressively complex base of soil, a touch of wild yeasts, a touch of citrus oil and incipient notes of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and tightly-knit, with a rock solid core, excellent focus and grip and a long, youthful and perfectly balanced finish. This needs two or three years’ worth of bottle age to really blossom, but all the constituent components are here to make a terrific bottle of dry riesling with a bit of cellaring. Impressive juice. 2018-2030. **92.**

Chardonnay

2013 Alesia “Alder Springs Vineyard” Chardonnay (Mendocino)

The 2013 Alder Springs Vineyard Chardonnay from Alesia is outstanding and one of the best wines I have yet tasted from this second label from Kevin Harvey’s excellent team at Rhys Vineyards. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a cool and classy blend of fresh pineapple, pear, salty soil tones, acacia blossoms and a stylish base of butter oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with fine complexity, crisp acids and fine length and grip on the poised and very serious finish. At 13.1 percent alcohol, this has really hit its sweet spot and sings on both the nose and palate! Truly a superb bottle of chardonnay. 2015-2020+. **92.**

2013 Bravium “Abbassi Vineyard” Chardonnay (Carneros)

The 2013 Abbassi Vineyard Chardonnay from Bravium is pretty ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol, but the wine handles its octane well and shows no signs of heat or flabbiness. Given how many California chardonnays are well north of fourteen percent these days, it seems bit of funny to call a 13.5 percent alcohol wine “ripe”, but there is a lot more race and cut to be found in the thirteen percent range for this varietal. On the nose the wine offers up a fine mix of

pear, pink grapefruit, marzipan, a nice touch of soil tones, orange zest, a bit of toasty oak and a gentle topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is still pretty primary, with its full-bodied format showing a good core, fine focus and a long, crisp and youthfully reticent finish. This needs at least another six months of bottle age to really blossom and will be better a year or two down the road. Once it starts to open up, it would not surprise me to see its score move up a few points. 2016-2022+. **88+**.

2013 Donelan “Genevieve Block” Chardonnay (Sonoma)

The 2013 “Genevieve Block” bottling of chardonnay from Donelan is pretty ripe for my tastes, coming in at a hefty 14.5 percent octane, but it does a pretty good job of managing its alcohol level. The wine offers up a really lovely nose that shows tons of Meursault character in its mélange of apple, floral tones, a touch of pineapple, hazelnuts, butter and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, fine length and grip and just a touch of backend bitterness on the long finish from the high level of alcohol. However, this is not particularly hot on the backend and is really quite a tasty drink in its style, though, a degree lower in alcohol would have made this wine stunning, rather than quite good! 2015-2018. **87+**.

2013 Domaine Drouhin “Cuvée Arthur” Chardonnay (Dundee Hills)

The 2013 vintage of Cuvée Arthur from Véronique Drouhin and her talented team at DDO is a beautiful bottle of chardonnay for drinking over the next five to ten years. It is a tad riper than I would find ideal, coming at 13.9 percent, but is very pure on both the nose and palate and shows no signs of *sur maturité* or awkward balance. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, a complex base of soil, acacia blossoms, sweet nuttiness, incipient notes of *crème patissière* and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and focused, with a generous attack, a lovey core, sound framing acids and lovely length and grip on the ripe, but complex finish. Good juice. 2015-2025. **92**.

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Horseshoe Vineyard” Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2013 Horseshoe Vineyard chardonnay from Rhys Vineyards is a beautiful young wine, wafting from the glass in a still primary constellation of apple, buttered almonds, lovely soil tones, a touch of leanness, a touch of spring flowers and a very judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still fairly tightly-knit, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and superb backend energy on the long and zesty finish. This is still very early days for this very promising chardonnay, and I would not be tempted to open a bottle for at least another two or three years, as it is still very primary in profile and needs some time to allow the secondary layers of complexity to begin to emerge. 2017-2030+. **92+**.

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Alpine Vineyard” Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2013 Alpine Vineyard chardonnay is another beautiful, young wine from this great vintage at Rhys, and in the fullness of time, this may well take its place at the top of the hierarchy of all the chardonnays yet produced at this Santa Cruz Mountain icon. The bouquet is deep, pure and still quite youthful, as it wafts from the glass in a classy blend of pear, passion fruit, a touch of hazelnut, complex soil tones, a hint of iodine and a topnote of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with a fine core, great focus and grip, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the very Meursault-like finish. This is showing more of its latent complexity out of the blocks than the Horseshoe bottling, but it too is a very young wine and it would be fool-hardy to be opening bottles in the next few years, as there is so much more complexity to come with bottle age here! Great juice. 2018-2030+. **94+**.

2013 Sojourn Cellars “Durrell Vineyard” Chardonnay (Sonoma Coast)

The 2013 Durrell Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Sojourn Cellars is produced from two parcels of old, Wente clones and was raised in forty percent new wood in this vintage. It is a fairly ripe wine, coming in at 14.3 percent alcohol, and shows just a bit of backend heat on the palate, which may indicate that its actual octane is perhaps a tad higher than the label suggests. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a lovely blend of pear, apple, acacia blossoms, a nice touch of soil, gentle notes of *crème patissière* and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very flattering on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and grip, good acidity and a long, slightly warm finish. This is good juice and I had no problem drinking a glass, but it could have been absolutely stunning at a slightly lower level of alcohol. 2015-2019. **89+**.



2013 Sojourn Cellars “Campbell Ranch Vineyard” Chardonnay (Sonoma Coast)

The 2013 Campbell Ranch Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Sojourn is a touch less ripe than the Durrell Vineyard bottling, tipping the scales at 14.1 percent and offering up a fine nose of buttered pears, pineapple, a nice base of soil tones, lemon blossoms and new oak. On the palate the wine again seems just a bit riper than 14.1 percent (at least to my sensitive tongue), with a trace of backend heat poking out on the finish. The wine is full-bodied, quite deep and nascently complex, with a good core, sound acids, but a bit of assertive ripeness on the finish making the wine slightly hot and heavy-handed out of the blocks. This could use a year in the

bottle to allow some of its secondary layer of complexity to emerge, as it is still pretty primary in personality, and will be a good, solid drink once it has blossomed. That said, I would love to see this wine a full half point lower in octane, as it might show more inner tension and *nervosité* if it were a bit less ripe. 2016-2025+. **88+**.

2012 Thomas Fogarty “Santa Cruz Mountains” Chardonnay

The 2012 “Santa Cruz Mountains” bottling of chardonnay from Thomas Fogarty is really a fine bottle, with its 13.5 percent octane allowing lovely freshness and bounce on the palate. The first class bouquet offers up scents of apple, hazelnut, a nice touch of acacia blossoms, a stylish base of soil tones and buttery oak. With air this even shows a bit of geranium that strongly recalls Meursault. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a fine core, excellent focus and a long, crisp and complex finish. This is drinking very well today, but is nicely structured and should age quite well. Nathan Kandler at Thomas Fogarty is clearly at the top of his game today! 2015-2025. **91+**.

2012 Thomas Fogarty “Damiana Vineyard” Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 Damiana Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Thomas Fogarty is pretty ripe by the high standards of this winery, tipping the scales at a hefty 14.5 percent alcohol, and the wine does show just a touch of backend heat on the palate as a result. The bouquet is wide open and flamboyantly enticing, offering up a superb blend of pineapple, pear, acacia blossoms, pastry cream and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, good acids, lovely focus and grip and just a bit of the aforementioned heat on the backend that keeps its score down a tad. This is a wine that will drink very well for the next few years, but at this octane level, I cannot imagine holding up as well in the cellar as the 2012 Santa Cruz Mountain bottling from the winery. Good juice that could have been great with just a bit less ripeness. 2015-2018. **89**.

2012 Thomas Fogarty “Albutom Vineyard” Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 Albutom Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Thomas Fogarty is a completely different expression of the varietal than the Damiana Vineyard, as the wine comes in at a cool 12.9 percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, as it wafts from the glass in a very classy blend of pear, apple, gentle leesy tones, a touch of iodine, lovely soil nuances, white lilies, vanilla and a very refined base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a superb core, racy acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, still quite primary and well-balanced finish. I love the sense of reserve this wine shows out of the blocks, as it augurs extremely well for its future evolution. This is nicely lean today, but will blossom in the mid-palate with a bit more bottle age. A beautiful bottle of chardonnay. 2015-2025+. **92+**.

2012 Thomas Fogarty “Langley Hill Vineyard” Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 Langley Hill Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from the Thomas Fogarty winery is a superb wine that recalls to my palate (despite dramatically different *terroirs*) some of the old classic vintage of Château Montelena’s chardonnays from the late ‘70s and early 1980s. The wine comes in at a cool 13.3 percent alcohol and offers up a beautifully pure nose of apple, pear, a very discreet touch of leesiness, a dollop of white flowers, a nice undertow of soil tones and a very svelte framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, succulent and light on its feet, with lovely framing acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, fairly complex and absolutely delicious finish. This is gorgeous to drink right out of the blocks and should cruise along nicely for the next five to seven years, but does not seem to have the chassis to age longer than that timeframe. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2022. **92**.

2012 Thomas Fogarty “Portola Springs Vineyard” Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The Portola Springs bottling of chardonnay from Thomas Fogarty is the lowest octane of their fine range of chardonnays in 2012, coming in at a very understated 12.5 percent alcohol. Consequently, the wine is more discreet out of the blocks than some of the riper versions, but should be the longest-lived of this fine lineup of 2012s and does not lack for personality or complexity on either the nose or the palate. The bouquet is deep, vibrant and classy, as it offers up a superb constellation of pear, delicious apple, fresh almond, lovely soil tones, a touch of citrus zest and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and intensely flavored, with zesty acids, outstanding focus and grip, a fine core and a long, complex and racy finish. This wine at 12.5 percent does not have the same easy amplitude out of the blocks as some of the riper specimens of the vintage, but there is a backend energy here that is very, very exciting and is quite rare in the greater universe of riper California chardonnays! I would give this a year or two in the cellar to really let it blossom, and then drink it over the ensuing ten to fifteen years, as this should age beautifully. A dynamite bottle! 2016-2030+. **93+**.

2012 Château Montelena “Napa Valley” Chardonnay

It had been many years since I last tasted Château Montelena’s Napa bottling of chardonnay, which used to be one of my favorites in all of California, as its non-malo style has always provided a lovely spine of acidity for the wines to age long and gracefully. The 2012 is a bit riper than the ones I remember so fondly from yesteryear, coming in at 13.8 percent alcohol, but the wine is fresh and vibrant on the nose and only shows a whisper of backend heat on the palate. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of pear, peach, acacia blossoms, a touch of almond paste and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, crisp and full-bodied, with a fine core, good focus and grip and a long, youthful and ever so slightly warm finish. My gut feeling is that at its slightly higher octane, this will not age as long as the wines did from the vintages of the 1970s and 1980s, but it is still an impeccably well-made bottle of chardonnay and a lovely drink for the next five to seven years. 2015-2022+? **91**.

2011 Mayacamas Vineyards Chardonnay (Mount Veeder) served from magnum

The 2011 Mayacamas Vineyards chardonnay is still a young wine (particularly in magnum), coming in at 13 ¼ percent alcohol and offering up a fairly ripe nose for this bottling, with notes of apple, pineapple, chalky soil tones, acacia blossoms and a discreet framing of vanillin oak wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in personality, with a fine core, crisp acids and lovely focus on the long, zesty and youthful finish. Out of magnum, I would not touch this wine for another four or five years, so that some of the secondary layers of complexity can start to emerge. Good juice. 2020-2040+. **90+**.

2006 Littorai Chardonnay “Charles Heintz Vineyard” (Sonoma Coast)

I was expecting just a bit more from the 2006 Littorai Chardonnay from the Charles Heintz Vineyard, as Ted Lemon makes some of the most age-worthy chardonnays in California in my experience. But, the ’06 was getting to the far side of its plateau, and while still tasty, is staring to get pretty soft now and is in need of drinking up. The mature bouquet offers up scents of pineapple, apple, gentle soil tones, a touch of herbaceousness and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and gently structured, with a good core, sound complexity and solid length on the easy-going finish. Not bad, but probably much more interesting when it had a bit more cut and grip a few years back. 2015-2016. **87**.

2002 Littorai “Thieriot Vineyard” Chardonnay (Sonoma Coast)

The 2002 Thieriot Vineyard bottling of Chardonnay from Ted Lemon is drinking beautifully and at age thirteen is at its apogee. The bouquet delivers a fine, mature blend of apple, pineapple, toasted almonds, salty soil tones, orange peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with very good cut and grip on the long, *à point* finish. This has probably been drinking with fine style for a decade already, but still has several more years of pleasure in it. 2015-2020+. **92.**

2001 Littorai “Thieriot Vineyard” Chardonnay (Sonoma Coast)

I do not recall the vintage characteristics, but the 2001 Thieriot Vineyard chardonnay from Littorai certainly seems to be showing a fair bit of botrytis to it today and is far more tropical as a result than the classic 2002 version. The bouquet offers up a botrytized blend of pineapple, guava, honey, a touch of salty soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, but with the botrytis defining the palate quite emphatically, with concentration and acids increased from the noble rot, but with less precision and breed as a result. This is a good bottle with plenty of life ahead of it still, but botrytis and chardonnay have never been my favorite combination. 2015-2025. **88.**

2000 Littorai “Thieriot Vineyard” Chardonnay (Sonoma Coast)

Ted Lemon’s 2000 vintage of chardonnay from the Thieriot Vineyard continues to drink very well, but this wine is far more advanced in its aromatic and flavor profile than the 2002, as it offers up a mature and quite tertiary nose of peach, apple, a touch of butterscotch, salty soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a wide open personality that still nicely retains its shape and bounce, and a long, tertiary and fully mature finish. The balance here is still lovely and the wine is drinking very well still today, but it is quite a mature style of chardonnay at age fifteen and will want drinking up over the next four or five years. 2015-2020. **89.**

1995 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée LV” Chardonnay (Sonoma County)

Kalin’s Cuvée LV Chardonnay hails from the Long Vineyard in Dry Creek Valley, which is a vineyard that provides three different bottlings these days for the Leightons, with the “LV” hailing from the upper section of the vineyard, which is slightly warmer than the other two sections from which they source chardonnay grapes. The 1995 LV is a stellar young chardonnay, wafting from the glass in a beautiful bouquet of pear, a touch of mint, salty soil tones, a hint of beeswax, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy in profile, with an excellent core, great purity and focus and a long, vibrant and impressively soil-driven finish. A beautiful bottle of chardonnay that is a relatively recent release from Kalin Cellars and a wine that will continue to drink beautifully for the next twenty years or more. 2015-2035+. **94.**

1995 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée W” Chardonnay (Livermore Valley)

The 1995 vintage of Cuvée W chardonnay from Terry and Frances Leighton is the most exotic and perfumed vintage of this bottling that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The beautifully musky nose soars from the glass in a blend of fresh apricot,. Passion fruit, musky floral tones, orange peel, a beautiful base of soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a great core, outstanding focus and balance, excellent acidity and fine grip on the very long and complex finish. While this has plenty of secondary layers of complexity and is wide open in personality, it is also built to age and will continue to drink beautifully for at least another fifteen years. Great juice. 2015-2030+. **94.**

1974 Stony Hill Vineyards Chardonnay

This was only Mike Chelini's second vintage making wine at Stony Hill, and he very clearly hit the ground running as full-time winemaker at this great estate. I had not tasted this wine since 2010 and was very happy to be served the wine blind this past year, as this is the kind of wine one can get very easily accustomed to drinking! The bouquet on the 1974 is still very fresh and pure, as it soars from the glass in a vibrant mélange of lemon peel, candied orange, a hint of the honey to come, a gloriously complex base of salty soil tones, fresh nutmeg, a touch of browned butter, dried lavender and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, laser-like focus and stunning length and grip on the perfectly balanced, vivid and beautifully complex finish. This is very clearly one of the greatest wines produced in the mid-1970s in all of California, and given that this was an age that produced so many great, great wines, it is marvelous to see the 1974 Stony Hill Chardonnay still bright, pure and electric and in the full bloom of its zenith of maturity! 2015-2030+. **96+**.

Sémillon

2000 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

The 2000, which happens to be the first wine the Leightons have released from the new millennium, is a blend of eighty percent Sémillon (sourced from Wente Brothers Vineyard) and twenty percent Sauvignon Blanc- which for the first time, is also from a very old vineyard owned by the Wente family in Livermore Valley (rather than the old Potter Valley sauvignon blanc vineyard that they used for years). Wente's Sémillon vineyard was planted in 1909 from Charles Wetmore cuttings taken from Château d'Yquem and the wine is barrel fermented, goes through full malolactic fermentation and is aged in twenty percent new wood. There were 500 cases produced in the 2000 vintage, which may well be the finest iteration of this superb bottling since the stellar 1991! The wine offers up a deep and complex nose of lemon, melon, beeswax, a touch of licorice, a beautiful base of soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still very racy at age fifteen, with a rock solid core, great complexity and a very long, bright, impeccably balanced and classy finish. It will continue to age and evolve for another fifteen to twenty years and is an absolute bargain! 2015-2030+. **94+**.

Sauvignon Blanc

2014 Heitz Wine Cellar Sauvignon Blanc (Napa Valley)

The current release of Heitz Wine Cellar's fine sauvignon blanc bottling comes in at a cool and classy 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up an utterly classic nose of grapefruit, gooseberry, fresh-cut grass, a nice touch of soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and zesty, with a nice core, plenty of youthful structure and very good length and grip on the focused and promising finish. This is not a bad drink today, but another six to twelve months in the cellar will allow it to relax a bit structurally and really start to hit on all cylinders. Very Sancerre-like in all aspects but chalky soil tones, and a really lovely rendition of Napa sauvignon blanc. 2015-2020+. **89**.

2001 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Livermore Valley)

This is the first vintage that I have tasted from the new source of decidedly old vine sauvignon blanc that the Leightons have begun to work with in the Livermore Valley. This is from a parcel of one hundred year-old vines and the 2001 is a superb wine that is now at its apogee of peak maturity. The wine is now nicely honeyed in color and offers up a beautiful and

very complex nose of tangerine, a touch of petrol, a lovely walnut-like nuttiness, citrus peel, gentle notes of beeswax and a very complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, mature and vibrant finish. A beautiful bottle of mature sauvignon blanc that would make a great ringer in a mature white Bordeaux tasting! 2015-2030. **93.**

Rosé and Blanc de Noirs

2014 Bravium Rosé of Pinot Noir “Muns Vineyard” (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2014 Bravium Rosé of Pinot Noir from the Muns Vineyard is a lovely pale salmon color and offers up a fine nose of melon, tangerine, stony soil tones, a touch of cherry skin and a gentle topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This works really nicely at table and is a perfect, red wine substitute on those hot summer evenings. 2015-2017. **89.**

2014 Bravium Rosé of Pinot Noir “Signal Ridge Vineyard” (Mendocino Ridge)

The 2014 Bravium Rosé of Pinot Noir from the Signal Ridge Vineyard is one of the ripest rosés I can recall tasting in the last few years, tipping the scales at a pretty hefty 13.9 percent alcohol and does show its octane a bit on the palate, but aromatically the wine is quite enticing. The bouquet is a deep and fairly complex blend of pomegranate, orange, lovely spice tones, a bit of smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and juicy at the core, with sound acids, good focus and grip and a long, fairly complex and ever so slightly heady finish. I would like this even better if it were a bit lower in octane, but it carries its alcohol pretty well and is really quite a tasty bottle. 2015-2016. **87.**

2014 The Withers Rosé (56% Mourvèdre, 44% Grenache) El Dorado

The 2014 Rosé from The Withers is a very tasty bottle that recalls top examples from the Rhône or Provence, as it comes in at 13.4 percent alcohol and retains lovely bounce and cut on the backend. The first class nose is a blend of white cherries, tangerine, a nice range of soil tones, gentle spice elements and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively complex, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, succulent finish. Good juice. 2015-2018. **89.**

2014 Bravium Pinot Noir Blanc “Wiley Vineyard” Steel Tank Aged (Anderson Valley)

This was certainly an interesting wine, as I do not taste too many white wines made from pinot noir that do not include bubbles! The nose offers up an exotic blend of peach, tangerine, nice soil tones and a bit of fruit skin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit heavy-handed in style, with a good core and a long, four-square and slightly bitter finish. This has good depth and stuffing, but seems to lack a bit of the inherent delicacy of pinot noir. 2015-2019. **86.**

Merlot

2012 Calluna Vineyards “aux Raynauds” Merlot (Chalk Hill)

David Jeffrey makes really high class merlot, with his 2012 bottling including five percent cabernet franc in this vintage. The winery’s merlot parcel is planted at the top of their hillside vineyard, where there is a high clay content in the soil, which perfectly suits this variety. This is nice and cool in personality in 2012 (like the stellar 2011 version), coming in at 13.4 percent alcohol and offering up a really fine, complex bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of currant leaf and a discreet base of new wood. On

the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very elegant, with a lovely core, superb soil signature, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the focused, refined and very classy finish. This wine retails for \$40 per bottle, which makes it awfully hard to rationalize shopping for Pomerol at today's prices! Clearly, David Jeffrey is now one of California's absolute masters when it comes to merlot! 2020-2040+. **94.**



2011 Lexington “Gist Ranch Estate” Merlot (Santa Cruz Mountains)

Lexington is a new project of Thomas Fogarty and his Cellar Master, Nathan Kandler, which has been a decade in the making. The fine Fogarty winery specializes in chardonnay and pinot noir, and for many years, the team here has been looking for a possible vineyard to develop to produce Bordeaux varietals. The remote Gist Ranch was identified close to a decade ago and cleared and planted, with the first wines to roll out of the cellars due for release this autumn. The 2011 Merlot comes in at a fairly moderate octane of 14.5 percent alcohol and was raised entirely in used barrels. The inaugural release offers up a very Pomerol-like aromatic blend of plums, black cherries, chocolate, tobacco leaf, soil and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant on the attack, with a fine core, ripe, suave tannins, good acids and just a bit of backend heat on the long and nicely chewy finish. I would have loved to have seen this just a touch lower in alcohol, particularly in the 2011 vintage, but this is a very well-made bottle of merlot with serious aspirations and it should age quite well indeed. It is

approachable today, but still quite primary, and I would give it at least a few years in the cellar to allow some of its secondary layers to emerge. 2017-2035+? **90+**.

1990 Duckhorn Vineyards Merlot (Napa Valley)

I was thinking the 1990 Duckhorn merlot, at twenty-five years of age, might really be an interesting bottle of wine, but I was wrong. This is 13.7 percent alcohol, which was probably too high for longer-term cellaring, as the nose is now very simple in its mélange of dark berries, damp soil, coffee grounds, herbs and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and completely four-square, with no complexity and a chunky finish that still shows some bitter, uncovered oak tannins on the clipped finish. It is not dead yet and will probably last another ten years, but it is not really alive either... Pedestrian juice. 2015-2025. **82**.

Syrah and Other Rhône Varietals

2012 Donelan “Cuvée Christine” Syrah (Sonoma County)

The 2012 Donelan “Cuvée Christine” Syrah is a lovely wine, coming in at a svelte 14.1 percent alcohol and offering up lovely potential on both the nose and palate. The fine bouquet delivers up scents of cassis, black raspberries, a nice touch of meatiness, dark chocolate, green peppercorn and a dollop of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely primary in personality, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, youthful and well-knit finish. This is already a tasty bottle for drinking today, but a handful of years in the cellar will allow the wine to develop some of its secondary layers of complexity and will really allow it to blossom. A fine bottle. 2019-2040+. **90+**.

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

The 2012 Rhys syrah from the Horseshoe Vineyard is a bit less ripe in personality than the 2012 Skyline Vineyard version (please see below), coming in at an even thirteen percent octane and offering up simply stunning aromatic and flavor purity. The very complex bouquet smells like a Gérard Chave wine from the 1980s, soaring from the glass in a precise and classy constellation of cassis, black raspberries, roasted meats, raw cocoa, black olive, stony soil tones, a touch of medicinal young syrah, new leather, cedar and just a whisper of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and brilliantly soil-driven, with a fine core, flawless focus and balance, ripe, chewy tannins and a very long, very complex and soil-driven finish. This is a puppy and will need at least eight to ten years to really come into its own, but it should prove to be a serious long-distance runner and a reference point example of just what is possible with this grape in a properly stony *terroir*, coupled with impeccable winemaking. Stunning young syrah! 2023-2060+. **95+**.

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

The 2012 Skyline Vineyard bottling of syrah from Rhys Vineyards is pretty ripe by the standards of this cuvée, coming in at 13.7 percent alcohol, but the wine is still impeccably balanced and shows outstanding potential for the cellar. The deep and youthful nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, black pepper, espresso, stony soil tones, black olive and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and still impressively transparent, with a fine core, tangy acids and superb complexity and grip on the long and ripely tannic finish. This will start to drink well four or five years down the road and probably reach its apogee around its tenth birthday. Lovely juice. 2019-2050. **93**.

2010 The Withers “Sonnet” (Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre) Mendocino County

The 2010 Sonnet bottling from The Withers comes in at a fairly civilized 14.1 percent alcohol and is comprised of a blend of seventy-two percent syrah, twenty-five percent grenache and three percent mourvèdre. The wine offers up a ripe, but classy nose of black raspberries, pepper, black olive, *garrigue*, a touch of chocolate and a very refined framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a good core of ripe fruit, moderate tannins and just a touch of heat poking out on the long finish. It is only the backend alcohol here that keeps the score down a bit, as the constituent components here are excellent. For those a bit more tolerant of higher octane wines, add three points to the score! 2015-2030+. **89.**

2010 The Withers “Bel Canto”- (Sierra Foothills)

The 2010 Bel Canto bottling from The Withers is comprised of a blend of fifty-two percent grenache, forty-two percent mourvèdre and six percent syrah and comes in at 14.1 percent alcohol in this vintage. The wine offers up a lovely, Châteauneuf du Pape-like nose of baked cherries, raspberries, spit-roasted game, pepper, spice tones and sandalwood. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, with good complexity on the attack, a sound core, ripe tannins and a fair bit of uncovered alcohol poking out on the hot finish. I like the constituent components here quite a bit, but this just seems higher in octane than the 14.1 percent on the label and would be a lot better to my palate at a lower alcohol level. At fourteen-plus percent, it is just a bit stewy and too hot for pleasure and this was the only wine from The Withers that did not impress (with the usual caveat that those who have more tolerance to high alcohol wines should add several points to me score). 2015-2018? **83.**

2010 Edmunds St. John “Wylie-Fenaughty Vineyards” Syrah

The 2010 vintage of Wylie-Fenaughty syrah from Steve Edmunds is an outstanding young wine, tipping the scales at a very grown up thirteen percent alcohol and offering up a simply stunning nose of cassis, dark plum, black pepper, chocolate, a superb base of soil and a fine touch of meatiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, moderate tannins and exceptional length and grip on the poised and classy finish. A great bottle of syrah in the making, but it could still do with at least a few more years’ worth of bottle age to really start to blossom. Its absolute apogee is still a decade in the future. 2017-2040. **94.**

1978 Fetzer Vineyards Petite Syrah “Special Reserve” (Mendocino)

The 1978 Fetzer Vineyards Petite Syrah “Special Reserve” is quite ripe for this era in California wine, as it came in at a robust 14.7 percent alcohol, but the wine has aged really beautifully and is still drinking with complexity and breed at age thirty-seven. The wine offers a deep, complex and smokily autumnal blend of desiccated dark berries, charred wood, coffee grounds, roasted game, fallen leaves and bonfires in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now very velvety, with a fine core, tertiary complexity, melted tannins and excellent length and grip on the slightly warm, but balanced finish. Just a lovely wine from an era at Fetzer where the family made really good wines that aged with the same agility as the big boys of the time, but were bargain priced! This lovely wine still has plenty of life ahead of it and there is absolutely no hurry to drink it up. 2015-2030. **92.**

Zinfandel

2012 Heitz Wine Cellar “Ink Grade Vineyard” Zinfandel (Napa Valley)

The 2012 Ink Grade Vineyard bottling of zinfandel from Heitz Wine Cellar is a really lovely, old school example of the varietal, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol and offering up a fairly light color and plenty of red fruit and spice tones. The fine bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of raspberries, cherries, allspice, a touch of *garrigue* and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with plenty of zinfandel tanginess, a good core, nascent complexity and fine length and grip on the moderately tannic and slightly heady finish. This should age quite well and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for at least four or five years and let it blossom. Good juice cut in the mold of zinfandel from the 1970s and 1980s. 2019-2040. **89.**



Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Bordeaux Blends

2013 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Cathy Corison’s 2013 Napa Valley bottling is the first cabernet sauvignon I have tasted from this vintage, and the wine is an absolute classic in the making. The beautifully youthful and pure nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a hint of meatiness, incipient notes of Rutherford Dust, cigar wrapper, a touch of allspice and a very refined framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins, lovely soil inflection and outstanding length and grip on the cool,

classy and nascently complex finish. At 13.5 percent alcohol, this wine is just perfect in all respects and simply needs the addition of bottle age to blossom into a hauntingly beautiful bottle of cabernet sauvignon. 2023-2060+. **94.**

2012 Andrew Will “Mays’ Discovery Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Horse Heaven Hills)

This is the relative newcomer in Chris Camarda’s fine lineup of red wine bottlings from Andrew Will Cellars, as the first vintage produced from the fruit from this vineyard only dates back to the 2010 vintage. The 2012 version is outstanding, coming in at an even fourteen percent octane and offering up a superb bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of currant leaf and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, chewy tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. I love the combination of ripe and generous fruit at the core and seamless, but serious structural elements that will carry the wine a long way into the future. It is certainly approachable today (and quite tasty), but the real fireworks here will not start for at least another six or seven years, and I would be strongly inclined to cellar the wine until at least 2021 or so before starting to drink it in earnest, as it will just be blossoming at that point. It will probably not be at its true zenith until its twentieth birthday! A very, very high class bottle of cabernet sauvignon. 2021-2060. **94.**

2012 Andrew Will Cellars “Champoux Vineyard” (Horse Heaven Hills)

This has been one of the flagship vineyard designates in the Andrew Will lineup since its first release in the 2000 vintage, and the 2012 rendition is a beautifully refined wine. The blend this year has the lowest percentage of cabernet sauvignon that I can ever recall for this cuvée, coming in with only fourteen percent of this varietal, to go along with sixty-four percent cabernet franc and twenty-two percent merlot. The wine is very pure and nicely ripe on both the nose and palate, wafting from the glass in a deep and very sophisticated aromatic constellation of cassis, sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, coffee, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of nutty new wood, a bit of lead pencil and the very earliest signs of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is simply superb, delivering a full-bodied format that shows off excellent depth of fruit at the core, a fine soil signature, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and quite black fruity finish. This is another absolute *tour de force* in 2012! 2022-2060. **94.**

2012 Andrew Will Cellars “Two Blondes Vineyard” (Yakima Valley)

Chris Camarda and his partners in this vineyard, Bill and Melody Fleckenstein, planted this parcel only in 2000, so with each passing year, the vines get older and the wines get more complex. This year the blend from Two Blondes is fifty percent merlot, thirty percent cabernet sauvignon and twenty percent cabernet franc, with the wine having been raised in thirty-five percent new wood and bottled after eighteen months in cask. The bouquet on the 2012 is outstanding, offering up a deep and complex mélange of black plums, dark berries, coffee, a touch of menthol, cigar wrapper, fresh herbs and smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a very suave attack, lovely focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. The backend energy on this wine is absolutely enormous! With fifty percent merlot in the blend this year, the 2012 Two Blondes Vineyard bottling is channeling its inner Pomerol in a most exciting fashion. A simply stunning young wine. 2019-2055. **95.**

2012 Andrew Will Cellars “Ciel du Cheval Vineyard” (Red Mountain)

The 2012 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard bottling from Chris Camarda is made up of the same blend as the Two Blondes in this vintage: fifty percent merlot, thirty percent cabernet sauvignon

and twenty percent cabernet franc, and both wines were raised in the same thirty-five percent new wood, so they are beautiful to compare to each other and witness the dramatic differences in their respective *terroirs*. The bouquet on the 2012 Ciel du Cheval is more black fruity in profile than the Two Blondes, offering up a superb blend of cassis, dark berries, espresso, cigar ash, dark, gravelly soil tones, currant leaf and a nice framing of discreetly nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a velvety attack, a superb core, beautifully-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and youthfully complex finish. The refined attack here suggests a wine that will be drinkable earlier, but the outstanding backend structure and grip are like young Cheval Blanc and this beautiful wine really must be forgotten in a cool corner of the basement for several years to allow it to develop its full spectrum of complexity. A great, great wine. 2020-2060. **94+**.

2012 Andrew Will Cellars “Sorella” Champoux Vineyard (Horse Heaven Hills)

The 2012 Sorella from Chris Camarda, which is based primarily on the oldest cabernet sauvignon vines on this vineyard, which were planted all the way back in 1972, is absolutely stellar in this vintage. The *cépages* of the 2012 Sorella works out to sixty-seven percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent merlot and thirteen percent cabernet franc, and like all of the single vineyard bottlings from the estate this year, it was raised in thirty-five percent new oak and came in at an even fourteen percent alcohol. The gorgeously youthful nose jumps from the glass in an expressive blend of cassis, cigar smoke, a touch of coffee bean, dark soil tones, graphite, tobacco leaf and a lovely framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great balance, firm, integrated tannins, good acids and stunning length and grip on the poised, elegant and nascently complex finish. A few vintages back, the Sorella was a bit riper and far more flamboyantly-styled out of the blocks, but this new, slightly lower interpretation of the vineyard shows even greater potential for long-term cellaring and is amongst the finest Bordeaux-styled blends that one can buy on either side of the Atlantic these days! If you asked me to choose between Château Angélus for example, I would take Sorella without hesitation! The 2012 is an utterly brilliant wine and perhaps, the finest Sorella I have yet tasted from Chris Camarda, though one is going to have to exercise a bit of patience to see the full panoply of nuance that this wine will offer once it completely blossoms. 2022-2060. **96**.

2012 Calluna Vineyards “CVC” (Calluna Vineyards Cuvée) Chalk Hill

The 2012 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is a Bordeaux-styled blend of thirty-six percent merlot, twenty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent cabernet franc and ten percent petit verdot. The wine comes in at a reasonable 14.2 percent alcohol and offers up a complex and classy bouquet of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, a touch of menthol, dark soil tones and a judicious framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a fine core, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. To my palate, there is just a touch of heat hovering on the backend today, but it is quite minor, and the wine is built to age very nicely. 2019-2040+. **91+**.

2012 Calluna Vineyards “Calluna Estate” (Chalk Hill)

The Calluna Estate bottling from David Jeffrey is always a barrel selection in the cellar, with the finest casks of each of the five varietals grown on the estate blended together to produce this wine. The 2012 version is 14.2 percent alcohol and has a *cépages* of fifty-nine percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-five percent merlot, seven percent cabernet franc, five percent petit verdot and four percent malbec. It is a half point higher in octane than the stunning 2011, and is an absolutely superb follow-up to that wine, as it offers up a deep, complex and very elegant nose of cassis, black cherries, espresso, dark soil tones, cigar wrapper, gently spicy oak and a

smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and a bit more generous on the attack than the classically structured 2011 version, with lovely focus and balance, a fine core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent grip on the long and very classy finish. This is really an excellent young wine, with the structure to demand a good eight to ten years in the cellar to really blossom and the potential to age gracefully for thirty-plus years. At its slightly higher octane level, and cannot quite match the precision of the 2011, nor the wonderful red fruity tones, but it is a wonderful wine in its own right. 2023-2055. **94.**

2012 Calluna Vineyard “The Colonel’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Chalk Hill)

The 2012 “The Colonel’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon from David Jeffrey’s Calluna Vineyard is quite a bit riper than the classically “cool” 2011, which came in at 13.2 percent alcohol. The 2012 version is a more typical 14.4 percent, but is quite cool in the mouth and will not disappoint fans of this excellent estate. The youthfully complex bouquet is a black fruity blend of dark berries, black cherries, cigar smoke, a fine base of dark soil tones, graphite, a discreet framing of new wood and a lovely, spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely, nascent complexity, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the pure and youthful finish. This is another really refined example of Chalk Hill cabernet sauvignon and a fine follow-up to the excellent 2011 produced here. 2020-2045+. **93+.**

2012 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

I was very sorry to miss the opportunity to celebrate Cathy Corison’s twenty-fifth harvest, as the winery organized tastings on both the east and west coasts to commemorate the milestone by opening every vintage that she has produced at her own winery, and I was in Europe at the time of both events! In any event, her 2012 “Napa” cabernet sauvignon, which is her twenty-sixth vintage here, is really a beautiful wine, tipping the scales at a very refined 13.9 percent alcohol and offering up an utterly classic bouquet of red and black cherries, tobacco smoke, beautiful spice tones, a touch of currant leaf, Rutherford dust and a judicious framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and marvelously elegant, with a lovely core, superb soil signature, nascent complexity and excellent focus and grip on the very long, ripely tannic and impeccably balanced finish. This wine will age brilliantly! *Tout en finesse.* 2022-2055+. **94.**

2012 Corison Winery “Kronos Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 2012 vintage of Kronos Vineyard from Corison Winery is a stunning young bottle in the making. The wine is a tad less ripe than the “Napa” in 2012, coming in at 13.7 percent octane and offering up a pure and youthful bouquet of black cherries, cassis, gorgeous soil tones, cigar smoke, hints of the bell pepper to go and the Rutherford dust to come, gentle spice tones and a very understated framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a sappy core of fruit, superb soil signature, seamless tannins and a very, very long, elegant and still quite youthful finish. This is still very early days for the 2012 Kronos, which will be an absolutely stellar wine in the fullness of time, but I would not touch a bottle for at least another eight to ten years, as this wine is going to get better and better with extended bottle age! 2023-2065+. **95+.**

2012 Château Montelena Cabernet Sauvignon (Calistoga)

This is the first vintage of Château Montelena’s cabernet sauvignon that I have tasted in many years, and I was very happy to check the alcohol level on the wine and find that it comes in at a very civilized 13.8 percent in 2012. The wine offers up a deep and youthful nose of red and black cherries, tobacco leaf, a dollop of red curry, lovely soil tones, a proper touch of fresh herbs

and a discreet framing of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with lovely mid-palate intensity, ripe, well-integrated tannins, lovely transparency and a long, primary and impeccably balanced finish. This wine is so beautifully balanced today that it is quite approachable, but it is still a puppy and really needs a good decade in the cellar to start to show its secondary layers of complexity and drink with generosity. It is a terrific young bottle of cabernet sauvignon! I must have been missing some terrific recent vintages of cabernet sauvignon from Château Montelena! 2022-2055. **93+**.

2012 Napanook – Dominus Estate (Yountville)

The 2012 Napanook bottling from the Dominus Estate is comprised of a blend of ninety-five percent cabernet sauvignon and five percent petit verdot and was raised in a very elegant twenty percent new oak. At 14.5 percent alcohol, the wine is quite ripe in personality, but also stately in its balance and structure and seems very likely to age quite gracefully for a wine at this octane. The bouquet is a ripe and generous blend of pure black cherries, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil, a touch of allspice, chocolate and discreetly spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, great focus and nascent complexity, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and classy finish. I know this wine is crafted with an eye towards early accessibility, but I would love to see this wine a full point lower in octane, as it would be even more precise and ageworthy at this level, though it would not offer quite the same immediate gratification. That said, there is nothing here to be disappointed with and the 2012 Napanook is a very refined example of a riper style cabernet-based wine that keeps its alcohol beautifully in check. 2015-2030+. **91**.



The superb Ciel du Cheval Vineyard on Red Mountain in Washington state.

2011 Lexington “Gist Ranch Estate” Cabernet Franc (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2011 cabernet franc from new Lexington project from Thomas Fogarty and Nathan Kandler comes in at 14.4 percent alcohol and, like the merlot bottling, was aged entirely in used barrels. The wine is excellent, jumping from the glass in a deep and classy blend of cassis, black cherries, a touch of currant leaf, cigar ash, lovely soil tones and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, good acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and still fairly youthful finish. This wine is beautifully light on its feet, without lacking depth, and is quite tasty today, but really deserves four or five years in the cellar (at least) to allow it to fully blossom. It is a very high class, Cheval Blanc-like example of cabernet franc. Given that the ranch was only planted in 1999 and this is the result of vines that are only twelve years of age, I cannot wait to see future vintages, as once these vines really start to get some age under their toes, they are going to be produce some stunningly mineral-driven examples of cabernet franc. But, the 2011 is outstanding and a very, very strong first vintage here! 2019-2040+. **93.**

2011 Lexington “Gist Ranch Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2011 cabernet sauvignon bottling from Lexington includes twenty percent merlot in its *cépages* and was raised in twenty-eight percent new barrels. The wine comes in at a cool 14.1 percent octane and delivers absolutely exceptional complexity on the nose, with notes of cassis, sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, stony soil tones, a touch of nutty new wood and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with an excellent core, great structural interplay between its ripe tannins, tangy acids and mineral drive and a very, very long, nascently complex and energetic finish. This is a stellar young vintage of cabernet sauvignon and a very, very welcome new arrival in the firmament of California’s top cabernet bottlings for the cellar. Just a terrific bottle! 2021-2055. **94+.**

2011 Lexington “Gist Ranch Estate” Apex (Santa Cruz Mountains)

Interestingly, the Apex proprietary bottling from Lexington is almost entirely cabernet sauvignon in the 2011 vintage (with only one percent merlot in the blend), which is more than their varietally-labeled cabernet sauvignon, but I assume that the Apex cuvée will vary its *cépages* depending on vintage characteristics in future iterations. The wine sees the most new wood of any of these fine Lexington bottlings, but this is only one-third new oak, and like the cabernet sauvignon, it tips the scales at a very cool 14.1 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a beautiful bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, tobacco leaf, a nice touch of bell pepper, a fine base of soil and a refined framing of luxuriant nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely generosity on the attack, ripe, firm tannins and outstanding length and grip on the well-balanced and beautifully focused finish. This will need some extended aging to reach its apogee, but it will be a great bottle once it has blossomed. Stylistically, it is a bit more refined than the straight cabernet sauvignon and it will be interesting to see how these two superb wines evolve over the long haul, but today, though the Apex is the more polished out of the blocks, I am not sure that it will necessarily be the superior wine down the road. That said, this too is great juice. 2021-2055. **94.**

2010 Heitz Wine Cellar Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

I continue to be convinced that amongst the very finest values, year in and year out for cabernet sauvignon from the Napa Valley is the straight bottling from the Heitz family, as David Heitz really has a sweet touch with this varietal (having started out his career fashioning the legendary 1974s here!) and with great vineyard sources at his disposal. The 2010 Napa bottling

is the current release from the winery and offers up a deep and utterly classic nose of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a nice base of soil tones, a dollop of allspice and a discreet framing of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly ripe (coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol), with a lovely core, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and excellent nascent complexity on the very long, focused and gently warm finish. Octane levels of 14.5 percent have been standard operating procedure for David Heitz with his cabernet bottlings for well more than a decade and the previous vintages have aged very well indeed, but I keep thinking that I would have no issue with these wines coming in a half point lower in octane and showing a bit more chewy, youthful reticence out of the blocks, as it might make them even better twenty years down the road! That said, this is a lovely wine for the cellar and should age long and gracefully in the Heitz family tradition. 2021-2050+. **90.**

2010 Heitz Wine Cellar “Trailside Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The Trailside Vineyard bottling from Heitz Wine Cellar is the great, undiscovered gem in their fine lineup, as it seems to get overlooked a bit by fans of this iconic estate, probably due to the fact that it does not have the same history of some of their other single vineyards. To my palate, the Trailside bottlings being produced today eclipse the Bella Oaks bottlings of yesteryear, just to put their excellent quality in perspective. This is just a whisper less ripe than the 2010 Martha’s Vineyard bottling, coming in at 14.4 percent alcohol and offering up a simply superb bouquet of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, Rutherford Dust, cigar wrapper, a touch of Asian spice tones and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of ripe fruit, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the well-balanced and classy finish. At 14.4 percent alcohol, this is still a plenty ripe wine, but it manages its octane very well indeed and should age superbly well. One of the best vintages of Trailside Cabernet that I have yet tasted from the Heitz family! 2022-2060. **93+.**

2010 Heitz Wine Cellar “Martha’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 2010 Martha’s Vineyard bottling of cabernet sauvignon from the Heitz family is still a very young and primary bottle in the making, but it seems likely to be outstanding with a decade’s worth of bottle age. The bouquet is very deep and fairly ripe, offering up a fine mélange of black cherries, cigar wrapper, incipient notes of Rutherford Dust, a touch of clove, a superb base of soil tones, woodsmoke, a very faint presage of eucalyptus and a suave base of new wood. The customary mintiness of Martha’s Vineyard is not yet in evidence in the 2010. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthful, with a core of ripe fruit, firm, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. At 14.5 percent octane, this too has just trace elements of heat on the backend today, but I expect these will fully dissipate as the wine has a chance to blossom with bottle age. It is a very promising and classic vintage of Martha’s Vineyard and the only missing ingredient here is the passage of time! 2023-2065+. **95.**

2009 Heitz Wine Cellar “Trailside Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 2009 Trailside Vineyard bottling of cabernet sauvignon from the Heitz family is excellent, with superb complexity already in evidence on the nose and a fresh and plush palate that promises lovely drinking down the road. It is interesting that this is the same octane as the 2009 Napanook (please see below), and yet it does not exhibit the same backend heat as that wine. The bouquet is really excellent, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of cherries, Cuban cigars, Rutherford Dust, lovely soil tones, a nice touch of allspice and a deft framing of new

wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a lovely core, those fine Heitz acids, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This is going to be a superb bottle in the fullness of time, and it should come forward a bit sooner than the 2010 version. 2020-2060. **93.**

2009 Napanook – Dominus Estate (Yountville)

The 2009 Napanook is a very ripe wine at 14.5 percent alcohol, and despite fine aromatics and flavors, the wine does show some overt heat on the backend. The bouquet is not particularly marked by notes of *sur maturité*, as it offers up pretty good freshness in its fairly complex blend of black cherries, eucalyptus, cigar wrapper, a touch of coffee grounds and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, firm, slightly dry-edged tannins, more baked fruit tones than on the nose, and a long, slightly heady and rather chunky finish. I would love to have seen this wine a full point lower in octane, as it would be far better balanced and complex. This is not bad, but the combination of dry-edged tannins and fairly high octane really make it a question mark when it comes to a good moment for drinking. I would be inclined to give it only a couple of years in the cellar, and then drink it with still some tannin left, rather than waiting for the tannins to fully resolve, as I suspect that the fruit will be far less interesting at that point in time. 2018-2025+? **86+?**

2000 Philip Togni Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (Spring Mountain)

It had been a year since I last crossed paths with a bottle of the 2000 Philip Togni Cabernet, which readers will recall, was the first vintage where Lisa Togni returned to the winery full-time to work alongside of her father. This bottle was even a hair better than last year's, as it offers up an outstanding nose of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, incipient notes of chipotle peppers, a fine, complex base of soil and a discreet base of bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with the first signs of blossoming maturity starting to unfold, lovely focus and grip and still just as bit of backend, mountain cabernet tannins perking up the long and impressive finish. I love the Togni family's cabernets! 2020-2055. **94.**

1988 Dunn “Howell Mountain” Cabernet Sauvignon

There was probably not a vintage in California in the decade of the 1980s less desirable than the 1988s, which came on the market unheralded and scarred by charges of underripe malnourishment and no future. However, the handful I have tasted in the last few years have belied this moniker and have been far more complete wines than many of the far more-heralded 1987 north coast cabernets that I have tasted over this same time frame. The 1988 Dunn “Howell Mountain” is just starting to blossom on the palate and offers up an excellent nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a fine base of stony soil tones, a touch of eucalyptus, lovely notes of allspice and a fine framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully open and resolved on the attack, with a fine core, excellent balance and just a bit of backend tannin still perking up the long and complex finish. A fine, fine bottle. 2015-2030+. **92.**

1986 Mayacamas Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Mount Veeder)

The 1986 Mayacamas cabernet sauvignon is still on the youthful and bell peppery side of its evolutionary arc, but tracking very nicely and will be an excellent wine in another five to ten years' time. The bouquet offers up a blossoming blend of cassis, bell pepper, cigar ash, dark soil tones, incipient notes of chipotle pepper and a nice dollop of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep full-bodied, complex and young, with a rock solid core, fairly

moderate tannins, but a decidedly youthful personality on the long, ripely tannic and suave finish. This is still very primary in terms of aromatic and flavor development, but is softening up a bit on the palate and the future looks very good indeed for this wine- just be a bit more patient. 2020-2060. **92+**.

1981 Diamond Creek “Red Rock Terrace” Cabernet Sauvignon (Diamond Mountain)

The 1981 Red Rock Terrace from Diamond Creek is a lovely example of the vintage, but there is a touch of brett here that may put off some tasters (though I found it quite acceptable in level). The deep and complex nose offers up a “cooler fruit” blend of dark berries, espresso, chipotle peppers, a touch of seaweed, cigar ash and a fine, complex base of dark soil tones, to go along with aforementioned brett. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite resolved on the attack, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and still a bit of backend tannin waiting to more completely resolve on the complex and well-balanced finish. One’s enjoyment of this wine really depends on one’s tolerance of a bit of brett, but if a little does not put you off too much, this is really a pretty tasty bottle that is starting to drink well and has plenty of life ahead of it. Clearly, 1981 was not a great vintage for Al Brounstein, but the wine has aged gracefully and does offer up plenty of complexity at age thirty-three. 2014-2030+. **89**.



1978 Matanzas Creek Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma County)

The 1978 Matanzas Creek cabernet sauvignon is a stellar example of the vintage is now at its apogee of peak maturity, but has years and years of life still ahead of it. The outstanding

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

1976 Freemark Abbey Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1976 Freemark Abbey cabernet sauvignon is a lovely example of the vintage, with the “dried fruit character” of this drought year, but with a sweet, extant core and lovely focus and balance still defining the wine as it closes in on its fortieth birthday. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a blend of desiccated cherries, Rutherford dust, petroleum jelly, dried spice tones and gentle notes of woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety, with excellent complexity, a fine core, still just a touch of tannin on the backend and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. Really a lovely bottle of wine at its apogee, but still with plenty of life in it. 2015-2025+. **91.**

1976 Louis Martini “California” Cabernet Sauvignon

In the drought year of 1976, it was not easy to keep alcohol levels down, as the grapes tended to dehydrate on the vine, but the '76 Louis Martini “California” cabernet sauvignon managed to come in at only 12.5 percent alcohol, which no doubt has helped it cruise along as long as it has. The wine is a nicely mature wine on both the nose and palate, delivering a tertiary bouquet of dried cherries and red currants, meaty tones, a bit of leather, herb tones and a nice topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and fully mature, with fading structure, but still solid depth at the core and sneaky length on the soft finish. This wine is now at the end of its plateau and will start to slide in the coming years, but is still quite an enjoyable glass of mature cabernet. 2015-2022+. **87.**

1976 Sterling Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1976 vintage is a very strong one for Ric Forman at Sterling Vineyards, as the wine does not show much influence from the drought conditions of the growing season and is really drinking with great style and complexity as it closes in on its thirtieth birthday. The bouquet is deep, complex and still quite vibrant, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, menthol, a hint of the petroleum jelly to come, a bit of allspice and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely depth at the core, melting tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, tangy and complex finish. Just a lovely bottle of Napa cabernet at its apogee and decades of life still ahead of it. 2015-2035+. **93.**

1975 Heitz Wine Cellar “Fay Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon

It had been five years since I last had a bottle of the 1975 Fay Vineyard bottling of cabernet sauvignon from the Heitz family, but in this last year I have had the good fortune to drink the wine on three occasions and found it to be stellar on each visit. The deep and very pure nose offers up a still fairly youthful mélange of red and black cherries, chipotle peppers, cigar smoke, a touch of red curry, lead pencil, petroleum jelly and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a beautiful core of vivid fruit, plenty of Rutherford dust soil tones, still a touch of tannin and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish

that closes with excellent grip and complexity. A classic wine that time never seems to touch—perhaps due to its thirteen percent alcohol level? 2015-2040. **94+**.

1974 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Cask 23" Cabernet Sauvignon

I noted that the Stag's Leap Cask 23 was still only thirteen percent alcohol in the ripe vintage of 1974, and this is probably one of the reasons it has aged so beautifully. At age forty-one the wine is absolutely beautiful to drink, as it delivers a superb aromatic constellation of dark berries, chipotle peppers, menthol, Rutherford allspice tones, a touch of meatiness, orange peel and a dollop of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite tangy, with a lovely core of velvety fruit, melted tannins and impressive length and grip on the seamless and utterly refined finish. A very, very fine bottle that remains at its zenith. 2015-2030+. **93.**

1972 Cabernet Sauvignon "Napa"- Heitz Wine Cellars

This was the first time I have had the pleasure to drink a bottle of the Napa bottling from Joe Heitz from the 1972 vintage, and given the fair bit of mintiness here on the nose, I am guessing that perhaps this was one of those tail end of the vintage bottlings that might have been stretched with a bit of Martha's Vineyard. The superb nose offers up a mature and vibrant blend of red and black cherries, Rutherford dust, petroleum jelly, a touch of cherry skin, gentle notes of chipotles and a nice touch of mintiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and *à point*, with superb complexity, melted tannins, bright acids and excellent grip and focus on the long and suave finish. A beautiful bottle of old school Napa cabernet sauvignon that is still at its zenith. 2015-2030. **91.**

1969 Cabernet Sauvignon "Lot C-91"- Heitz Wine Cellars

I had not tasted a bottle of the Lot C-91 cabernet sauvignon since 2007, but as I wrote back in the feature on this great estate a few years ago, back in the early days here, Joe Heitz would occasionally have to raid the Martha's Vineyard casks aging in the cellars to "stretch" the last casks of Napa cabernet when stocks were running low of bottles, and occasionally, these blends would appear with special lot designations, as is the case with the C-91. My last bottle of this wine was very pretty, but in retrospect, not as vigorous as some, as I have now had an utterly pristine example! The 1969 Lot C-91 is a stunning bottle of cabernet, offering up a gorgeous nose of red and black cherries, eucalyptus, Rutherford dust, a touch of cranberry, cloves, woodsmoke, cigar wrapper, earth and a bit of chipotle pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely superb at the core, with great focus and complexity, still a touch of tannin and a very long, complex and tangy finish. The last bottle of this rare cuvée was outstanding, but this one was even better, with greater depth, vibrancy and suave, structural integrity! 2015-2030+. **94.**

1969 Mayacamas Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Mount Veeder)

The 1969 vintage is not a particularly ripe vintage for mountain cabernets, and the '69 Mayacamas shows plenty of "cool fruit" character on both the nose and palate, but has also aged very gracefully and is drinking beautifully at age forty-six. The excellent bouquet delivers scents of cassis, bell pepper, a beautiful base of stony soil tones, cigar ash, herb tones, chipotles and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still very nicely structured, with a good core, fine soil signature, melting tannins and a long, tangy and low fat finish. This is not the blockbuster style of the classic 1968 or 1970 vintages at Mayacamas, but this is an utterly complete wine in its own right and beautiful evidence that Bob Travers did not require only the ripest years to make great wines! 2015-2030+. **92.**

1968 Charles Krug Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

These were tumultuous times at Charles Krug, as Robert Mondavi had only been thrown out of the family winery a few years before and the threat of the lawsuit churning its way through the courts at this time would have put a cloud over the winery, but Peter Mondavi still managed to make a very fine bottle of 1968 cabernet sauvignon. Back in these days, Peter Mondavi would still have been buying fruit from Nathan Fay's excellent vineyard, and it is likely that the backbone of the 1968 is from Fay Vineyard (though he might have also been making a special bottling from these grapes in '68). In any case, this wine, once it had a chance to open up in the decanter (as it started out a bit raisiny) is quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, dried eucalyptus, dried black currants, sage, a touch of saddle leather and a nice topnote of allspice. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite velvety on the attack, with solid mid-palate depth, melted tannins and very good length and grip on the vibrant finish. Not world class in terms of complexity, but a lovely bottle of mature cabernet sauvignon from an outstanding vintage. 2014-2030+. **89.**

1958 Beaulieu Vineyards "Georges de Latour" Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon

The legendary 1958 BV Private Reserve cabernet has long had a reputation as one of the greatest wines produced in its era in the Napa Valley, as this is an utterly classic Rutherford Bench bottling from the estate in its glory years. I have had the pleasure to taste this wine on five or six occasions in the last half dozen years, but it has been fully mature probably for forty years at this point and one seldom catches a regular-sized bottled these days that is not in gentle decline. This most recent bottle was really quite vibrant for this wine today, as it offered up a beautiful nose of plums, cocoa, black cherries, nutskin, toasted coconut, chipotles and cigar ash. There is just a whisper of maderization hovering in the background of the aromatics here, but I have had more fully oxidative examples in recent times. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and even a bit more vigorous than the nose suggests, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and velvety finish. The glory days for the 1958 BV are essentially in the rearview mirror today (expect perhaps in magnum), but even in decline, this is a very tasty bottle of historic importance, and one can still see just how brilliant it must have been at its apogee. 2015-2020+. **88.**

Pinot Noir

2013 Alesia "Alder Springs Vineyard" Pinot Noir (Mendocino)

Rhys Vineyards in less than a decade has come to define great, traditionally styled pinot noir and their Alesia label, for the wines they make from purchased grapes, is often one of the top values to be found for this varietal in California. The 2013 Alder Springs Vineyard bottling is quite a bit riper this year than the cool and classy 12.5 percent alcohol of the 2012 version, as this wine tips the scales at a pretty generous 13.6 percent. The wine is a bit jammier in personality as a result, but still deep and complex on the nose, offering up scents of baked cherries and plums, a touch of beetroot, chocolate, fresh herb tones, a nice signature of soil and a deft framing of smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety, with a good core, bright acids and a bit of backend heat on the complex and wide open finish. This is far more accessible out of the blocks than the more structured and cooler 2012, and will supply plenty of enjoyment over the coming decade, but at 13.6 percent, it seems a bit riper than would be ideal for longer-term cellaring. This is good, solid juice, with plenty of complexity, but I would have loved to have seen it a bit lower in octane. 2015-2025. **88.**

2013 Bravium “Wiley Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

The 2013 Bravium “Wiley Vineyard” Pinot Noir is really a lovely, low octane bottle, tipping the scales at 12.7 percent alcohol and offering up lovely red fruity personality on both the nose and palate. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, a touch of beet root, cola, fresh herb tones, a nice base of soil and a refined framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and complex, with a good core, lovely intensity of flavor, modest tannins, tangy acids and a long, velvety and very well-balanced finish. Good juice that is quite approachable today, but which will be even better with a few years’ worth of bottle age. 2015-2035. **91+**.



2013 Bravium “Signal Ridge Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Mendocino Ridge)

Bravium’s 2013 Pinot Noir from the Signal Ridge Vineyard is a bit riper than their Wiley Vineyard bottling, coming in at 13.6 percent alcohol and quite a bit darker in color as well. However, it shares the lovely freshness and aromatic precision of the former, as it offers up a lovely nose of black cherries, a touch of dark chocolate, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, incipient herb tones and a deft framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a sappy core of fruit, good acids, a fair bit of ripe tannin on the backend and a long, focused and very well-balanced finish. In contrast to the quite accessible 2013 Wiley Vineyard bottling, the Signal Ridge pinot will need three to four years in the cellar to start to drink well, but it will be excellent once it starts to blossom. 2019-2040. **92**.

2013 Bravium “Muns Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2013 Muns Vineyard bottling of pinot is the ripest of the three cuvées I tasted from Bravium this year, coming in at 13.8 percent octane, but the wine is quite well-balanced and shows no signs of heat or jamminess on the palate. The bouquet is deep and primary, offering up scents of black cherries, a bit of pomegranate, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, sweet herb tones and a nice base of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, very good balance, bright acids and very good length and grip on the moderately tannic finish. Where this wine does not quite keep pace with its pinot noir siblings this year is in terms of complexity, where I think a little bit has been lost at the slightly higher octane. This is still a good bottle, but I would choose either of the other Bravium pinots over this one in this vintage, as they just exhibit more latent complexity out of the blocks. 2017-2027+. **89.**

2013 Bravium “Beau Terroir Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Carneros)

Bravium’s 2013 Pinot Noir from the Beau Terroir Vineyard in Carneros is really a lovely and very transparent example of the vintage, with lovely freshness and bounce for its ripeness level of 13.7 percent alcohol. The complex and delicately strung together nose offers up a fine mélange of cherries, strawberries, cola, a fine base of soil stones, a dollop of fresh thyme and a judicious framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and soil-driven, with a nice core of sweet fruit, lovely focus and balance and a long, tangy and moderately tannic finish. The ripeness shows just a touch of in the backend, not so much in warmth, but in generosity of fruit, but this is a very classy and well-made bottle of pinot noir. 2015-2035+. **92.**

2013 Domaine Drouhin Pinot Noir (Dundee Hills)

Véronique Drouhin’s 2013 regular bottling of pinot noir at Domaine Drouhin is one of the strongest in recent years (not that recent vintages have been anything but exemplary!), with the depth and seamless structure that should make it a cellar treasure a decade down the road. The wine is pretty ripe at 13.9 percent alcohol, but focused and very well-balanced on both the nose and palate. The very complex bouquet offers up a vibrant and still fairly primary constellation of cherries, blood orange, incipient notes of beetroot, a lovely signature of soil, fresh thyme, lavender, cedar and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and tangy, with a lovely core, fine transparency, moderate tannins, lovely acids and a long, bouncy and youthfully complex finish. There is just a whisper of heat today on the backend that I wish was not there, but this is a very promising wine that is eminently drinkable today, but clearly will build in layers of complexity with some extended bottle age. Chapeau! 2015-2035. **92+.**

2013 Masút Vineyard “Estate” Pinot Noir (Mendocino)

The 2013 Masút Vineyard “Estate” Pinot Noir was raised in fifty percent new wood and bottled without fining or filtration. This is the ripest vintage to date that I have tasted from the Fetzer brothers from this vineyard, as it tips the scales at 14.9 percent alcohol, but holds its alcohol extremely well and shows only a whisper of backend heat on the backend. The deep and complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, baked plums, cola, dark soil tones, gently toasty oak and sweet herb overtones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a fine core, excellent focus, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the gently warm finish. I would have loved to have seen this a fully point lower in octane, but, that said, it is impeccably well done for its ripeness level and is really a well-made wine. 2015-2025+. **89** (and add three points if you are less sensitive to octane than me!)

2013 Masút Vineyard “Two Barrel” Pinot Noir (Mendocino)

The 2013 “Two Barrel” pinot noir from the Fetzer brothers is the ripest wine I have yet tasted from their new winery, coming in at a full 15.1 percent octane. It was raised entirely in new oak and offers up a ripe and fairly complex nose of black cherries, black plums, chocolate, a touch of coffee grounds, balsam bough and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tangy, with a fine core of fruit, impressive lightness of step for its octane, fine focus and a long, gently tannic and surprisingly well-balanced finish. There is just a bit of backend heat here, but it is very well-integrated into the wine today and this wine is really very drinkable for this level of alcohol. Of course, a full point lower in octane and the wine would be drop-dead gorgeous, rather than a very impressive balancing act! I have no experience aging pinots at this alcohol level, but suspect that this wine will at least drink well for a decade and perhaps even longer. 2015-2025+? **88.**

2013 Rhys Vineyard “San Mateo County” Pinot Noir

The San Mateo bottling is typically from a section of the Family Farm Vineyard that is not quite as consistently excellent as the lion’s share of the vineyard, often with small lots of other vineyards added to the blend. In 2013, this is eighty-five percent Family Farm fruit from the recalcitrant portion of the vineyard, along with a bit of younger vine juice from Alpine and Horseshoe Vineyards. The wine is very pretty and stylish, albeit in a bit more fruit-driven style than a typical Rhys pinot noir and suggests a bit of younger vine fruit in the blend. However, the 2013 San Mateo bottling is nicely cool, coming in at a very suave 12.9 percent octane and offering up a complex aromatic blend of cherries, beetroot, gentle notes of woodsmoke, coffee, herb tones and a lovely topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and silky, with a fine core of fruit, lovely and quite elegant fruit tones, modest tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This is really a lovely bottle in the 2013 vintage, with plenty of fruit complexity and a very seamless style. 2015-2030+. **90.**

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Home Vineyard” Pinot Noir (San Mateo County)

The 2013 Home Vineyard pinot noir shares an intensity of flavor and backend energy this year with all of the other fine pinots in the lineup, and it is quite clear that the 2013 vintage here at Rhys is a very special year indeed for this variety (and we shall see about the syrahs from this vintage next year, when they are ready for release). The bouquet on the Home Vineyard is deep, pure and black fruity, delivering a complex constellation of black plums, black cherries, cola, beautifully complex soil tones, a dollop of fresh herbs, a discreet framing of cedar and esthery savory notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with superb mid-palate depth, fine-grained tannins, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and still pretty primary finish. This is a touch more bound up in its fine structure out of the blocks than some of the single vineyard bottlings, but this will just protect it from infanticide and the wine will be stellar when it blossoms fully. 2020-2050. **93+.**

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Family Farm Vineyard” Pinot Noir (San Mateo County)

The 2013 iteration of Family Farm pinot noir from Rhys Vineyards is an utterly suave and classy bottle of young pinot, with a black fruity personality, tons of soil signature and outstanding structural integrity that will carry it far into the future. The simply gorgeous bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, espresso, stony soil tones, sarsaparilla, *fine herbs* and a gentle touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with a great core of fruit, superb focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and stunning length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is going to age magically, and though it will be approachable upon release, please leave it alone in the

cellar for at least the next five years (perhaps after dipping into a single bottle just to see where it is going!) and allow it to fully blossom. Its apogee of peak drinkability will probably be ten to twelve years down the road. 2020-2050. **94+.**

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Bearwallow Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

The Bearwallow bottling of pinot noir has always stood out a bit from the Rhys San Mateo and Santa Cruz bottlings, but it has company from Mendocino in 2013 with the new Porcupine Hill cuvée in the lineup. The 2013 Bearwallow tips the scales at an even thirteen percent and offers up a beautifully complex bouquet of pomegranate, black plum, a touch of coffee bean, fresh herb tones, a fine base of dark soil and incipient notes of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid core of very sappy fruit, with tangy acids, impeccable balance, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and youthfully complex finish. There is a great sense of reserve and backend energy in this wine in 2013 that augurs extremely well for its future evolution in bottle. This is the first vintage where some new, high density plantings have been included in the bottling and, there is no question that this is the finest vintage of Bearwallow pinot noir that I have yet tasted from Rhys! 2021-2050+. **95.**



2013 Rhys Vineyard “Porcupine Hill” Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

The 2013 Porcupine Hill pinot noir from Kevin Harvey and his talented team at Rhys comes in at a very civilized 12.7 percent octane in this vintage. This is a new, high density

planting of vines in the Bearwallow Vineyard, that are on a hillside section that was not previously cultivated and are planted to a density of 17,000 vines per hectare! The wine offers up beautiful nascent complexity on both the nose and palate, wafting from the glass in a classy aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, French roast, a touch of chicory, beautiful dark soil tones, a hint of cedar and a gentle topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and light on its feet, with outstanding intensity of flavor, moderate, fine-grained tannins, lovely acids and superb length and grip on the poised and still fairly primary finish. This will be all too easy to drink out of the blocks, but there is no doubt that a bit of self-restraint will be very well-rewarded four or five years down the road, as this wine has layers of complexity still to unfold with time! As this is still quite young vines, I am sure that we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg here and the Porcupine Hill bottling is going to get better and better as these vines get older. 2019-2050. **93+**.

2013 Rhys Vineyard “Santa Cruz Mountains” Pinot Noir

The 2013 Santa Cruz Mountains bottling of pinot noir from Rhys Vineyards is a lovely, red fruity wine that tips the scales at a very civilized thirteen percent alcohol. The wine offers up a beautiful and very red fruity aromatic blend of strawberries, cherries, eucalyptus, coffee, a nice touch of soil and a pretty topnote of sweet herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and quite velvety on the attack, with a fine core, modest tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. A really lovely entry level bottling from this superb Santa Cruz Mountain estate. 2015-2025+. **90**.

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Horseshoe Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2013 Horseshoe Vineyard pinot noir from Kevin Harvey and his fine team at Rhys is a very, very civilized 12.5 percent octane and offers up a gorgeous bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, stony minerality, fresh thyme, raw cocoa, cardamom, cloves and a very discreet base of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core, tangy acids, a nice signature of stems from its inclusion of plenty of whole clusters, moderate, ripe tannins and a very long, transparent and intensely flavored finish. This is still a puppy, but it is clearly one of the finest vintages of pinot noir I have yet tasted from the Horseshoe Vineyard. It will demand some cellaring to fully blossom on the palate, but the stunning aromatics show just how fabulous this wine will be at once it has blossomed. 2020-2050. **93+**.

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Skyline Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2013 Skyline Vineyard pinot noir is as expressive and exotic on the nose as I can remember for a young wine from this great *terroir*, and I suspect that the 2013 is going to be a reference point vintage for this wine that we are going to look back on with reverence a decade or two down the road. The stunning nose wafts from the glass in an magically complex blend of black plums, pomegranate, a touch of smoked duck, gorgeously layered soil tones, a bit of balsam bough, cola, woodsmoke, sweet herbs and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and already quite velvety in texture, with laser-like focus, a sappy core, moderate tannins and a very long, very complex and tangy finish. This beautiful wine is only 12.6 percent alcohol, but is so layered and intensely flavored that it could not be improved upon by any means- other than magnums! A great, great young pinot noir that is deceptively approachable today and is going to be hard to resist young, but which will age brilliantly. 2019-2050. **96+**.

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Alpine Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2013 Alpine Vineyard bottling this year from Rhys is another truly exceptional example of the vintage and this wine is a cellar treasure in the making. Like many of the other

2013 pinots here, there is a musky sappiness on the nose that is truly stunning (and has not really been seen here in previous vintages), with the wine delivering a gorgeous aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, espresso, complex, dark soil tones, fresh thyme, exotic spice tones and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great structure, fine-grained tannins, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the pure and nascently complex finish. A great, great wine in the making, and a bit easier to resist out of the blocks than the 2013 Skyline, which will make it far less likely to be slaughtered by premature opening! 2021-2050. **95+**.

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Swan Terrace” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

As I noted last year, the Swan Terrace bottling hails from an easterly-facing section of Alpine Vineyard that merits a bottling on its own for its own unique voice of *terroir*. The 2013 version is a marvelously elegant and complex wine on both the nose and palate, offering up a cool fruit mélange of dark berries, Bing cherries, beautiful botanicals, a touch of gamebird, lovely minerality, vinesmoke and a gentle topnote of cardamom. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and very intensely flavored, with a fine core, moderate tannins and great transparency on the very long, youthful and oh, so promising finish. This is the lowest octane bottling of pinot noir from the Rhys lineup in 2013, coming in at a svelte 12.2 percent alcohol, but there is no shortage of stuffing or intensity and all this lovely wine needs is time in the cellar to fully blossom. 2020-2050. **94+**.

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Horseshoe Hillside” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The very first release of the “Horseshoe Hillside” reserve bottling of pinot noir from Rhys Vineyards is utterly spectacular, with a more reserved personality than the regular bottling and even more precision and complexity. The great nose wafts from the glass in a bottomless mélange of sweet dark berries, a touch of grilled meats, bitter chocolate, a superbly complex base of soil tones, sweet herb tones, vinesmoke, an exotic touch of dried eucalyptus and a discreet framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impeccably balanced, with a great core, stunning soil signature, suave tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the long, nicely reserved and complex finish. There is a nice touch of youthful stems here that is not evident in the regular Horseshoe Vineyard bottling, but this wine is supposed to include the same percentage of whole clusters as the regular, and I imagine that this is just how the wine is showing at this early stage in its evolution. This is going to be an absolutely brilliant bottle of pinot noir with sufficient bottle age, but give it at least five or six years in the cellar to start to blossom before even considering opening a bottle! Not that it will not be delicious out of the blocks, but this is so clearly built for the long haul that it would be insanity to waste bottles early on! 2021-2050+. **98+**.

2013 Rhys Vineyards “Alpine Hillside” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

Unlike the Horseshoe Hillside, the Alpine Hillside bottling does include just a touch more whole clusters than the “regular” Alpine cuvée, but otherwise the wine has been treated exactly the same in the cellars prior to bottling. The bouquet is pure, complex and absolutely stunning in its youthful magnificence, offering up notes of black cherries, black plums, a stunning base of minerality, a potpourri of botanicals, a touch of gamebird, graphite, incipient notes of the autumnal elements to come, a touch of youthful stems and a refined framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and light on its feet, with a sappy core, great transparency, moderate, beautifully integrated tannins and a long, tangy and still fairly youthful finish. This is more accessible out of the blocks than the Horseshoe Hillside, but it too is really

built for the long haul and it would be criminal to commit infanticide with any bottles of this rare and utterly brilliant young wine! 2021-2050+. **99.**

2013 Sojourn Cellars “Russian River Valley” Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

Sojourn Cellars makes lovely and quite classic examples of Russian River pinot noir and their 2013 is a lovely wine, tipping the scales at a very civilized 14.2 percent alcohol and having been raised in fifty percent new wood. The fruit for this bottling is completely destemmed and the wine is bottled unfinned and unfiltered after twelve months of cask aging. The wine is nicely pale in color and offers up a fine and quite complex bouquet of cherries, sweet beetroot, a good base of soil tones, a touch of cola, gentle Sonoma herb notes and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and light on its feet, with fine intensity of flavor, a still quite youthful profile, a bit of backend tannin and a long, primary and tangy finish. This could use another six months to a year of bottle age to start to show some of its secondary layers and more fully integrate its new wood, but it has a nice sappiness at the core and will be a very tasty wine. I would love to see this bottling aged in a slightly lower percentage of new wood, just to distinguish it a bit more from the single vineyard bottlings, as the Russian River cuvée is obviously intended to drink a bit sooner and a bit less new wood could add to its early appeal. But, this is a very well-made wine. 2015-2030+. **88+.**

2013 Sojourn Cellars “Campbell Ranch Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

The Campbell Ranch bottling of pinot noir from Sojourn in 2013 is outstanding, tipping the scales at 14.2 percent alcohol and offering up a forward and classy personality. The bouquet is fairly ripe in personality, wafting from the glass in a blend of baked cherries and plums, a bit of chocolate, delicate notes of fresh nutmeg and cardamom, a bit of spiced meat and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly plush on the attack, with a good core, sound acids, fine focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic and nicely balanced finish. Though this is the same octane as the Rodgers Creek bottling, it does not hide its alcohol quite as seamlessly on the backend, which I think is an indication that this will be the wine to drink earlier in its evolution. It is not hot on the finish, but one can sense the ripeness lurking here. Good juice, but I would have loved to have seen this a bit lower in alcohol, just to tighten the wine up a bit structurally on the backend. That said, this is very well-made and still very tasty. 2015-2025+. **91.**

2013 Sojourn Cellars “Rodgers Creek Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

The 2013 Rodgers Creek Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Sojourn Cellars is outstanding, as this cool vineyard has produced marvelous fruit in this vintage. The wine includes fifteen percent whole clusters this year, is aged in fifty percent new wood and comes in at 14.2 percent alcohol. The deep and very, very promising bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine mélange of cherries, red plums, cola, a touch of fresh herbs, a lovely base of soil and a very stylish framing of gently spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a lovely signature of soil, moderate, suave tannins and outstanding length and grip on the pure and still primary finish. This will need four to five years to really show all of its complexity (even though it is very easy to drink out of the blocks) and it would be a crime to not let it blossom more fully with some extended bottle age. High class juice. 2020-2050. **92.**

2013 Sojourn Cellars “Silver Eagle Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

The Silver Eagle Vineyard is in the Green Valley on the western edge of Sonoma and the 2013 pinot noir from Sojourn is the most black fruity of their bottlings this year. The wine includes ten percent whole clusters and came in at 14.2 percent alcohol, having spent a year in cask (fifty percent new) and was bottled unfinned and unfiltered. The deep and classy nose offers

up an absolutely superb blend of black cherries, dark plums, cola, lovely, complex soil tones, just a hint of espresso and a very refined base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, finely-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. This is a superb bottle in the making, and though one can drink it with great pleasure today, it really should be cellared for at least another five to seven years and really let it come into full bloom. 2020-2050. **93+.**

2013 The Withers Pinot Noir “Peters Vineyard” (Sonoma Coast)

The 2013 Peters Vineyard pinot noir from The Withers is really a lovely wine, offering up a deep and complex nose of red and black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and nicely balanced, with a fine core of fruit, nascent complexity, bright acids, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the poised and still fairly youthful finish. Structurally, this wine is quite accessible, but it is still pretty primary and a couple of years in the cellar should result in even more complexity. A very fine bottle. 2017-2035. **91+.**

2013 The Withers Pinot Noir “English Hill” (Sonoma Coast)

The 2013 English Hill bottling of pinot noir from The Withers is excellent wine, coming in at a cool and classy 13.1 percent octane and offering up a lovely, pale ruby color that augurs very well for refinement on the nose and palate. The bouquet delivers on this promise, wafting from the glass in an excellent and quite complex aromatic constellation of cherries, beet root, vinesmoke, cola, fresh herb tones, orange peel and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovely sappy core, tangy acids, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Exciting juice. 2015-2035+. **92.**

2013 The Withers “Charles Vineyard” Pinot Noir- (Anderson Valley)

At 13.7 percent alcohol, the Charles Vineyard bottling of pinot noir is the ripest of the three pinots I tasted from The Withers, and like the Rhône varietal bottlings from the winery, this too is a bit hot on the backend of the palate as a result of its octane. The nose is ripe, but complex and stylish in its blend of cherries, fresh herb tones, a bit of chocolate, a nice base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, moderate tannins, tangy acids and a bit of uncovered alcohol poking out on the long finish. This is not bad, but clearly could be significantly better at a slightly lower level of alcohol. 2015-2025+. **87.**

2012 Donelan “Two Brothers” Pinot Noir (North Coast)

The 2012 Two Brothers bottling of pinot noir from Donelan is really a pretty and quite red fruity example of this varietal. The nose wafts from the glass in a stylish blend of strawberries, beetroot, fresh herb tones, a touch of cinnamon and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, svelte tannins and fine length and grip on the tangy finish. This is not overly complex, but does a very nice job delivering its range of flavors and aromatics and a velvety and well-balanced format. Good juice. 2015-2030. **89.**

2012 Thomas Fogarty “Razorback Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The team at Thomas Fogarty winery have turned out a dynamite bottle of pinot noir from the Razorback Vineyard in 2012, with the wine coming in at a cool 12.9 percent alcohol and offering up excellent complexity on both the nose and palate. The young and very pure nose

offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, a touch of cola, dark soil tones, a bit of spit-roasted game and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and still quite youthful finish. I love the balance and sense of reserve this wine is showing out of the blocks, and with five or six years of bottle age, it is going to be drinking with great style and complexity, but give it a bit of time in the cellar! 2020-2045+. **92+**.

2012 Thomas Fogarty “Henry Ayrton’s Block” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The Henry Ayrton’s Block hails from the Rapley Trail Vineyard and this is one of Thomas Fogarty’s finest bottlings of pinot noir. Readers may recall that this block in the vineyard lies down at the base of the hillside in a more protected alcove and tends to ripen a bit better each year as a result. The 2012 vintage here comes in at a cool and classy 13.2 percent alcohol and delivers a superb, black fruity nose of black cherries, dark plums, a dollop of espresso, stony soil tones, a bit of balsam bough, woodsmoke, cedar and an exotic topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and nicely soil-driven, with ripe tannins, good acids and lovely focus and grip on the long, youthfully complex and promising finish. This is still quite primary on the palate and really deserves at least four or five years in the cellar to start to blossom more fully- it will be a terrific wine for several decades. Fine juice. 2019-2045. **92**.

2012 Thomas Fogarty “Rapley Trail Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 straight bottling from Rapley Trail Vineyard is a half point higher in octane than the “M Block” bottling from this vineyard, but still quite manageable at 13.7 percent. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex and classy mélange of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of balsam bough, charred wood, dark soil tones, a nice dollop of spices and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and still quite youthful in profile, with ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the ripe finish. This needs a few years to fully blossom, but I suspect it will not age as long as the M Block bottling, as the higher alcohol level will probably lead to a shorter plateau of maturity. 2018-2030+. **91**.

2012 Thomas Fogarty “Rapley Trail Vyd.- M Block” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The team at Thomas Fogarty planted the Rapley Trail Vineyard in 1981, and this high elevation vineyard now produces a few different bottlings from different locations on this steep hillside. The M Block is up at the top and quite exposed to the vagaries of the weather, with the wine often showing impressive complexity as a result. This is certainly the case with the 2012 version, which is pretty ripe for this windy location, coming in at 13.2 percent alcohol and offering up a truly superb nose of sweet dark berries, a touch of meatiness, dark soil tones, fresh lavender, woodsmoke, hints of the autumnal notes to follow and a very stylish base of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This is going to be a stellar bottle of pinot noir at its apogee. 2020-2045+. **93+**.

2012 Thomas Fogarty “Will’s Cabin Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

This is the first vintage of pinot noir that I have tasted from the Will’s Cabin Vineyard produced by Thomas Fogarty, as this high elevation vineyard is planted to relatively young vines and the wine has been blended into the Santa Cruz bottling prior to the 2012 vintage. The wine is fairly ripe, as at 2300 feet above sea level, Will’s Cabin Vineyard sits above the morning fog line. The 2012 is 13.8 percent alcohol, includes a quarter whole clusters and was raised in twenty-five percent new wood. The bouquet is excellent, jumping from the glass of black fruit,

stony soil tones, lovely spice elements, fresh thyme, balsam boughs, a bit of bonfire and a discreet base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch warm on the backend, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, complex and nicely tangy finish. This bottling is only going to get better as the vines get older and this is really quite an auspicious first vintage, despite the fact that I would love to see it a touch lower in octane. 2015-2030+. **92.**

2012 Kendric Vineyards Pinot Noir “Reserve” (Marin County)

I love the transparent style of Kendric Vineyards’ pinot noir bottlings and their 2012 Reserve is another absolutely stellar bottle in the making. The color is typically light (a hallmark of Stewart Johnson’s very refined pinots) and the superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex constellation of cherries, black raspberries, fresh herb tones, a touch of cinnamon, lovely soil tones, cola and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and intensely flavored, with a fine core, lovely soil inflection, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a superb bottle in the making, but it will want a few years in the cellar to fully blossom. 2018-2038+. **92+.**

2012 Martinelli “Bondie Home Ranch- Water Trough Vineyard” Pinot Noir

When I looked on the label of this wine and saw 15.5 percent alcohol, I really feared this wine was going to be absolutely undrinkable, but I was pleasantly surprised, as it was nowhere near as bad as I feared. The wine is quite light in color and the bouquet in particular is surprisingly interesting, as it offers up scents of baked strawberries and cherries, rhubarb, damp herb tones, chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full and very velvety on the attack, with quite modest depth at the core, little tannin or acidity and some spiky heat poking out and roughening up the finish. I really thought this was going to be unpleasant in the extreme, but it is okay in a very spit-polished manner, though way too hot on the backend for me to ever actually drink a glass, let alone share a bottle. 2015-2020. **82.**

2012 Sprucewood Shores Estate Pinot Noir (Lake Erie Ontario) Screwcap

This is the first wine I tried from Sprucewood Shores Estate on the northern side of Lake Erie in Ontario. The wine is quite ripe at fourteen percent alcohol, and is just a touch warm on the backend. The bouquet shows quite nicely, offering up notes of dark berries, woodsmoke, a touch of meatiness, savory herb tones and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is already a bit reductive from its closure, with some backend pinching and metallic minerality in evidence, which is too bad, as there is good depth and balance here as well. The wine is full-bodied, bright and light on its feet, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and slightly heady finish. I would love to see this wine under fourteen percent and under natural cork, as there are some really good constituent components and impressive complexity here and this wine could be excellent, instead of merely good. 2015-2017+? **86.**

2010 Joseph Swan “Cuvée de Trois” Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley)

The Joseph Swan “Cuvée de Trois” bottling of pinot noir is consistently one of the finest values to be had for this varietal in the wide world of California wine and the 2010 is drinking beautifully at age five. The bouquet remains youthfully vibrant in its blend of strawberries, cherries, a touch of cola, Russian River herb tones and a nice topnote of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, long and tangy, with a fine core, good bounce and grip and a long, youthfully complex and beautifully balanced finish. This wine has at least a couple of decades of life ahead of it, but is starting to drink with plenty of style. Rod Berglund makes very good wines

from every grape variety with which he works, but it is hard not to come to the conclusion that he is one of California's pinot noir masters. 2015-2035. **90+**.

2009 Sojourn Cellars "Russian River Valley" Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast)

The 2009 vintage of the Russian River Valley bottling of pinot noir from Sojourn Cellars came in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and is drinking with great breed and style at age six. The pure and classic bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, beetroot, Sonoma herb tones, cola, a fine Goldridge soil signature and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, bright and velvety on the attack, with a fine core, tangy acids, melting tannins and impressive length and grip on the wide open finish. This wine is still climbing and will be even better a few years down the road, but six years out from the vintage, the wine has blossomed very nicely indeed and is a pleasure to drink. 2015-2030. **90.**

2008 Eyrie Vineyards Pinot Noir (Oregon)

It had been many years since I last crossed paths with a bottle of Eyrie Pinot Noir, of which I had cellared several vintages from the 1980s in my cellar and drank with quite a bit of enjoyment in the decade of the 1990s. The 2008 is a tad riper than I remember the wines from the 1980s, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol, but is pure and fresh on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a blend of cherries, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, soil and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, simple and not particularly intense at the core, with good acids and grip on the backend, but just a touch of uncovered oak tannins sticking out on the finish. This is okay, but I had higher hopes for it. 2015-2025+. **86.**

**DOMAINE DE CHEVALIER:
GREAT WHITE BORDEAUX AND ONCE UPON A TIME,
HOME TO THE GRAVES' MOST ELEGANT RED WINE**



Domaine de Chevalier in Pessac-Léognan is one of the great unsung estates in all of Bordeaux. The domaine is actually located in the Léognan sector of the Graves, which lies inland to the southwest from the Garonne River and is in a far more rural area than the estates that are rather encased by the city of Bordeaux's suburban sprawl these days in the vicinity of Pessac. In fact, Domaine de Chevalier is nearly surrounded by woodlands and is quite an isolated estate. It is not particularly old by Bordeaux standards, having only come into prominence as a wine-producing estate in the region in 1875, when it was purchased by Monsieur Arnaud Ricard. The property actually dates back to the seventeenth century, when it was known by its Gascon name of *Domaine de Chivaley* (with *Chivaley* being the Gascon word for "knight" in English, or "*chevalier*" in French), when it was a "typical of the period" estate of mixed agricultural production, where food crops, timber, vineyards and fields were all cultivated and the proprietor lived on the property. History recalls that the estate took its name from its close proximity to the "Pilgrim's Trail" that leads ultimately to the Spanish town of Santiago de Compostela and which lies over the Pyrenees in Galicia. One presumes that it took its moniker from one of the chivalric orders such as the Knights Templar who would have been entrusted with the safety of the pilgrimage route in the vicinity and who must have had a residence in what was to become DDC. The Ricard family, who were important members of the wine trade in Bordeaux, set about planting a larger portion of the property to vine immediately after they purchased it in 1875, and soon thereafter wine production was the primary business of the property, though the family continued to harvest timber as well from the forested sections of the estate throughout the period of their ownership.

The day to day operations of Domaine de Chevalier from 1875 forwards were in the hands of Arnaud Ricard's son, Jean Ricard. Monsieur Ricard was a fine winemaker, as well as an able manager of the timber business at DDC during his tenure, and he ran the estate up until the turn of the century and was really responsible for building a fine reputation for the wines of Domaine de Chevalier during its formative years. Upon his retirement in 1900, his son-in-law, Gabriel Beaumartin assumed the direction of DDC and built strongly upon the very solid foundation that had been laid here by his father-in-law. Monsieur Beaumartin was one of the most highly-respected producers of his generation in Bordeaux, and it was during his tenure that DDC developed notoriety as one of the greatest "off vintage" producers in all of Bordeaux- a trait it shared with Château La Mission Haut-Brion throughout much of the first six or seven decades of the twentieth century. Edmund Penning-Rowsell's old book on Bordeaux is replete with examples of superb DDC vintages that he drank and cellared from poor vintages in the region, such as 1923, 1924 and 1937, and he notes that before him, André Simon was equally laudatory about vintages at Domaine de Chevalier such as 1931 and 1935, with none of these years even remotely close to "good vintages." As Mr. Penning Rowsell observes, "Gabriel Beaumartin must have been a particularly fine wine-maker, for he triumphed where others failed", and "one of the reasons for his success was that he was also a timber merchant with a large labor force", so that, he could wait to pick until the perfect moment, even in difficult years, and then he "brought in his workers and cleared the relatively small vineyard in two or three days, instead of the more normal ten to fourteen days" typical at larger châteaux. Gabriel Beaumartin ran Domaine de Chevalier with great skill for forty-two years, until his passing away in 1942.

Monsieur Beaumartin was succeeded by Claude Ricard, the grandson of Jean Ricard in 1942, and he too had an excellent reputation for consistent quality of the wines at Domaine de Chevalier. However, his tenure was anything but smooth, as only three years after his taking over the reins of the estate, DDC was devastated by frosts in the winter of 1945, which caused extreme damage to the vineyards and necessitated significant replanting over the next decade or more. Claude Ricard was one of several cousins who obtained shares of Domaine de Chevalier upon the passing away of Monsieur Beaumartin, and eventually, the family would start to disagree about the direction at DDC and this would necessitate the sale of the property to the Bernard family, who were important players in the Cognac trade, in 1983. Happily, Olivier Bernard, the young scion of the family who was put in charge of Domaine de Chevalier, retained the services of Claude Ricard after the transfer of ownership and the estate, so that it continued on for several years without any fundamental changes in the style or quality of the wines here. Claude Ricard retired from DDC in 1988, after having mentored Olivier Bernard during his formative years directing the property, and this was certainly a golden age for Domaine de Chevalier, as Messieurs Bernard and Ricard presided over an absolutely fabulous string of vintages here in the decade of the 1980s. The only exception to the brilliance at Domaine de Chevalier in the '80s was the 1982, which was hit by hail and not in the league of most of the top wines from that year and certainly not at the same quality level as the following year of 1983 for DDC. The vineyard portion of the property, which had only been fifteen hectares of vines prior to the severe frosts of 1945, were greatly expanded once the Bernard family took over direction of the estate, as their healthy financial base in the Cognac trade and as a Bordeaux *négociant* allowed for widespread planting to expand the area under vine at this important property.

At the present time, Domaine de Chevalier is comprised of a hundred hectares of forest land, meadows and vineyards, with 42.55 hectares committed to vineyards and the remainder left as woods or fields. Of the forty-two and a half hectares that are planted to vines, 36.75 are used for the red wine of Domaine de Chevalier and 5.8 hectares are planted with white grape varieties to make the beautiful white wine of DDC, which is indisputably one of Bordeaux's greatest whites. The vineyard expansion which was undertaken here in 1985, in turn required renovation and new building for the winemaking facilities, with construction occurring primarily in 1991, with the architectural centerpiece of this period being the large, elegant, circular vat room. Today the vineyards are planted to a high density of ten thousand vines per hectare, to force the roots deeper in search of greater expression of minerality in the finished wines. The roughly thirty-seven hectares of vignobles at Domaine de Chevalier dedicated to the *vin rouge* here are planted to sixty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty percent merlot and three percent each of cabernet franc and petit verdot. For the nearly six hectares utilized for the white wines, the breakdown is seventy-two percent sauvignon blanc and twenty-eight percent sémillon. As the winery has been systematic in their replanting of the vineyards on a piece by piece basis since Olivier Bernard's family purchased it in the mid-1980s, the average age of vines across the entire spectrum of grape varieties is now twenty-five years of age. Most of the vineyards are planted in the area immediately surrounding the château and *chais* buildings, with the vast majority to the north and east of the architectural structures on the property. Almost all of the white grape varieties are planted due east of the château, in a band of chalkier soils that runs through the main red grape vineyards like a cross. However, the vast majority of the vineyard soils here are classic Graves gravel, with sandstone and clay lying below the layer of river gravel. There is also a significant vein of iron to be found in the soils here and which can often be spotted in the red wines of this property when they are fully mature. In the distant past, DDC used to have an issue with the clay layer of subsoil retaining water in wetter growing seasons, but a drainage system was installed at the property as far back as 1962, and since that day, spring frost has been a far more serious threat than poor drainage in wet summers.

Domaine de Chevalier was once one of the great, *terroir*-defined red wines in all of Bordeaux, but the estate has changed the style of its red wines in the last dozen years and really no longer can be ranked amongst the true traditionalists of Bordeaux. There was a time when I owned more Domaine de Chevalier rouge in my cellar than red Bordeaux from any other estate in the region, but as the style has changed here, my percentage of DDC in the cellar has fallen off precipitously (and I also discovered the wines of Magdelaine during that stretch, which certainly softened the blow of a stylistic change of direction at DDC). The current proprietor of Domaine de Chevalier continues to be Olivier Bernard, who in 2002, sought to gain a bit more notoriety for DDC's red wines in the firmament of Bordeaux's leading estates by hiring Stéphane Derenoncourt to consult at this important Graves domaine; Monsieur Derenoncourt immediately put his signature on this great property's wines, much to the chagrin of lovers of classically-styled claret such as myself. The white wines here have always been very highly-regarded and for most of the post-war period, they have been ranked (erroneously) by most Bordeaux commentators as superior to the red wines here, but this has never been my contention and I have always considered both the blanc and rouge from DDC in its classic period as amongst the very finest wines in all of Bordeaux. Monsieur Derenoncourt has only been entrusted with overseeing the red wine production at DDC, with the white wines now made under the consultancy of Denis Dubourdieu, who, in my experience, has a far more classically-aligned palate, and I have not

noticed any dramatic stylistic swing with the white wines of Domaine de Chevalier since his arrival.

To fully appreciate the wines of Domaine de Chevalier in its glory days, one has to understand that the estate sits in a significantly cooler section of the Graves, as the property lies a couple of miles southwest of the center of Léognan, where the days, and particularly, the evenings, are much cooler than is the case further north and east towards Pessac. As Monsieur Bernard has commented on occasion, the further a property here is inland from the Garonne River, the cooler the microclimate will be, and this is particularly true of the evening temperatures of the summer months, as Domaine de Chevalier is surrounded by forests, rather than the suburban concentrations of buildings that engulfs vineyards still extant in Pessac such as Châteaux Pape Clément or Haut-Brion. The dramatically different diurnal temperature gradations at Domaine de Chevalier have always provided the wine with quite high natural acidity for claret, with the cooler average temperatures translating into far more elegant and soil-driven wines than was typical for many of the top Left Bank and Graves producers in the latter half of the twentieth century, and it was only in truly exceptionally hot vintages that DDC rouge would show notable muscle in its bygone era of classically-styled wines. However, whatever the red at Domaine de Chevalier may have lacked in broad shoulders back in its classical phase was more than made up for by inimitable aromatic complexity and perfume, truly exceptional transparency and a vibrant and tangy personality that took time to blossom from behind its structural elements and start to shine, but which always aged brilliantly. Back in the day, if one had patience, the wine was always one of the most rewarding red wines to be found in all of Bordeaux, but due to its relatively smaller scale of production, was every bit the insider's wine in the marketplace.

Sadly, we have to speak of Domaine de Chevalier's classical phase in the past tense these days, for as noted above, Stéphane Derenoncourt was brought in as consulting winemaker at the property in time for the 2002 vintage. To be fair to Monsieur Derenoncourt, he has shown a lighter touch at DDC than at several of his other consultancies, and the wines here are certainly more elegant still than is the case at some of his usual haunts in St. Émilion such as La Mondotte, Pavie-Macquin or Canon la Gaffelière. But, that noted, one still must observe that the red wines at Domaine de Chevalier unquestionably began a new phase with Monsieur Derenoncourt's arrival here in 2002 and, to my palate, the red wines here were significantly superior in their misunderstood past than they are today. This is despite all of the predictable accolades that have been piled on DDC rouge since the partnership began in 2002. Not surprisingly, the red wines at Domaine de Chevalier today are oakier, fleshier and far less soil-driven than they were prior to the Derenoncourt era at the property, but a bit of restraint is still seen in the cellars here, as the standard operating procedure of malolactic fermentation in new oak is only used for one-third of the blend for the DDC rouge today, rather than the full hundred percent one sees at so many other properties where M. Derenoncourt consults. The wine is now raised in anywhere from forty to seventy-five percent new barrels as well these days, depending upon the style of the vintage, and as has become endemic in Bordeaux in the last decade, the property likes to use a wide array of different *tonneliers* for their barrels, as it is the current *Bordelais* fashion to believe that one can build complexity into a wine by using a wide variety of different woods and toasts in the casks. Perhaps it should be said that one can also do this by allowing the *terroir* to take center stage, as was the case at DDC prior to 2002.



The white wine at Domaine de Chevalier has always had the finer reputation in the Bordeaux market than the *rouge* here, and the wine has consistently sold for a higher price as well, with some of this reflective of the much smaller quantities in which it is produced, *vis à vis* the reds of DDC, but also because it was always the easier of the two great wines produced here in the past to appreciate right out of the blocks. However, this is not to say that it was an early bloomer by any stretch of the imagination, as throughout its long history, Domaine de Chevalier Blanc has been one of the longest-lived white wines in all of the Graves region, with only Haut-Brion Blanc and the former Laville Haut-Brion wines that could last the comparable four or five decades out from the vintage and still drink with great vigor and refinement. Part of the great track record for longevity of the DDC Blanc bottling has been that this is a wine that does not undergo malolactic fermentation, and thus, starts out life with plenty of acid backbone to carry it far into the future. Domaine de Chevalier's location in the cooler, southwesterly reaches of the Graves region has also played a role in making this such a long-lived white wine, as the grapes for this bottling always ripen in a leisurely fashion throughout the growing season, and in my experience, the wine can be one of the raciest white wines in all of Bordeaux in warmer vintages. With the arrival at DDC of Monsieur Dubourdieu to oversee the white wines here, I have not noticed any significant change of direction in the style or quality of the Blanc (both of which were always exemplary), and the real difficulty posed to this wine today is from the issue of premature oxidation, which has affected all of the great white wines of the Graves equally since the 1994 vintage. However, as my note on the 1994 DDC Blanc below will attest, at least up until a couple of years ago, I was very lucky with this wine and had not hit any bottles that were

premoxed (though this was admittedly a very small sampling of no statistical significance and I have not seen a bottle in a few years now).

Since the 1994 vintage, I have not bought and held onto any top white Bordeaux for my cellar for long-term aging, as premox is a prevalent in this region as in Burgundy, so I do not have notes on more recent vintages of DDC Blanc except for the new vintages tasted during *En Primeur* visits. I did buy some 2001s for my cellar, which was another outstanding year for the dry white wines of the Graves, but when my 1994s started to tank a few years after laying down the '01s, it seemed more logical to send off the 2001 vintage to auction in search of earlier drinkers of top white Bordeaux, rather than lose another vintage to premox waiting for the wines to get into their sweet spot after a dozen years or more of cellaring. However, back prior to the onset of premature oxidation for white Bordeaux, I bought quite a lot of these wines for my cellar and drank them with great enjoyment, and was fortunate to drink a fairly sizable range of Domaine de Chevalier Blanc from the vintages of the late 1970s and 1980s back in this era. It is a style of wine that I always found truly compelling, with the fairly high percentage of sauvignon blanc in the blend giving the wines a lovely grassiness that I always found very appealing, as this was invariably linked to lovely fruit tones of lime, green apple, fresh fig and often, a touch of coconut. DDC Blanc has always been a wine with significant soil signature as well (just like the *rouge* back in the day), with an overt sense of its underlying gravel present in the young wine. Like all of the very top white wines of the Graves in the decade of the 1980s, it was a wine that was fairly generously new oaky in style, with the vanillin aspect of the new wood adding a lovely base to the grassy, petrol, fine fruit tones and soil signature of the wines. Though it was a very long-lived wine and classically buttoned up behind its structure during its adolescence, Domaine de Chevalier's white wine would often show all of its depth and promising complexity for the first few years after release, so it was never quite as hard to appreciate as the *rouge* here in its very earliest days. With bottle age, notes of candied lemon and lime are common here, along with beeswax or lanolin, and the more overtly grassy elements here tend to slide to the background with extended bottle age, while the more gravelly soil elements of youth seem to get far more chalky in personality as the decades roll by. It is one of the greatest dry white wines produced in all of Bordeaux, with only Haut-Brion Blanc, Laville Haut-Brion and Pape Clément Blanc in the same league.

I should also take a moment to talk a bit about the different styles of the Domaine de Chevalier *rouge* bottlings here pre- and post-2002, as Stéphane Derenoncourt's team has certainly left their fingerprints on the red wines here since their arrival. The DDC *rouge* today is a fleshy, often velvety wine that shows very lovely fruit tones of black cherries, blueberries and plums, plenty of chocolate, often notes of coffee bean from its complicated cocktail of new wood and sometimes some of the classic smokiness of Pessac-Léognan. There are still soil tones in evidence in the Derenoncourt version of DDC's red wine, but it is a far more understated afterthought in the wine out of the blocks than was the case prior to his arrival here in 2002. The wines are not too bad in most vintages in their modern guise, but clearly are made to be simpler wines to appreciate in their younger days, with their textures nicely worked up in the cellars with micro-oxygenation and perhaps enzymes or other techniques to add more early plushness (which one almost never, ever found in older vintages of DDC when they were only a handful of years out from their release), while still giving the wines a fair bit of tannic structure. Many of the tannins one finds in the Derenoncourt versions of DDC certainly come from the new oak. The

wine is still recognizable as DDC on a certain level, but it is not a wine done with the same celebration of *terroir* as was done in the past, and though it offers up a bit more early, flashy appeal to the uninitiated, I would be utterly shocked to see it end up having anywhere near the same quality of the ageability of the Domaine de Chevalier *rouges* of the past.

In contrast, Domaine de Chevalier prior to Monsieur Derenoncourt's inimitable services having been contracted for by Olivier Bernard, was one of the most elegant, transparent and tangy wines to be found anywhere in Bordeaux, with the bounce, purity and refined sense of intensity that was recognizable in great old vintages of Ausone and Magdelaine, but very few other estates on either side of the Gironde in this era. The wine would often start out life seemingly more medium-bodied than full, as the cooler nights at DDC often gave the wine a lovely girdle of acidity which could mask a bit of the mid-palate depth in its early days. The fruit here pre-Derenoncourt was often as red fruity as black, with notes of red plums and cherries often quite typical in the wine, and often with notes of blood orange appearing with a couple of decades' worth of bottle age. Classic Graves notes of tobacco leaf, cigar wrapper and nutty overtones were typical, along with plenty of chocolate, gravelly soil tones and often, overt traces of the iron that is found embedded in the clay subsoil at DDC. I should note that when one goes back and looks at the best books on Bordeaux from the decade of the 1980s, there is a constant refrain that the red wines at Domaine de Chevalier began to get a bit more mid-palate stuffing and slightly broader shoulders out of the blocks from the 1983 vintage forwards, after Monsieur Bernard arrived to direct the estate (working alongside of Claude Ricard through the 1988 harvest), but I wonder now if this was a reflection of attempts to add a bit more "meat to the bones" of the young DDC Rouge, or if it was simply a reflection of the style of the vintages here in 1983, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989 and 1990. Like many of the top wines in Bordeaux in the decade of the 1980s, the percentage of new wood used here certainly increased during this same stretch of vintages, but never became particularly aggressive in its influence in the finished wine, and certainly the decade of the 1980s for the red wines at Domaine de Chevalier remains one of my favorites (along with the great run of vintages the estate had here in the 1960s).

With extended bottle age, the Domaine de Chevalier *rouge* of yesteryear blossomed into a bright, bouncy and often quite silky red of great aromatic refinement and flavor complexity, with a superb signature of soil, chocolaty overtones that often got quite black truffley with age, cigar smoke and nutskins also typically part of the aromatic and flavor profile. Texturally, old DDC *rouge* would show almost Pomerol-like silkiness on the palate, but could be differentiated from the wines of that commune by its more gravelly, or brick dusty components in the soil element. That said, I have called old vintages of DDC served to me blind Pomerol on more occasions than I prefer to recall! Like so many wines that tend to start out with relatively higher acidity than the custom in their respective regions, Domaine de Chevalier never seemed lighter than its neighbors' wines once it had blossomed with bottle age, but would invariably take a bit more time to start to drink with the generosity of its plateau of maturity than wines that started out life with a bit less acid lift. I did not drink the great vintages of the 1970s at DDC in their youth, but had plenty of experience with the top vintages of the 1980s from their release dates to their blossoming stages of maturity, and none of these wines would I term "lighter in body" than the other top wines of Pessac-Léognan once they had a good decade or so of bottle age under their belt. Given the palate profiles of the wonderful DDCs from the decade of the 1970s, I can imagine that they might have been a bit tighter and seemingly "lighter" in style than the wines

from 1983 onwards, but again, at maturity, this was not an important distinction. Domaine de Chevalier *rouge* was one of the great connoisseur's wines of Bordeaux back in the day, with its relatively smaller production allowing only those most assiduous in their search for the wine to lay it down in the cellar, and the wine was invariably one of the lowest-profile star wines in the firmament of Bordeaux. Today, with the Derenoncourt connection, it is a far more famous wine in the market, and far less interesting to my palate. *Quelle surprise!*

The following wines have all been tasted in the last several years, with the exceptions of a couple of the old, timeless vintages, such as the 1947 and 1928, which I have only had the pleasure to taste on single occasions and whose notes date back a bit further into the past. Several of the vintages from the decades of the 1980s, 1970s and 1960s I have drunk on several occasions in the last few years, as these are the vintages I have focused on for my own cellar and bought a fair bit of them as opportunity allowed over the last decade. Sadly, I do not have any notes on the 1961 or the DDC rouge bottlings from the 1950s, all of which are purported to be outstanding, but which have not crossed my path. As noted above, most of the very recent vintages were tasted at En Primeur weeks during the four years that I attended these tastings, prior to readers voting for my decamping Bordeaux for Champagne or other regions during the early April tasting season in Europe.

Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

2012 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

The 2012 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc is a superb wine and clearly one of the greatest wines of the vintage- of either color! The deep, elegant and classic nose wafts from the glass in a mix of lime peel, fresh-cut grass, petrol, fresh figs, tart orange, vanillin oak and a complex base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and crisp, with lovely focus and grip, superb mid-palate concentration, bright acids and a very long, classy and dancing finish. This is a beautiful DDC Blanc- complete and utterly refined- and clearly the finest white produced here since the stellar 2007. 2016-2035+. **94.**

2011 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

The Domaine de Chevalier blanc is one of the best wines of the 2011 vintage, but even this lovely wine shows just a slight dip at the core and lacks the mid-palate amplitude of a truly great vintage here. The deep and classy nose jumps from the glass in a mix of fresh fig, grapefruit, cut grass, petrol, orange peel, lovely soil tones and a stylish dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and focused, with lovely balance and cut, good length and grip and just that slight lack of mid-palate density keeping this from being a truly classic vintage of DDC blanc. 2015-2040. **90+.**

2010 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

The 2010 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc is a very good wine, though it is done in a very ripe and much more forward style than is customary for this great white wine estate. This is not surprising, given the extreme growing conditions in the Graves in 2010. The deep and complex nose offers up a fine mélange of figs, pink grapefruit, lime, plenty of petrol and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with fairly soft acidity (particularly for DDC Blanc), but good length and grip on the finish. There is plenty of ripeness here, which probably translates into fairly high alcohol, but the wine shows no signs of disequilibrium and will offer fine, near-term drinking. 2011-2020+? **92.**

2009 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

I am quite used to Domaine de Chevalier Blanc towering above most of the other white wines in the appellation, but the 2009 shows quite a bit of mid-palate dilution and clearly was harvested soon after the mid-September rains of 2009. The nose is clean and correct, as it offers up scents of lemon peel, grapefruit, lime, fresh-cut grass, petrol and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and focused, though rather *fluide* at the core, with decidedly soft acids and moderate length and grip on the finish. Quite good in the context of the vintage, but hardly a great year for DDC Blanc. 2010-2020. **84-86.**

2007 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

The 2007 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc was raised in only thirty percent new wood this year, and this has allowed the more gentle raw materials of the vintage to show exceedingly well, making this wine by quite a wide margin the most impressive white Graves that I tasted at the UGC events. The nose is deep and really classy, as it jumps from the glass in a blaze of apples, fresh figs, petrol, grassy tones, a lovely base of soil and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with a juicy core of fruit, bright acids, lovely focus and a long, crisp and classic finish. A lovely, middleweight example of DDC Blanc for drinking over the next fifteen or so years- premature oxidation notwithstanding. 2010-2025+. **91.**

2003 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

The torrid summer of 2003 hardly produced ideal conditions for producing either red or white wines on the Gironde, but the 2003 DDC Blanc is really a pretty solid effort for this utterly difficult (and ludicrously overrated in certain circles) vintage in Bordeaux. The nose is quite fresh, albeit quite advanced already, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of green apple, lime, a bit of chalk, damp grass, plenty of petrol and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, soft and balanced, with very little acidity, not the same complexity in the mouth as the nose promises, and a short, straightforward finish with no grip or length. This really is pretty good for the vintage, but a far cry from a memorable bottle of DDC Blanc. Drink up over the near-term. 2013-2018. **82.**

1994 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

I have been extremely fortunate with the bottles of 1994 DDC Blanc that I have tasted, as I have not crossed paths with any that have shown any signs of premature oxidation. However, given that this plague in my experience affects several other 1994 white Graves wines, I have to assume that I have just been totally lucky in this regard. In any case, this most recent bottle was spot on and lovely, offering up a fine and still fairly youthful nose of figs, apple, a touch of coconut, petrol, *terres blanches*, incipient notes of grassiness and a stylish base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, well-balanced and still fairly youthful finish. If it avoids premo issues, this will be the finest Domaine de Chevalier Blanc since the great 1983, but it is right in that danger range of vintages, as many white Bordeaux from the 1994 vintage have succumbed to the pox already. In any case, this bottle still seems very sound and (as of yet) unaffected. 2013-2025+? **94+.**

1990 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

I was very happy to recently cross paths with a bottle of the 1990 DDC Blanc, as this is a wine that I did not cellar and did not really have a sense of how successful the wine was in this vintage. Of course, I have enjoyed several other top white Graves bottlings from 1990, so I was not surprised that Domaine de Chevalier has produced an absolute gem in this vintage! The deep, complex and still slightly youthful bouquet offers up a very complex bouquet of apple, fig,

petrol, fresh-cut grass, stony soil tones, citrus peel and a gentle and stylish base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and elegant, with excellent mid-palate depth, bright acids, fine focus and absolutely stellar length and grip on the focused and very, very classy finish. I would be inclined to give this excellent wine another couple of years in the cellar just to allow its secondary layers of complexity to fully emerge, but the wine is already drinking with great charm and style. 2010-2040. **94+**.

1985 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

The 1985 vintage of Domaine de Chevalier Blanc is a glorious wine that is just now starting to really enter into its absolute apogee of peak drinkability. The deep, complex and truly exceptional nose offers up a superb mélange of fig, lime zest, petrol, gentle grassiness, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a fine core of fruit, impressive, blossoming complexity, lovely focus and grip and a very, very long, crisp and perfectly poised finish. Just a beautiful bottle of DDC Blanc! 2009-2025+. **94**.

1983 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

The 1983 DDC Blanc has been a legendary example of this great wine for as long as I can remember, but it has always been a classic and deeply structured wine that has taken its own sweet time to wind around towards maturity. At age thirty, the wine is really starting to drink very well for the first time in its long existence, with the formidable structural elements now peeling away nicely and the wine offering up a superb nose of fresh figs, green apple, gentle grassiness, a bit of petrol, beeswax, complex, chalky soil tones and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with bottomless depth, great purity and focus, a rock solid spine of acidity and outstanding balance and grip on the poised and racy finish. This is a great vintage for Domaine de Chevalier Blanc, and the wine still has decades of life ahead of it. 2013-2035+. **95**.

1971 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

The 1971 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc remains a relatively young wine that is at its zenith of peak drinkability today, but is so beautifully balanced and vibrant that it will continue to cruise along at a very, very high level for decades to come! The gorgeous nose soars from the glass in a blend of lemon, beeswax, a touch of tangerine, still a touch of petrol, chalky soil tones, just a whisper of grassiness and a topnote of lanolin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully crisp, with a lovely core, magical complexity and outstanding length and grip on the poised, pure and impeccable finish. Just a hauntingly beautiful bottle of mature white Graves that should cruise for decades at this very impressive altitude. 2014-2040. **94+**.

1967 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

The 1967 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc was served immediately following the 1971 at an epic wine weekend in August of 2014, and I really wondered how on earth it was going to be able to follow that brilliant wine. Needless to say, my worries were unfounded, as the 1967 may well be even a hair superior to the 1971! The stunning bouquet delivers an aromatic constellation of lemon drops, marzipan, beeswax, a marvelous base of white soil tones, lanolin, a touch of botanicals and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its peak, with stunning complexity, impeccable focus and balance and stunning grip and focus on the very, very long, utterly pure finish. This too is amazingly young for its age and has years and years of life still ahead of it! 2014-2030+. **95**.



Domaine de Chevalier Rouge

2012 Domaine de Chevalier

The 2012 Domaine de Chevalier is over-extracted, but at least it is fairly well balanced and will eventually offer up reasonably enjoyable drinking. The deep bouquet is a blend of black cherries, Cuban cigars, blueberries, dark chocolate, a nice base of soil and plenty of nutty, luxuriant new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit forced stylistically, with a good core, nascent complexity and pretty good length and grip on the dry-edged and chewy finish. There is sufficient stuffing to eventually carry all the wood here, but some time will be needed to integrate it into the body of the wine. This is far from a refined wine (which used to be the calling card of DDC rouge back in its glory days), but it will not be a bad drink in the fullness of time. 2022-2055. **87+**.

2011 Domaine de Chevalier

After two badly oxidized samples at the start of the UGC event for 2011 Graves wines, an SOS call was put out to the nearby estate, who quickly dispatched over one of the technical team with freshly pulled samples that were really quite good. I have made no secret of my disappointment at the new direction at Domaine de Chevalier, as this estate has one of the largest representations of older vintages in my own personal cellar, and I cannot admire the changes wrought by Monsieur Derenoncourt since his arrival here. But, that said, this 2011 is clearly one of the best wines in the appellation this year! The nose is deep and fairly modern in its aromatic mélange of dark berries, black cherries, tobacco smoke, coffee bean and a suave base of nutty and lead pencilily new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and currently quite marked structurally by its new wood component, but with good mid-palate depth, lovely focus, a suave attack and probably enough stuffing to eventually carry its new wood with little difficulty. One could quibble about the complete lack of soil signature from an estate with one of the finest *terroirs* in all of Bordeaux, but at least the 2011 DDC is very well-balanced and quite well-made in its new, modern guise. 2022-2040+? **90**.

2010 Domaine de Chevalier

The 2010 Domaine de Chevalier is a notable success for the commune in this vintage, and though this is a currently modern wine these days, it has been fabricated with a craftsman's touch in this difficult vintage. The tarted up nose offers up scents of chocolate milkshake, black cherries, tobacco leaf and a smorgasbord of classy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and spit-polished, with very good balance, fine mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and a very long, refined and modern finish. This is really very well done in its style,, and though I long for the old style of DDC, where the *terroir* took center stage, given how barren the terrain looks in Graves this year, this wine stands out. 2020-2060. **87.**

2009 Domaine de Chevalier

This wine is a pretty far cry stylistically from the great old wines made at DDC in the glory days at this important estate, but it is still reasonably successful in its modern guise. The nose is quite "worked" in the modern sense, offering up scents of ripe black cherries and plums, chocolate, tobacco smoke fairly raw, strident new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and decidedly short on early complexity, with a sound core, very well-managed and massaged tannins and pretty good length on the decidedly simple and spit-polished finish. This is what you get these days when you write a big check to one of the glorified consultancies in Bordeaux- a wine that is carefully crafted with all of the tricks in the cellar (micro-oxygenation, malo in barrel and new wood from the trendiest *tonneliers*) and is totally lacking in *terroir* and soul! This is one of the better recent vintages at DDC, but this should not be confused with the great wines that the estate turned out year in and year out only a few short years ago... 2015-2035. **88.**

2008 Domaine de Chevalier

The 2008 Domaine de Chevalier was only raised in thirty percent new oak, but Monsieur Derenoncourt seems to have been able to maximize the impression of this thirty percent with his program of malo in barrel, and today the wine really has not yet even begun to incorporate all of its new wood into the body of the wine. That said, there is a very impressively complex wine here underneath the new wood and this wine could ultimately come around with sufficient bottle age and prove to be a very good example of the vintage. The nose offers up a complex mélange of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, tobacco leaf, lovely soil tones and the aforementioned, spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit rigid today from its oak, but with a good core, lovely shape on the attack and very good length and grip on the ripely tannic finish. I really wish they would go back to making old school wines at DDC, as the raw materials in this 2008 are stunning. If the wood fully integrates, this will probably be the top vintage of Derenoncourt DDC *rouge* to cross my path. 2018-2040+? **89-92?**

2007 Domaine de Chevalier

The 2007 DDC was raised in forty-five percent new oak this year, which does not seem over the top, but with the malo done in barrel, somehow the perception of the wine at this point is very woody. DDC has always been one of the most soil-driven wines in Bordeaux, so it pains me to see the wine made in this modern style these days. In any case, the 2007 offers up a modern nose of cherries, plums, cocoa powder, tobacco and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish and complex on the attack, with a solid core of fruit and a finish that has not yet absorbed all of its new wood, and hence is defined by a bit of uncovered wood tannin. I suspect that there is sufficient depth here to eventually absorb its wood, but what I really miss here is the unique and compelling signature of soil that used to define this wine from day one. By the standards of modern claret this is not an egregious example, but with a cellar full of vintages

of DDC ranging from 1964 to 1994, I for one have little incentive to buy the modern rendition of this wine. Bring back the good old DDC, Monsieur Bernard, before the star has fully lost its luster! 2015-2025+. **86.**

2006 Domaine de Chevalier

Tasting the 2006 DDC Rouge was really rather a depressing affair for me, as this was one of the first vintages that I crossed paths with the estate after Stéphane Derenoncourt was given free rein to alter the style of the wine. The 2006 Domaine de Chevalier is a fairly modern-styled wine which offers up an anonymous bouquet of sappy black cherries, tea leaves, chocolate and plenty of toasty, pricy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and superficially glossy on the attack, with solid depth and a long, chewy and new oaky finish. The elegance, complexity and breed that defined Domaine de Chevalier for centuries is nowhere to be found in this perfectly sound, perfectly boring example of the triumph of money over value. 2015-2025. **86.**

2005 Domaine de Chevalier

Ah, here we go. Domaine de Chevalier had been for several decades one of my absolutely favorite château in all of Bordeaux, and I am quite happy to have a lovely little cache of this property going back to the 1964 vintage in my cellar. However, the 2005 is a sadly overoaked and boringly modern wine that has managed to really obscure most of the soil expression of what had been traditionally one of the most inspiring *terroirs* in all of Bordeaux. The new oaky and anonymous nose on the 2005 offers up notes of black cherry, chocolate milkshakes, a bit of tobacco leaf and a more than generous coating of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fairly dense and very oaky, with the good acids of the vintage giving the fruit brightness, but with the core of the wine quite pinched and really pretty moderate in intensity and the finish blurred by some uncovered wood tannins. The heavy oak component here is at least better handled than at many châteaux, and consequently the wood tannins are not particularly raw and bitter on the backend, but this is a pretty sad example of DDC rouge when considered in the context of the very long string of profound wines that this property has turned out in the past. 2018-2040. **86+?**

1994 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1994 Domaine de Chevalier rouge is a very good example of this vintage and one of the sleeper vintages of DDC to look for from this decade. The bouquet is a pretty blend of cherries, tobacco, a touch of brick dust, smoky tones and a discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with a nice core, lovely focus and complexity, melting tannins, good acidity and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. Not a great DDC, but a very fine rendition of the 1994 vintage. 2010-2020+. **89.**

1989 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1989 DDC was showing brilliantly the last time I crossed paths with the wine, back in January of 2010. The nose is deep, pure and very expressive, offering up a fine mélange of cherries, blood orange, nutskins, a very complex base of soil tones, tobacco leaf, incipient notes of cocoa powder and a deft touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure, with lovely mid-palate depth and vinosity, modest tannins and truly exceptional elegance on the very long, focused and soil-driven finish. In a vintage where the fruit can sometimes get in the way of the *terroir* in each wine, the 1989 Domaine de Chevalier is noteworthy for its lovely transparency and very classic profile. 2010-2050. **93.**

1988 Domaine de Chevalier

This was the first time I had tasted the 1988 Domaine de Chevalier and I was hoping for a bit more from the wine, but it is just a touch on the sinewy side to rank up with the top vintages from this fabled decade at DDC. The nose is currently the best part of the wine, as it offers up a classic and quite complex nose of black cherries, dark chocolate, cigar wrapper, a complex base of gravelly soil, a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, but still currently a bit bound up in its structural elements, with a fair bit of tannin, a bit of leanness in the mid-palate and good, but not great length on the youthful finish. This is certainly still a very good wine, but there is a touch of austerity here that may or may not relent with more bottle age, so there is a possibility that this vintage of DDC may always be a touch under-nourished. In any case, it still needs at least a couple more years of bottle age to let the tannins more fully fall away. 2015-2035+. **89.**

1986 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1986 vintage at Domaine de Chevalier was very strong for the *vin rouge* and as the wine closes in on its thirtieth birthday, the wine is just starting to edge into its plateau of maturity and offer up some fine drinking. The structure of the 1986 vintage is still in evidence here, but the wine is blossoming nicely from behind it and offers up a deep and complex nose of red and black cherries, Cuban cigars, a superb base of soil tones, a fine note of Graves nuttiness, blossoming smokiness, a touch of brick dust, new leather and just a bit of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still moderately tannic, with a fine core, tangy acids and a very long, complex and classy finish that closes with excellent grip and soil drive. The 1986 DDC is still a few years away from really reaching its apogee of maturity, but it is getting closer and is really an excellent wine. 2018-2045. **92+.**

1985 Domaine de Chevalier

It has been several years since I last saw a bottle of the 1985 DDC, but when last tasted in 2007, it was showing outstanding potential. The deep, pure and beautifully refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red plums, cherries, tobacco leaf, black truffles, cocoa powder, beautifully complex soil tones and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a fine core of sappy fruit, modest tannins, sound acids and outstanding length and grip on the really intense finish. This is a beautiful vintage of DDC that was just entering its plateau of peak maturity in 2006 and should continue to drink well for many decades to come. 2007-2030+. **93.**

1983 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1983 Domaine de Chevalier is a brilliant wine and one of my favorite vintages from this estate in the decade of the 1980s- which was a very, very strong period for this estate. In fact, one could not ask for a better inaugural vintage for Olivier Bernard's era at the property. The wine offers up a beautiful and utterly classic nose of roasted cassis, pure black cherries, singed tobacco, chocolate, a beautifully refined base of soil tones, a deft touch of vanillin oak, classic DDC smokiness and incipient notes of the black truffles that will come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, suave and intensely flavored, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, still a touch of tannin and lovely grip on the complex and utterly suave and elegant, long finish. Just a superb vintage of DDC. 2013-2040. **93.**

1982 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1982 DDC rouge is far better than I anticipated, given the long-time reports that the property was hit hard by hail in 1982 and the wine inherently flawed from the outset. While the wine is a bit weedy in profile (probably from the hail), it is really not a bad drink today and much

more interesting than I would have expected. The nose offers up a complex blend of dark berries, black cherries, dark chocolate, herbs, coffee grounds and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and showing quite suave on the attack, with a good core, melting tannins and good length and grip on the slightly rugged finish. This is certainly not a great Domaine de Chevalier (and nowhere near as good as the 1983), but it is really not a bad bottle of claret for current consumption- particularly for those who can forgive a bit of weediness on the nose and palate. 2013-2035. **87.**

1979 Domaine de Chevalier (served from magnum)

The '79 DDC is a beautiful wine, and one of the loveliest examples of the vintage for current drinking. I have tasted the wine with quite some regularity over the last couple of decades, in both magnum and bottle, and I have consistently found it to be stunning and one of the great sleepers to be found on the auction market. This particular note is my most recent, and came from a magnum (though I have found the bottles to be every bit as fresh and vigorous as this magnum). The nose on the 1979 Domaine de Chevalier is deep and classic DDC, with notes of red cherries and red plums, chocolate, tobacco, summer truffles, Graves earth and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, poised and elegant, with excellent depth at the core, fine, melting tannins, sound acids, and lovely length and grip on the refined and complex finish. The '79 DDC is elegance personified, but possesses more depth and intensity than is customary with most wines from this vintage and really is a transcendental 1979 claret! It will continue to drink well for many, many years to come and is one of the great recent vintages for Domaine de Chevalier. 2015-2035+. **94.**

1978 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1978 DDC is another really lovely wine from what be one of the most consistently fine decades in the history of the estate. This is a more roasted and black fruity vintage for Domaine de Chevalier, and the wine bears quite a bit of resemblance to the 1978 Haut Brion in its aromatic mélange of dark berries, black cherries, roasted tobacco, Graves earth tones and a touch of black truffle in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very complex, with fine focus, melting tannins, impressive soil inflection and a very long, smoky finish. A very fine '78, but not quite in the league of the more refined 1979 DDC. 2012-2030. **90.**

1975 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1975 Domaine de Chevalier is another absolutely classic vintage for this iconic wine, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, cigar wrapper, iron-like soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of brick dust and a lovely topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a tad youthfully angular on the attack, with a fine core, tangy acids and lovely focus and balance on the still moderately tannic finish. This is certainly drinkable today, but my gut instinct is that the 1975 DDC will be even better with a few more years' worth of bottle age. A sleeper vintage for this great property in this, its golden era. 2014-2040. **92.**

1970 Domaine de Chevalier

Domaine de Chevalier gets my vote as one of the most consistently profound performers of the decades of the 1960s and 1970s in the firmament of Bordeaux, and the 1970 vintage is one of the reference point vintages for this fine property during their glorious heyday. The bouquet explodes from the glass in a blaze of cherries, red plums, blood orange, cigar smoke, Graves earth, cocoa powder, hints of black truffle and a dollop of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and pure, with the vintage's fine acidity adding brilliance and succulence to the palate, with great focus, lovely soil signature, outstanding depth, and great

length and grip on the long, complex and tangy finish. Simply brilliant winemaking, coupled to stunning *terroir*. 2014-2030. **94.**

1966 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1966 Domaine de Chevalier is a brilliant example of both the vintage and DDC's golden past. The wine offers up a magically complex and enchanting mélange of red plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, summer truffles, a nice touch of orange zest, singed tobacco, a lovely base of dusty Graves soil tones and a bit of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with a silky core of fruit, magical complexity, impeccable focus and balance, bright acids and absolutely great length and grip on the utterly refined and pure finish. Why one would ever think there was a need to improve on a style at DDC that produced such magically refined wins as the 1966 is a mystery that may never be solved! 2014-2035. **94.**



1964 Domaine de Chevalier

In the ripe and outstanding 1964 Graves vintage, the Domaine de Chevalier is classically refined and complex on both the nose and palate and just a beautiful example of how much has been lost with the changeover to a modern-styled wine of manipulation. The stunning bouquet soars from the glass in a red fruity blend of cherries, red berries, blood orange, cigar ash, summer truffles, a beautiful base of Graves soil tones, a touch of nutskin and a nice topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full and utterly suave, with a lovely core of fruit,

tertiary complexity, tangy acids, outstanding focus and balance and impressive grip on the very long, pure, transparent and silky finish. The ripeness of the 1964 vintage here shows up more in the relatively low acids of the '64 DDC (in comparison to the 1966 for instance), rather than in a riper spectrum of fruit tones. This is a beautiful example of the vintage that perfectly synthesizes the inherent elegance of Domaine de Chevalier and the velvety generosity of the 1964 vintage in the Graves. 2014-2035+. **94.**

1962 Domaine de Chevalier

It has been a few years since I last tasted a bottle of the 1962 Domaine de Chevalier, but this is one of my favorite wines of the vintage and it continued, on last visit, to still be cruising along nicely and showing no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The deep, complex and very refined nose offers up a classically mature DDC profile of cherries, red berries, woodsmoke, a hint of menthol, a lovely base of earthy Graves soil tones, truffles and a dollop of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and light on its feet, with a lovely core, superb soil signature, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on its long and silky finish. *Tout en finesse.* 2010-2025+. **90.**

1947 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1947 Domaine de Chevalier is a great bottle of wine that has clearly been at its apogee for several decades, but shows no signs of losing any steam for many years to come. Given the extreme frost damage here only two years before, I have to believe that production levels were microscopic at the estate in 1947, so I count myself very lucky to have crossed paths with this brilliant wine on a lucky occasion back in 2008. The absolutely stunning nose delivers a great blend of cherries, gravelly soil tones, sweet, Cuban tobacco, coffee, blood orange, herb tones and chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with tertiary layers of complexity, a fine core, melted tannins and exceptional length and grip on the vibrant and magically complex finish. This is a great, great example of the 1947 vintage and the inimitable *terroir* of Domaine de Chevalier. What a great old wine! 2008-2030. **94.**

1928 Domaine de Chevalier

I have only had the pleasure to taste the 1928 Domaine de Chevalier on one occasion—way back in 1995, but I can still taste this brilliant wine today in my imagination. Nearly twenty years later, this remains one of the finest 1928s that I have ever tasted! The utterly profound nose soars from the glass in an almost Vega-Sicilia-like blend of sweet, sweet plums, black cherries, chocolate, black truffles, singed tobacco, a gloriously complex base of Graves soil tones and a smoky topnote. With air this wine became more and more signature Graves, dancing away from its early, Vega-like personality as the base of soil begins to assert itself. On the palate the wine is deep, plush, opulent, and utterly seamless on the attack, with layer upon layer of sweet fruit, perfect balance, and a long, profound finish. Remarkably, there remains a fair bit of tannin still in this wine, so it should continue to drink brilliantly for many decades to come. Only a ton of time can work this kind of magic on a great Bordeaux vintage! A great, great wine with decades of life ahead of it! 1995-2040 **97.**

THE SUMMER OF 2015'S MÂCONNAIS WINES A LOOK AT THE VINTAGES OF 2012, 2013 AND 2014



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

This is the first feature I have written on the two fine chardonnay-producing regions of southern Burgundy, the M conna  and the C te Chalonnaise, and I have been remiss in not writing something sooner, as these two regions seem to have increased in importance for many wine lovers in the last decade. With the unrelenting scourge of premature oxidation making it increasingly hazardous to try and age white Burgundies long-term from the Chablis and the C te d'Or regions (not to mention white Bordeaux, Alsace and the Loire), the need for white Burgundies that will reach their apogees of peak drinkability in a shorter time frame has never been greater, and these two regions fit the bill perfectly in this regard. That the overall quality of the wines being produced here has increased in the last decade or two is also quite evident when one tastes through recent vintages, as there are far more high water marks today, and I really should have started covering these two regions more thoroughly several years ago! The M conna  and the C te Chalonnaise have certainly had their shares of weather struggles in the last few vintages, as the propensity for hailstorms that has afflicted villages such as Volnay and Beaune in the last several years has also been felt in these more southerly regions. The pattern of unsettled weather at flowering in the C te d'Or in the last handful of vintages has also been seen

in these two regions as well, with a very short crop produced due to poor flower set most recently in 2013. As Dominique Lafon noted, “the 2013 vintage in the Mâcon was the smallest I have ever experienced here, as the flowering took place under very unsettled weather and we have ended up with only half a crop in this year.” The 2014 vintage in both Mâcon and the Côte Chalonnaise has provided a more normal crop size, and both these two vintages have produced very good wines in qualitative terms, with only the very small yields of 2013 dampening the enthusiasm of *vignerons* in the two regions. Looking back to the 2012 vintage, both hail and difficult flowering weather took their toll during the growing season, and the yields in this vintage were not a whole lot more robust than those of 2013. However, in all three vintages, if one looked beyond the short crop totals of 2012 and 2013, the quality of the wines produced were quite fine in all three years and it is really a very good time for wine lovers to take a serious look at these two regions.

Amongst the three vintage, my more classically aligned palate has a preference for the 2014 wines, though all three years have produced some very fine examples at the best addresses. The 2014s are not quite as deep as either the best 2012s or the super-concentrated 2013s, but I like the bounce and vivacity that they deliver on the palate as a result of being a bit less concentrated in style. They are very emblematic of the charms of the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise at their finest, and though they may not be quite as broad-shouldered as the wines from the previous two years, based on what I have tasted so far, this is my favorite of the three most recent years. Keep in mind that many of the top Mâconnais bottlings from 2014 have not yet crossed my path, so wines such as the superb Clos de la Chapelle Pouilly-Fuissé, the Domaine Ferret wines and the superb single vineyard bottlings from Daniel and Julien Barraud have not yet been released. I am very much looking forward to tasting them next summer. The 2013 vintage, which was produced from such miniscule crop levels, is a very, very good vintage that I imagine that many lovers of Côte d’Or white Burgundies are going to be particularly attracted to, as the wines in the Mâconnais are notably broader-shouldered in this year and approach their northern brethren in structural terms. To my palate, I liked many of the 2013s I tasted a year ago better than I do today, as the wines seem just a touch heavy-handed to my palate at the present time, and while they continue to offer up plenty of depth and complexity, they do not have the customary charm that I look for in my favorite wines from the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise. The 2012 vintage is stylistically a step up for me from 2013- where the vintage is clean and classic in profile- for of course, one had to side-step around any issues that might have been brought up by the hail that afflicted some vineyards in this year. But, all in all, there is an awful lot of really, really serious chardonnay on the market at the present time from the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise!

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

The 2104 Vintage

2014 Steel Chardonnay- Maison Louis Jadot (Screwcap)

The “Steel Chardonnay” from Louis Jadot is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks, and is bottled with a screwcap to boot, so this is truly a “metal” version of chardonnay from the Burgundy region! The wine is produced from a blend of fruit from the Mâconnais, Côte Chalonnaise and Côte d’Or. The nose is quite nice and shows no signs of reduction in its blend of white peach, apple, gentle leesy tones, white flowers and a very gentle touch of citrus oils. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and well-balanced, with a good core, very respectable complexity, but the first signs of reduction poking out on the finish, which closes slightly bitter and already turning towards the asparagus side of the ledger. For drinking over the next few months, this is pretty good wine- particularly if decanted- but once the reduction locks in permanently, it will be gone. It is too bad that the team at Jadot chose a screwcap for the wine (though I do understand the intellectual continuity in doing so with the rest of the packaging), as the underlying wine here is really quite good. 2015-2016. **87.**

2014 Mâcon-Villages “la Crochette”- Jacques Charlet

The 2014 Mâcon-Villages “la Crochette” from Jacques Charlet is produced from sixty year-old vines and raised entirely in stainless steel. The wine offers up a pretty, floral aromatic blend of apple, spring flowers, gentle Mâconnais toastiness, white peach and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and wide open structurally, a solid core, good acids and a long, succulent and bouncy finish. This is not long on complexity, but has plenty of personality. A very good, classic bottle of Mâcon-Villages. 2015-2018. **88.**

2014 Mâcon-Villages- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon (screwcap)

I usually taste the Mâcon -Villages bottling in the Lafon cellars in Meursault each winter when I am there sampling the new vintage of Côte de Beaune wines, so I will typically see this wine sealed under natural cork. However, I tasted the 2014 here in New York, where the wine is imported with a screwcap, so this is the first vintage where I have tasted this cuvée under its alternate closure. The wine shows good depth of fruit on both the nose and palate, but is already a bit scalped on the palate from the screwcap. The nose is still quite vibrant in its mélange of white peach, apple, gentle toasty soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still quite generous on the attack, with a fine core, crisp acids, but a finish that is quickly hunkering down with early reductive issues and getting a bit pinched and showing the first signs of “metallic minerality” as well. The wine is still okay, but do not let it sit around too long in the bottle under this closure, as the writing is already on the wall. 2015-2016. **87.**

2014 Mâcon-Villages- Maison Louis Jadot

The Mâcon-Villages bottling from Louis Jadot a decade or more ago used to be pretty straightforward juice, but clearly the domaine is putting a lot more effort into this wine today, as the 2014 is really an excellent bottle of white Burgundy. The wine tips the scales at a cool and classy 12.5 percent and jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, pear, a potpourri of spring flowers, a touch of lemon zest and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with bright acids, lovely focus and grip and an impressively long, classy finish. This is not the most complex bottle of Mâcon-Villages that one will cross paths with, but it has depth, balance and breed and is really a fine value. 2015-2020. **88.**

2014 Mâcon-Chardonnay- Domaine Talmard (screwcap)

Domaine Talmard is currently run by Gérard Talmard, with all of the estate's vineyards located in the village of Chardonnay (which gave its name to the grape variety in the deeps of time). His 2014 bottling is sadly sealed under screwcap for the US and is already showing a bit of closure reductive issues on the palate, with a pinched backend, but the nose remains fresh and unaffected. The bouquet is a bright blend of apple, peach, gentle Mâconnais toastiness, chalky soil tones and a touch of fruit blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and bouncy on the attack, with a good core, bright acids and the first signs of reduction clamping down the finish, which is still reasonably long, but narrows towards the end, rather than offering up a peacock's tail. There is no doubt that the underlying wine here is outstanding, but under the screw, the wine is merely quite good today and will probably be worse for wear a year down the road. This is a high class bottling of Mâcon and should be all under natural cork! 2015-2016+? **87.**

2014 Mâcon-Chaintré "Roxanne"- Pascal Berthier

Pascal Berthier makes his Cuvée Roxanne from a blend of three different *lieux à dits* in the village of Chaintré, with the vines averaging forty-five years of age. The wine is raised in enamel tanks prior to bottling, rather than oak or stainless steel. The 2014 version is a very stylish and complex wine, wafting from the glass in an aromatic constellation of apple, white peach, wild flowers, chalky soil tones and just a bit of Mâconnais "toastiness" in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, bright acids, impeccable focus and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is really a fine bottle of Mâconnais chardonnay from a producer who is new to me. 2015-2019. **90.**

2014 Mâcon- La Roche-Vineuse "Sous le Bois"- Château de la Greffière

I know that I am dating myself, but the first vintage I drank from the Château de la Greffière of Isabelle and Vincent Greuzard was the 1988, so I knew these wines very well back in the day. However, I had not had the pleasure to taste a bottle for many years and was delighted to sample their full range of current releases for this report. Their bottling of Sous le Bois is from their younger vines, averaging twenty-five years of age. The 2014 version offers up a pure and vibrant bouquet of apple, white peach, lovely chalky soil tones and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a fine core, crisp acids and lovely focus and grip on the precise and classic finish. After tasting so many very concentrated bottles from the 2013 vintage, it is nice to have a glass of Mâconnais wine with utterly classic balance and delineation! 2015-2020. **89.**

2014 Mâcon Solutré Pouilly- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine et Pascal Rollet)

The 2014 Mâcon Solutré Pouilly from Domaine de la Chapelle's Pascal Rollet is a lovely bottle of Mâconnais chardonnay, with plenty of vibrant complexity to be found in its aromatic constellation of pear, grapefruit, chalky minerality, citrus peel and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely focused, with plenty of ripeness, fine balance and a long, zesty finish. This really has a fine core for a Mâcon-Villages bottling and should develop more complexity as it has to chance to blossom with a bit of bottle age. 2015-2023. **89+.**

2014 Mâcon-Vergisson "les Rochers"- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

Maurice Guerrin and his family are based in the fine Pouilly-Fuissé village of Vergisson and farm fourteen hectares of vines in the appellations of Mâcon, St. Véran and Pouilly-Fuissé. Their Mâcon-Vergisson bottling hails from two parcels that lie between the two mountains of the appellation, the Roche de Vergisson and Roche de Solutré, planted with thirty-five year-old vines. The wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel and the 2014 version offers up

a lovely nose of apple, pear, almond, chalky soil tones and fruit blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and youthful, with fine cut and grip, a lovely core and impressive length on the balanced and nicely zesty finish. This is a very serious bottle of Mâcon that is still on the young side and will be even better with a bit of bottle age and should age nicely for five to eight years. Good juice. 2015-2023+. **89+**.

2014 Saint Véran “Madame Noly”- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine et Pascal Rollet)

The 2014 Madame Noly bottling from Pascal Rollet is a much more classically styled example of St. Véran than their 2013 Perriers bottling (please see below), as it is clean, focused and youthfully complex in its medium-full format. The lovely nose offers up a fairly primary blend of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, a bit of Mâconnais toastiness and spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and nicely focused, with a fine core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the classy finish. This is a perfectly proportioned example of St. Véran that is extremely tasty out of the blocks, but will have no difficulty aging for the next half dozen years and should be even better to drink with a bit of bottle age. Lovely juice. 2015-2023. **90+**.

2014 Saint Véran “l’Or des Roches”- Domaine de la Grange

The 2014 Saint Véran “l’Or des Roches” from Domaine de la Grange is produced from forty year-old vines and is raised entirely in enamel tanks and sees no oak. The wine is pretty ripe at 13.5 percent and offers up a vivacious nose of apple, pear, sweet almonds, a touch of toastiness, buttercups and the first signs of the honeycomb to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with a fine core, plenty of complexity, lovely framing acids and a long, generous and bouncy finish. This is a broad-shouldered and serious example of Saint Véran, with plenty of stuffing and potential for aging-although it is not the most elegant expression of the appellation. Good juice. 2015-2022. **89+**.

2014 Saint Véran- Château de la Greffière

The Saint Véran bottling from Château de la Greffière was not part of their lineup when I was first selling these wines back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and it is a welcome addition to the domaine’s lineup. The 2014 Saint Véran offers up a really bright and stylish nose of white peach, a touch of pineapple, a complex base of limestone soil, white lilies and a discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and bouncy, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, crisp acids and very fine focus and grip on the long, elegant and well-balanced finish. This is an utterly classic bottle of Saint Véran. 2015-2022+. **91**.

The 2103 Vintage

2013 Chardonnay- Maison Louis Jadot

The Louis Jadot Chardonnay bottling is a blend of fruit from the Côte d’Or, Côte Chalonnaise and Mâconnais and was aged in casks. The 2013 offers up a fine nose of peach, pineapple, a nice base of soil tones and a very discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and fine focus on the long and tasty finish. This is not the most complex bottle, but it offers fine generosity of fruit and a nice base of soil in its juicy format. Good juice. 2015-2018. **87**.

2013 Chablis- Maison Louis Jadot

This bottle does not really fit in this report, but as it was sent along with the domaine’s Mâconnais bottlings, who am I to refuse a bottle of Chablis? The 2013 Jadot Chablis AC is a lovely village wine, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of apple, lemon, oyster shell, a

touch of straw and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with racy acids, excellent mineral drive and a long, serious and perfectly balanced finish. This is really a terrific bottle of straight Chablis! 2015-2025+. **90.**

2013 Rully- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I reported on the 2013 Rully from the Drouhin family in my feature on the 2013 Burgundy vintage in December of last year, and I was quite pleased to have a chance to revisit the wine on this side of the Atlantic in August of this year. The wine is showing beautifully, with a nice sense of reserve today that I did not sense in Beaune and which augurs even better for its positive evolution in bottle. The bouquet is deep, bright and nicely primary in its blend of apple, a touch of pink grapefruit, a fine base of stony soil, white flowers, still that dollop of fresh pineapple and a very understated framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with a lovely core, fine intensity of flavor, good focus and cut and a long, tangy and soil-driven finish. This is very serious white Burgundy for a very, very fair price! 2015-2022+. **90.**

2013 Mâcon-Villages “la Crochette”- Jacques Charlet

The 2013 Mâcon-Villages “la Crochette” from Jacques Charlet is a lovely example of this vintage, with a deep and fairly concentrated nose that reflects the very small yields of 2013 in the Mâconnais. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of apple, peach, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a nice dollop of Mâconnais “toastiness” in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really quite rock solid at the core, with good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and tangy finish. Good juice that should drink nicely for at least the next five years. 2015-2020. **88.**

2013 Mâcon-Villages- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2013 Mâcon-Villages from Maison Joseph Drouhin is really a very stylish and classy example of its appellation, and I like it better than the Mâcon-Lugny from the domaine (at least here in the states), as it is bottled under a natural cork. The wine exudes lovely aromatic brightness and charm in its blend of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, a touch of vanillin oak and a pungent topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and vibrant, with a fine core, a touch of Mâconnais toastiness on the backend, fine acids and impressive length and grip on the focused and quite serious finish. Fine juice. 2015-2020. **89.**

2013 Mâcon- La Roche-Vineuse- Maison Chanson

Maison Chanson’s 2013 Mâcon- La Roche Vineuse is a very good bottle that shows some of the intense concentration of the short yields of this vintage, but also some lovely floral tones and very fresh fruit nuances to keep it fairly light on its feet. The bouquet offers up a classic blend of apple, peach, chalky soil tones, buttercups and a gentle topnote of vanilla. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with good acids, fine focus and a long, quite intensely flavored finish. This is a very good example of the vintage, as the short crop adds stuffing without taking away too much elegance. 2015-2019. **87.**

2013 Mâcon- La Roche-Vineuse “Vieilles Vignes”- Château de la Greffière

The old vine bottling of Mâcon- La Roche-Vineuse from the Château de la Greffière is partially barrel-fermented and is produced from their vineyards in excess of fifty years of age. Twenty-five percent of the cuvée is raised in Burgundy casks and then blended in with the remainder, which has been raised in stainless steel. The 2013 vintage’s concentrated style seems

to have not had as great an impact on these old vines, as this is one of the most filigreed 2013 Mâconnais wines that I tasted for this report. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a very pretty blend of apple, white peach, a touch of butter, chalky minerality, white flowers and a gentle framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and lovely complexity on the long and classy finish. A first class Mâcon! 2015-2020+. **90+**.

2013 Mâcon Viré-Clessé- Maison Chanson

The 2013 Viré-Clessé from Maison Chanson is a very pretty wine on the nose, wafting from the glass in a fine mélange of apple, lemon blossoms, chalky soil tones, a touch of butter and a well-measured framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and still fairly youthful in profile, with a good core, crisp acids and a pretty good length on the slightly chunky finish. Today, the wine does not deliver the same complexity on the palate as it promises on the nose, but there is good stuffing here and the wine may blossom with a bit more bottle age. 2015-2020+. **87+?**



Dominique Lafon in one of his Mâconnais vineyards.

2013 Mâcon-Lugny- Maison Joseph Drouhin (screwcap)

The 2013 Mâcon-Lugny from Joseph Drouhin is sealed under a screwcap in the US, but the wine was showing just a touch of reduction this past July (expressed as a vegetal streak) and needed a bit of aeration to blossom. With air the wine opens nicely and offers up a classic nose

of apple, white peach, a touch of acacia blossom, chalky soil and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and bright, with a good core, fine complexity and just a bit of backend reduction that does not blow off, with the first vestiges of metallic minerality starting to clamp down and add a touch of bitterness on the finish. This is a really good wine that is holding its own against its closure, but it is a shame that it was not just bottled under natural cork and could drink as its maker intended it. 2015-2016. **86.**

2013 Mâcon-Lugny- Maison Louis Jadot

This is the first vintage of Mâcon-Lugny that I have ever tasted from Maison Jadot and the wine is quite tasty. The wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel and offers up a ripe, vibrant nose of apple, a touch of pineapple, spring flowers and a very nice base of Mâconnais soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and juicy, with a good core, sound acids and a bit of backend heat poking out on the long finish. The label here states 12.5 percent alcohol, but I have to believe the octane is a bit higher than that. 2015-2017. **86.**

2013 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2013 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is a very pretty wine, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, a touch of grapefruit, salty soil tones and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with good acidity, fine focus and sneaky length and grip on the backend. Good juice. 2015-2020. **88.**

2013 Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2013 les Maranches from the village of Uchizy is a bit riper and more generous on the attack than the Milly-Lamartine this year, and it is a tad less elegant and racy as a result. The wide open nose offers up a mélange of apple, peach, toasty Mâcon soil tones and a bit of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered for a young Mâcon, with a good core and a long, zesty and easy-going finish. This will drink best in its youth. 2015-2018. **87.**

2013 Mâcon-Bussière “Les Clos”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The new addition of the Mâcon-Bussière “Les Clos” bottling from the Drouhins is outstanding. The wine is half fermented in stainless steel tanks and half in new, large *foudres*, which once they are seasoned with the Bussière, will be reserved for use in Chablis. The wine was bottled at the end of June and was showing lovely purity and depth in December, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, lemon, gently toasty soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak from the large *foudres*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite long, with sound acids, fine focus and good length and grip on the zesty finish. This has lovely depth for its pedigree. 2015-2020+. **89.**

2013 Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The La Monsard was fermented all in large casks this year, as the yields were so small in these vineyards in Bussière as there was not sufficient quantity to fill even one of the small stainless steel tanks in the cellars here. The wine has turned quite well indeed in 2013, offering up a quite refined bouquet of apple, orange, toasty soil tones, a bit of fresh almond and just a whisper of buttery oak (though the casks were not new). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite long, with a fine core and a long, classy finish. This is quite unique in personality this year from past iterations, with the barrel-fermentation giving the wine a rounder texture and a bit less mineral drive than is customary, but the quality is every bit as high as previous vintages, just with a slightly different personality this year. 2015-2020. **88+.**

2013 Mâcon-Chardonnay “Clos de la Crochette”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2013 Clos de la Crochette was the first wine picked by Dominique’s team in Mâcon, as this is always one of the most easily-ripened vineyards. The wine offers up a fine and wide open aromatic constellation of peach, tangerine, lovely minerality, spring flowers and a touch of toasty Mâcon soil tones as well. On the palate the wine is long, crisp and full-bodied, with a good core, lovely focus and bounce on the backend and fine depth at the core. Good juice. 2015-2021. **90.**

2013 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2013 Clos du Four has turned out beautifully in this vintage, wafting from the glass in a very classy blend of apple, pear, a touch of nutskin, toasty soil tones, orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with good mid-palate concentration, lovely focus and nascent complexity and lovely length and grip on the finish. A strong vintage for this iconic Mâcon bottling. 2015-2022. **91.**

2013 Mâcon Viré-Clessé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2013 Mâcon Viré-Clessé from Dominique Lafon is the only single village bottling from him in this vintage that I had a chance to retaste here in New York in August and the wine is showing even better today than it did in Meursault in December of last year. The beautifully refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, iodine, a nice shading of hazelnut, complex, chalky soil tones, a very discreet touch of vanillin oak (this is raised in three to four year-old *demi-muids*), white lilies and a very gentle topnote of fresh lavender. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very intensely flavored, with racy acids, superb focus and grip and a very long, complex and racy finish. I love that Dominique Lafon’s top bottling of Mâconnais wine is his most elegant, not his broadest-shouldered! 2015-2025. **93.**

2013 Mâcon-Charnay “les Crays”- Domaine Jean Manciat

The Mâcon-Charnay “les Crays” from Jean Manciat is his bottling produced from younger vines, which are around a dozen years of age these days, with the wine barrel-fermented in four to eight year-old casks. The 2013 is pretty ripe at 13.5 percent and shows some of the concentration of the very short yields of this vintage, as it offers up a nose of peach, pineapple, a nice base of soil tones, some fruit skin notes and a bit of Mâconnais toastiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a superb core, fine focus and grip and a long, bright and fairly powerful finish. Stylistically, this is pretty concentrated for a Mâconnais white, which may not be to everyone’s taste, but it is impeccably well-made and should age very well for several years. 2015-2022+. **89+.**

2013 Mâcon-Charnay “Franclieu”- Domaine Jean Manciat

The Franclieu bottling from Monsieur Manciat is his stainless steel raised cuvée, but it is produced primarily from fifty year-old vines. The 2013 version is a touch lower in alcohol than the Les Crays (13 versus 13.5 percent) and delivers a vibrant aromatic mélange of apple, peach, spring flowers and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and juicy, with a fine core (though not quite the extraordinary concentration of the Les Crays), lovely focus and balance, sound framing acids and very good length and grip on the energetic finish. The Les Crays is the showier cuvée in 2013, but I like this wine every bit as much for its more classically shaped profile. 2015-2019. **89+.**

2013 Mâcon Viré-Clessé “Majeure”- Domaine de la Verpaille

The Domaine de la Verpaille is run by Estelle and Baptiste Philippe, who took over the reins of this family estate in 2004. They have been farming their three hectares of vines organically since 2006. Their Mâcon Viré-Clessé “Majeure” bottling is produced from sixty

year-old vines and is fermented and aged entirely in stainless steel tanks. The 2013 offers up a deep and quite ripe nose of pear, pineapple, a touch of Mâconnais toastiness, citrus oil and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, bright acids and a long finish that closes with notes of citrus peel. This is a fairly concentrated bottle of Mâcon with fine depth and length, but not quite the same level of complexity as the very top estates' versions of Viré-Clessé. 2015-2023. **88.**

2013 Saint Véran “les Perriers”- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine et Pascal Rollet)

The 2013 Saint Véran “les Perriers” from Domaine de la Chapelle shows some of the extra concentration on the nose that is the hallmark of this vintage in the Mâconnais and its remarkably short yields. The deep bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, a touch of pineapple, a touch of chalky soil, a nice touch of white flowers and a bit of butter in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit tropical from a touch of botrytis, with a good core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. I am not a fan of botrytis in my chardonnay, so this does not sing for me as much as it may for others who are more tolerant of a bit of noble rot in their St. Véran. However, that said, it is very well-made in its style (and add three points to my score if botrytis does not bother you in Mâconnais wines). 2015-2020+. **88.**

2013 St. Véran- Maison Joseph Drouhin (natural cork)

The 2013 St. Véran had also been bottled at the time of my visit, and I tasted this wine under natural cork, where it was absolutely singing. Folks in the US still get this wine under screwcap, which will be a completely different experience I have no doubt- at least after another six months. In any case, under cork, this is really lovely in 2013, as the very low yields in the Mâconnais have translated into a wine of great purity and depth for its appellation, delivering a bouquet of peach, apple, spring flowers, lemon zest and a nice base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and intensely flavored, with fine focus and grip, nice complexity and impressive length and grip on the vibrant and shapely finish. This is really good this year! 2015-2022+. **89+.**

2013 St. Véran- Maison Joseph Drouhin (screwcap)

I tasted the screwcapped version of the 2013 Drouhin St. Véran here in New York in July, so six months after sampling the cork-sealed version in Beaune in December of last year. This made for a good opportunity to taste my hypothesis above, and the wine was still pretty similar to the cork-finished version on the nose, though starting to get pinched a bit, so that the aromatic amplitude was starting to diminish a bit. But, the spread of scents was quite similar, as the wine offers up scents of apple, peach, lemon blossoms, a nice base of soil tones and just a whisper of savory notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is quite a bit different at the six month mark, as the closure is starting to pinch the backend and give the wine a sharpness to its minerality that was emphatically not in the bottle tasted in December. The wine remains long, zesty and nicely focused, but this is the digital version of the wine and I prefer the cork-finished version, which had some “analogue” warmth and generosity on the backend, which is missing here. This is still a good wine, but it is shorter than the above and will not last as long in bottle. If experience is any guide, the gap between these wines will continue to grow over the next few years. 2015-2018. **88.**

2013 Saint Véran “le Clos Vessats”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The le Clos Vessats bottling from Domaine Guerrin comes from a two hectare vineyard the family owns in the commune of Léynes, which has a southwesterly exposition and is planted

with ten year-old vines. This cuvée of Saint Véran from the Guerrin family is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. The wine delivers a classy and very floral nose of apple blossoms, white lilies, pear, a touch of tangerine and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and fairly concentrated (in the style of the vintage), with a fine core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the still fairly youthful and slightly chunky finish. This is quite tasty today, but really deserves another year in the cellar to allow the palate to catch up with the really outstanding aromatic profile of the wine. Fine juice. 2016-2022. **89.**

2013 Saint Véran “la Côte-Rôtie”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The 2013 Saint Véran “la Côte-Rôtie” from Domaine Guerrin et Fils is barrel-fermented primarily in one to five year-old casks, with fifteen percent of the barrels new for the *elevage* of the wine. The 2013 offers up a superb bouquet of apple, pear, a nice touch of nuttiness, lovely soil tones and a discreet framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, crisp acids, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is a very high class example of Saint Véran. 2015-2023+. **91.**



2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “Alliance” Vieilles Vignes- Daniel et Julien Barraud

The 2013 Alliance old vine bottling from the father and son team of Daniel and Julien Barraud all hails from fruit grown in their home village of Vergisson, with the bottling blending old vine grapes from three different *climats* in the town. The wine wafts from the glass in an excellent blend of pear, apple, a touch of fresh almond, a lovely base of soil, a hint of lemon oil

and a gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. This is really high class Pouilly-Fuissé that is drinking with great class today, but will have no difficulties aging well for several years. 2015-2022+. **92.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Chataigniers” Vieilles Vignes- Daniel et Julien Barraud

The Pouilly-Fuissé “les Chataigniers” Vieilles Vignes bottling Daniel et Julien Barraud hails from a *lieu à dit* in the village of Fuissé, planted with vines that are in excess of sixty years of age. The 2013 version offers up a deep and concentrated nose of pear, apple, nutskin, lovely soil tones, dried flowers and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in profile, with a rock solid core, crisp acids and lovely focus and grip on the powerful and still fairly youthful finish. This is a lovely wine that is quite tasty today, but will show more nuance with a year or two of bottle age. 2015-2025. **91.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Crays”- Daniel et Julien Barraud

The Pouilly-Fuissé “les Crays” bottling from Daniel et Julien Barraud hails from one of my favorite vineyards in all of the appellation, as it lies at the foot of the Roche de Vergisson and is a superb *terroir* that gives lovely minerality to its wines. The 2013 is really a classy example of this high quality vintage, wafting from the glass in a bright and complex nose of apple, pear, a touch of iodine, spring flowers, chalky soil tones and a discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, bright acids, nascent complexity and very good length and grip on the long and zesty finish. This cuvée is raised in twenty percent new wood. A lovely example that is still on the youthful side and will be even better with another couple of years’ worth of bottle age. 2015-2023. **92.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “la Verchère” Vieilles Vignes- Daniel et Julien Barraud

The la Verchère old vine bottling from the Barraud family hails from vines planted between 1947 and 1969, with the wine barrel-fermented and aged twelve to fourteen months in cask prior to bottling. The vineyard of la Verchère has a plain south exposition that tends to translate into excellent ripeness in most vintages. The 2013 version is outstanding, with the low yields of the vintage really giving the wine extraordinary depth in the mid-palate. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, white peach, a bit of butter, complex soil tones, a bit of orange oil, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, bright acids and a very long, still very youthful and quite concentrated finish. This really needs a year or two to fully blossom, as the low yields here give the wine a backend intensity that will mitigate nicely with a bit of bottle age. Very fine juice. 2016-2030? **92+.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Chapelle

The Vieilles Vignes bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé from Pascal Rollet comes from his parcels in the village of Solutré that lie outside of his Clos de la Chapelle. The average age of the vines used for this bottling are sixty years of age, with the wine barrel-fermented and aged eighteen months prior to bottling. The intensity of the short yields of this year are in evidence in the fine nose of pear, apple, dried flowers, a touch of fresh almond, lovely soil tones and just a whisper of oak influence from the older barrels it spent residing in during the first twelve months of its *élevage*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite concentrated, with a rock solid core, nascent complexity and fine focus and grip on the crisp, balanced and fairly broad-shouldered finish. This is a lovely example of the vintage, but my gut feeling is that I will like it even better in the more classically proportioned vintage of 2014. 2015-2025+. **90+.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “Clos de la Chapelle”- Domaine de la Chapelle

The Clos de la Chapelle is the Rolls-Royce bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé from Monsieur Rollet, as this is produced from his tiny parcel of eight year-old vines situated right at the base of the Roche de Solutr . This sees a discreet touch of new wood during its *elevage* and is really a beautifully made bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé. The nose is utterly classic, as these very old vines routinely produce short yields, so the concentrated style of 2013 is less in evidence here, with the wine wafting from the glass in a complex and quite classy m lange of pear, white peach, complex, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of almond, orange zest, gently musky floral tones and a dollop of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and utterly refined, with a superb core, crisp acids, still a bit of youthful oakiness that will integrate more fully with a bit of bottle age and outstanding length and grip on the elegant, intensely flavored and vibrant finish. This is absolutely stellar Pouilly-Fuissé! 2015-2030+. **93.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Joseph Drouhin’s 2013 Pouilly-Fuissé is a lovely wine that shows all of the depth and intensity that the low yields of this growing season presented in the M connais. The nose offers up a fine, youthful blend of peach, pineapple, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and gentle M connais toastiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, bright acids and fine length and grip on the vibrant finish. A fine example. 2015-2019. **89.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The “straight” Pouilly-Fuissé from Domaine Ferret is a lovely bottle in 2013, with the intensity of the low yields of this vintage very nicely managed here, so that the wine remains light on its feet and vibrant. This also sees less new wood than the higher level bottlings at the domaine, which works very well in this vintage, as the wine offers up a pure and excellent bouquet of apple, pear, a nice base of limestone soils, a touch of toastiness and a fine topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and impeccably balanced, with a fine core, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the focused and bouncy finish. This is really a lovely bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé that is still a tad primary in personality, but will really blossom over the coming twelve to twenty-four months. High class juice. 2015-2025+. **91+.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Crays”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The les Crays vineyard is one of the finest *lieux   dits* in the appellation, situated right at the base of the Roche de Vergisson and made famous back in the day by the outstanding wines of Andr  Forest. The Guerrin family’s version is barrel-fermented and raised in casks up to five years of age, with fifteen percent of the barrels renewed each year. Their 2013 les Crays is an absolutely superb bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé, wafting from the glass in a deep and complex blend of pear, peach, toasted almond, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a nice touch of buttery oak. on the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with crisp acids, fine complexity and a long, balanced and perfectly focused finish. This is just a whisper more marked by its oak than the great wines made by Monsieur Forest back in the 1980s and early 1990s, but for fans of those wines, this is a must have addition to the cellar, as it is stellar Pouilly-Fuissé and a fine, fine rendition of this outstanding *terroir*. 2015-2025+. **92+.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The old vine bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé from Domaine Guerrin is sourced from three different *lieux   dits* in the village of Vergisson, with the minimum age of vines included in the cuv e at least forty years of age. The wine is barrel-fermented, with fifteen percent of the wood new for the *elevage* of this bottling. The 2013 offers up a superb nose of apple, pear, a nice touch

of Mâconnais toastiness, chalky soil tones, hazelnut and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. A lovely example, with the old vines here carrying the new wood seamlessly. 2015-2025+. **93.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé- Maison Louis Jadot

The 2013 Pouilly-Fuissé from Maison Louis Jadot is really a quite serious example of this appellation, and unless my memory is playing tricks with me, this vintage has more depth and structural integrity than use to be the case with this bottling a decade or so ago. I note that this wine is now partially barrel-fermented, which I believe is a change from the past. The deep and youthfully complex nose offers up scents of pear, apple, gentle Mâconnais toasty elements, white flowers, a nice base of soil and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more tropically fruity than the nose suggests, with a good core, bright acids and a long, generous and bouncy finish. It is a bit more complex on the nose than the palate today, but more flavor complexity may emerge with a bit of bottle age. Good juice and a more serious wine than my anticipation, based on my experience with this wine back in the vintages of the 1990s and early 2000s. 2015-2020. **88+.**

2013 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Pierre Vessigaud

Pierre Vessigaud has been farming his parcels in and around the town of Pouilly organically since 2010, and his Vieilles Vignes bottling is comprised of plots that are forty-five years of age. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in older Burgundy casks, ranging from two to ten years of age, to give the wine a bit of structural depth, without masking the *terroir* with overt new oakiness. The 2013 is fairly ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a deep and complex nose of pear, apple, hazelnuts, lovely, complex soil tones, a bit of pastry cream, a gentle whiff of vanilla and a topnote of buttercups. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core, crisp acids, very good focus and a long, complex and bouncy finish. This is a very serious bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé from a producer who is new to me with this wine, but one I will look forward to following in the years to come. For fans of Meursault, this is a Pouilly-Fuissé that will push all the right buttons. Fine juice. 2015-2020. **90.**

The 2102 Vintage

2012 Rully- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2012 Rully from Joseph Drouhin is really drinking beautifully at age three and is a stellar bargain for excellent white Burgundy at a very, very fair price. The deep and complex nose offers up a fine mélange of fresh pineapple, pear, salty soil tones, spring flowers and a gentle base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with an excellent core, fine focus and grip, lovely complexity and a long, vibrant and intensely flavored finish. The depth and concentration of many 2012 Côte de Beaune whites can be seen here a bit as well, which adds more stuffing to the mid-palate than is typical of Rully. Fine juice. 2015-2019. **91.**

2012 Viré-Clessé- Domaine de Roally

The 2012 Viré-Clessé from Domaine de Roally, which is now owned by Jean Thévenet's son, Gauthier, who purchased the property from Henri Goyard after his retirement at the turn of the century. As was the case at this estate under the direction of Monsieur Goyard, Gauthier Thévenet harvests here on the late side and leaves a bit of residual sweetness in the wines. The

2012 Viré-Clessé is a lovely wine that is beginning to show some secondary layers of complexity in its complex bouquet of apple, pineapple, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, butter and a gentle topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe, with a good core and complexity, bright acids and just a hint of backend heat on the long finish. This is a fine wine, but at fourteen percent alcohol, it does pack a bit of a punch. 2015-2019. **89.**

2012 Saint-Véran- Jean Manciat

The 2012 Saint-Véran from Jean Manciat is aged in a fair bit of new wood, but Monsieur Manciat has a light touch with the oak and the wine is beautifully balanced on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of apple, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and a judicious framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe, with a fine core, crisp acids, lovely complexity and a long, focused and concentrated finish. Lovely juice. 2015-2019. **91.**

2012 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Vieux Murs” Vieilles Vignes- Jacques Charlet

The Pouilly-Fuissé bottlings from Jacques Charlet are produced by the Barbet family, owners of the superb St. Amour estate of Domaine des Billards (amongst other properties in Beaujolais and the Mâconnais). The Charlet family is related by marriage to the Barbets and was the original owner of Domaine des Billards. The Jacques Charlet bottlings are produced from purchased grapes from several *vigneron* families in the region that the Barbets have known for decades, with the old vine bottling hailing from vines averaging fifty years of age and all picked by hand. The wine is fermented and raised in a combination of one-third new wood, one-third older casks and one-third stainless steel tanks. The 2012 version offers up a deep and serious nose of apple, pear, lovely nuttiness, a fine base of chalky soil tone, dried flowers and a discreet base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with crisp acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, poised and vibrant finish. This is a lovely bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé! 2015-2020. **91.**

2012 Pouilly-Fuissé “Tournant de Pouilly”- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2012 Tournant de Pouilly from Domaine Ferret, which is probably the most fruit-driven bottlings from the estate, is absolutely lovely in this vintage, wafting from the glass in a complex and very classy constellation of apple, pear, iodine, nutskin, a nice touch of chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open in personality, with a succulent core, excellent acids and structure, impeccable balance and a very long, complete finish. This wine will age very well for six to ten years, but it is drinking so well right now that it is highly unlikely that more than a small percentage of bottles will see their sixth birthdays! 2015-2025. **92.**

2012 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Ménétrières”- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2012 les Ménétrières from Domaine Ferret is really a very serious bottle of white Burgundy, with its bit of new oaky influence adding depth and backbone on the palate. The deep and youthfully complex bouquet shows a bit of oak char in its aromatic profile of apple, peach, lovely soil tones, a touch of fresh nutmeg, apple blossoms and a nice touch of butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core, lovely complexity and very good length and grip on the focused finish. If one were going to nitpick, the oak is tad too assertive on the backend of the palate, but this is a very, very minor complaint for a very good wine. 2015-2023+. **91+.**

2012 Pouilly-Fuissé “le Clos”- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2012 Pouilly-Fuissé “le Clos” from Domaine Ferret is really a terrific example of the vintage, jumping from the glass in a deep and complex constellation of apple, white peach, toasty aromatics, gentle nuttiness, chalky soil, a touch of iodine, apple blossoms and a fine base of buttery new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids and a long, complex and fairly oaky finish. As is the case with the 2012 Ménétrières, the only demerit here is that the oak is just a touch heavy-handed on the backend, but it is a very gentle quibble with a very serious example of Pouilly-Fuissé. 2015-2023+. **92.**

2012 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Perrières”- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2012 Perrières from Domaine Ferret is another truly excellent example of the vintage, delivering a deep and sophisticated bouquet of apple, pear, toasted almond, iodine, chalky minerality, gentle notes of acacia blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, crisp acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, oaky and well-balanced finish. Like all of the 2012 wines from Domaine Ferret, the oak treatment here is very generous, but the wine carries its lumber well and should age very well indeed. That said, all of these wines would have been better with a lighter hand with the new wood, as more of their unique soil signatures would have shined through with less new wood. However, this is very good juice. 2015-2023+. **92+.**



Older Vintages

2009 Montagny- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2009 Montagny from Joseph Drouhin is still drinking very well at age six, with the ripe, generous character of the vintage now having been augmented by secondary layers of complexity from bottle age. The bouquet delivers a fine and quite complex mélange of candied lemon, fresh pineapple, lovely chalky soil tones, a nice touch of paraffin, lilacs and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still bright and zesty, with a fine core of ripe fruit, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and gently heady finish. The ripeness of 2009 shows itself just a bit on the backend, but this wine is aging very nicely indeed and is at its apogee today. It is still available in the New York market and is an absolute bargain for a mature white Burgundy at its peak. 2015-2019. **90.**

2009 Viré-Clessé “Cuvée E. J. Thévenet”- Domaine de la Bongran

Jean Thévenet has been joined by his son Gauthier in recent times at the iconic estate of Domaine de la Bongran, who has long championed production of a later-picked, powerful style of Mâcon that ferments very slowly in the family’s cellars (two years to complete its fermentation is not out of the norm!) and then aged for several years in cellar prior to release. My first experience with Monsieur Thévenet’s Viré-Clessé dates back to the 1989 vintage, but I had not tasted one in several years prior to receiving this sample of his fine 2009. The wine is a very classically powerful example of Mâcon, in the tradition of the estate, wafting from the glass in a ripe and complex nose of pineapple, peach, lovely soil tones, citrus oil, butter and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and concentrated at the core, with fine focus and grip, crisp acids and just a bit of backend residual sweetness on the long and complex finish. This is a lovely example of its genre and clearly is still climbing at six years of age. 2015-2020+. **90.**

2006 Pouilly-Fuissé “Cuvée Fût Colbert” Vieilles Vignes- Loron et Fils

Loron et Fils is the *négociant* arm of the Barbet family and this Pouilly-Fuissé bottling is one of their oak-aged examples that they have also been producing in recent years from some of their top domaines in Beaujolais. The 2006 old vine bottling of Cuvée Fût Colbert is held back in the family’s cellars until it is mature, so this is the current release in the market. The wine offers up a beautifully mature and vibrant nose of pear, apple, sweet almonds, a fine base of chalky soil, gentle smokiness and a very well-done framing of butter oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully mature, with a lovely core, still good framing acids, impeccable balance and a long, silky and complex finish. For fans of mature white Burgundy, this is an absolute steal. It is now at its apogee and will continue to drink with plenty of style for a handful of years to come. Impressive juice. 2015-2019. **92.**

REPORT ON A GREAT OLD RIOJA TASTING WITH THE SAARBRÜCKEN WINE CLUB



Vines ready for picking in the Rioja Alavesa region in October of 2014.

In the past, I have written reports on some of the extraordinary tastings I have been invited to share in with one of the finest wine tasting groups I have been fortunate to meet over the years. This dedicated group of tasters meets once or twice a month at the Hotel Leidinger's wine cellar room in the city of Saarbrücken, Germany, and I often have the good luck to be writing my reports on the new vintage in Germany around the same time that they are holding a tasting of the club. This past March, one of the members of the group, Dr. Norbert Lappas, was raiding his cellar to put on an old Rioja tasting of epic proportions, and I happened to be in the neighborhood and was invited to participate. It was an astonishing tasting, with the youngest wines in the lineup from the 1970 vintage and a great many bottles stretching all the way back to the vintages of the 1920s. The tasting was organized primarily by producer and style of wine, with some of the more delicately-styled producers' wines, such as Franco-Espagnolas and Federico Paternina starting off the red wine portion of the evening, and then working back towards the more legendary estates such as Marqués de Riscal, López de Heredia, Cune and Marqués de Murrieta's great Castillo Ygay Reserva Especial. To give just some idea of how munificent the lineup was on this March evening in Saarbrücken, we had off bottles of the 1928 Bilbainas Rioja "Vieja Reserva, the 1970 Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva from López de Heredia and the 1952 Monte Real from Bodegas Riojanas and it did not even put a slight damper on the

fireworks of the evening! On many a night, those three wines would be the centerpieces of a great, great tasting, but our lineup was so deep and so broad, that we were able to roll into the night without missing a beat with those three off bottles.

We started off with two very fine, very old Rioja Blanco bottlings, one from Federico Paternina and one from Marqués de Murrieta (which was the first old Castillo Ygay white wine I had ever had the pleasure to taste), and then settled in for one of the most beautiful lineups of old, pristine bottles of Rioja as I have ever had the pleasure to taste. Rather than list the wines as we tasted them on this March evening, I have listed the wines in chronological order for this report, so that some of the more gently-styled wines can receive a bit more of their due than if they are listed first in the star-studded list of wines tasted on this evening, as human nature is such that most of us would scroll down to the most famous names that we know best from this region. It was one of the greatest tastings I have ever had the pleasure to be a part of, as the provenance of so many of these bottles was absolutely exemplary. Dr. Lappas has been collecting these wines for a very long time and he served on this occasion, several of the most pristine examples of a certain old Rioja cuvées that I have had the good fortune to drink, with for example, his bottle of the 1947 Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva every bit as fresh and vibrant as the bottle I was sent by Maria de López de Heredia back in 2009, when I was writing my historical feature on the bodegas, and which had come directly from the family cellars in Haro. It was a brilliant evening of good company and great, great wines and I have been looking forward to reliving a bit of the magic by sharing these notes since that night in March! Many thanks to Dr. Lappas and all of the tasters in the group for inviting me to share in such a great lineup of Rioja.

Rioja Blanco

Federico Paternina Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva “30 Years”

This particular bottle of Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva from Paternina was released in 1969, putting its vintage back at least as far as 1939, but it could have been even a bit older than that, as the owner had not been able to find out anything more about its history. It is an amazingly vigorous old white wine for its age, offering up a very pretty bouquet of lemon, oranges, toasted coconut, salty soil tones and a touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite extant, with tangy acids and really quite nice length and grip on the mature and classy finish. This is not as complex as the very top Rioja Blanco bottlings, but for its age, it is really something special and shows no sign of imminent decline. 2015-2030+. 89.

1946 Castillo Ygay Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- Marqués de Murrieta

The 1946 Castillo Ygay Blanco Gran Reserva is showing its age a bit more than the Paternina “30 Years” Rioja Blanco it was paired with at this tasting, but this wine is still alive and not really a bad drink, considering that it is nearly seventy years of age! The deep-pitched and very mature nose offers up scents of orange peel, cherries, smoke, browned butter, a touch of toasted coconut and a bit of new leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still retains bright acids, but it is just a touch oxidative today- though this was probably also the case twenty years ago. The finish is still long and the wine remains focused and vibrant. Given the wine’s fine balance and still zesty acidity, it will probably cruise along like this for at least another fifteen years and maybe longer. Not bad and probably truly stunning at its apogee. 2015-2030? 86.

Rioja Tinto

1964 Franco-Espagnolas Rioja Gran Reserva “Excelso”

I last crossed paths with this wine back in 2011 at a Rare Wine Company old Rioja tasting, and this most recent bottle in Saarbrücken was showing quite similarly. The bouquet is deep, perfumed and tertiary in its blend of dried red berries and cherries, clove-like spice tones, *sous bois*, celery seed, salty soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, velvety and autumnal in profile, with nice acids, good complexity and a long, well-balanced and nicely focused finish. Good juice. 2015-2040. **89.**

1964 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia

I have had the good luck to drink the 1964 Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva with some frequency over the years, and this recent bottle in Saarbrücken was one of the finest I have had the pleasure to sample. The bouquet is deep, pure and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of raspberries, cherries, cloves, autumn leaves, orange peel, cigar wrapper nutskins and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and complex, with a lovely core, great soil signature, still a whisper of tannin and a long, complex and tangy finish of impeccable focus and balance. Viña Tondonia is one of the great red wines of the world and the 1964 vintage is an utterly classic rendition! 2015-2050. **94.**

1962 Rioja “Viña Real” Gran Reserva- Cuné

The 1962 vintage of Cuné’s “Viña Real” Gran Reserva is one of the greatest vintages I have had the pleasure to drink of this wine, and this most recent bottle was the finest yet that I have had the pleasure to taste! The bouquet is pure, complex and seemingly still young at age fifty-three, as it offers up a bottomless blend of black cherries, dark berries, cigar ash, dried eucalyptus, meaty tones, a touch of red curry and a fine base of autumnal forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and very, very complex, with a rock solid core, a bit of tannin and outstanding length and grip on the poised, focused and still climbing finish. This wine has (amazingly) not yet reached cruising altitude and will continue to improve over the coming years! Sheer brilliance! 2015-2050+. **96+.**

1959 Bodegas Palacio Rioja Gran Reserva “Glorioso”

Bodegas Palacio was founded in 1894 and is based in the Rioja Alavesa region. Its Glorioso label was first launched in the 1928 vintage and continues on to this day, with this designation reserved for the traditionally styled wines produced here. The 1959 Glorioso Gran Reserva shows some Garnacha influence in its aromatic constellation of baked raspberries, lovely notes of cinnamon and clove, a touch of meatiness, autumn leaves, Rioja nuttiness and a touch of savory brown spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just starting to get a touch volatile, with a good core, melted tannins and lovely length and grip that shows plenty of baked fruit character through the long finish. This has a nice touch of noble rusticity about it and still plenty of life, assuming that the touch of VA here is the bottle, rather than the wine. 2015-2035. **89.**

1959 Castillo Ygay Rioja Reserva Especial- Marqués de Murrieta

I love the old Castillo Ygay Reserva Especial bottlings from Marqués de Murrieta and was absolutely ecstatic to walk into our tasting in Saarbrücken and see that we had four of the greatest vintages of this iconic bottling in the lineup! The 1959 is a stunning wine, soaring from the glass in a vibrant mélange of cherries, blood orange, nutmeg, meaty tones, cloves, a superb base of salty soil nuances, autumn leaves and a nice touch of savory brown spices in the upper

register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a great core of sappy red fruit, exceptional focus and grip and a bit of old-fashioned tannin still perking up the very, very long, very complex and classy finish. A great, great bottle of a great old Rioja. 2015-2045. **95.**



1952 Rioja “Viña Real” Gran Reserva- Cuné

Given that I have only recently written more than thirty-five pages on the great estate of Cuné, it is hard to believe that we were able to come up with a vintage of Viña Real” Gran Reserva that I did not write up in that feature, but I had no recent note on the superb 1952! The beautifully complex and *à point* nose soars from the glass in a classic blend of black cherries, meaty tones, toasted coconut, cigar ash, dark soil tones, nutskins and an exotic topnote of bacon. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly refined in terms of both balance and focus, with a superb core, great soil signature, melted tannins, sound acids and superb length and grip on the fully mature and vibrant finish. A beautiful vintage of Viña Real” Gran Reserva, the 1952 still has decades of life in it. 2015-2035+. **94+.**

1952 Rioja Reserva- Marqués de Riscal

The Spring 2015 tasting in Saarbrücken was the first time I had the pleasure to drink the 1952 Marqués de Riscal Reserva and the wine is absolutely brilliant. This was the glory days at this famous bodegas and the 1952 shows why this estate was ranked up there at the very top of Rioja producers throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a very complex blaze of cherries, raspberries, nutskin, cinnamon stick, toasted coconut, spicy soil tones, cigar smoke and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with lovely mid-palate intensity, still a bit of backend tannins and great focus and grip on the very, very long, tangy and utterly profound finish. This is clearly one of the greatest vintages of Marqués de Riscal that I have had the pleasure to taste and the wine is not far off the quality of the legendary 1945! 2015-2050. **96+**.

1950 Franco-Espagnolas Rioja Gran Reserva “Excelso”

While the 1964 Excelso from Franco-Espagnolas is a perfectly lovely, mature bottle of Rioja, the 1950 is a decided step up in terms of depth, vigor and complexity. The wine is notably darker than the 1964 and shows a superb nose which jumps from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, charred wood, meaty tones, cinnamon, cigar wrapper, Rioja nuttiness and just a touch of forest floor in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and *à point* finish. This is clearly a step up from any previous vintage I have tasted from Franco-Espagnolas, as well as the oldest, and clearly indicates that this bodegas was even better in the 1940s and early 1950s than in subsequent decades. 2015-2040. **93+**.

1948 Federico Paternina Rioja Gran Reserva “Club”

I have only had a handful of older Federico Paternina Rioja bottlings, but none have been as impressive as the pair we had in Saarbrücken in March. The 1948 “Club” Gran Reserva is a fine example of this great Rioja vintage, delivering scents of raspberries, cloves, cherries, celery seed, a nice touch of meatiness, Cuban cigars and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite vibrant and tangy, with a lovely core, still a touch of backend tannin and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This wine still has years and years of life in it! 2015-2040. **93**.

1947 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia

I had not drunk a bottle of the 1947 Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva since writing my feature on this great bodegas back in 2009, so I was thrilled to see this legendary Rioja included in our tasting lineup for Dr. Lappas’ tasting in March. The bottle was everything one could expect from this legend, offering up an utterly profound bouquet of red and black cherries, meaty tones, nutskins, forest floor, a touch of summer truffle, nutmeg, gentle notes of toasted coconut, Cuban cigars and an exotic topnote of saffron. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite tangy, with a great core, glorious complexity and stunning length and grip on the gently tannic, deep and very pure finish. I really like the touch of old-fashioned structurally elements here that give the wine even more dimension on the palate. Amazingly, this is a step up from the very, very fine 1964 and is one of the greatest bottles of Rioja I have ever tasted. 2015-2035+. **96**.

1942 Castillo Ygay Rioja Reserva Especial- Marqués de Murrieta

I had not tasted a bottle of the legendary 1942 Castillo Ygay in a long, long time and this particular bottle was as good as this magical wine can be, delivering an utterly profound bouquet of red and black cherries, brown spices, a touch of balsam bough, toasted coconut, a marvelous base of soil, a touch of cinnamon stick, meaty tones, gentle notes of cigar ash and forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very tangy, with a great core of fruit, lovely soil signature, laser-like focus and utterly brilliant length and grip on the seamlessly complex and endless finish. I have drunk the 1942 Ygay on perhaps four or five occasions during my life in wine, and after a flawless first bottle, I have sought in vain to replicate that first magical encounter- until this tasting in Saarbrücken, as Norbert's bottle of the 1942 was utterly pristine and at the height of its powers! 2015-2050. 97.



1934 Castillo Ygay Rioja Reserva Especial- Marqués de Murrieta

Our bottle of the 1934 Castillo Ygay at Dr. Lappas' tasting was very good, but not quite as perfect in provenance as the other three old vintages of this great cuvée. This is a wine I have now tasted on about eight occasions, with only one truly perfect bottle, and the others not quite as vigorous, which I suppose is simply a function of the age of this wine today. In any case, this particular bottle of the 1934 was very tasty and complex, offering up a deep and mature nose of baked plums and black cherries, brown spices, forest floor, spiced meats, a touch of acorn and a topnote of cloves. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite tertiary on the attack, but with

a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature and excellent focus and complexity on the long, tangy and *à point* finish. This is a very, very good example of the '34 Ygay, but there are even more pristine examples still out there if one is lucky. 2015-2030+. **93.**

1928 Federico Paternina Rioja Gran Reserva

The 1928 Paternina Gran Reserva is a beautiful bottle of old Rioja, with great aromatic and flavor complexity, no sharp edges and plenty of life still in it. The excellent bouquet offers up a complex constellation of plum pudding, cigar smoke, cloves, charred wood, acorns, autumn leaves and a lovely topnote of toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tertiary and beautifully complex, with a decidedly autumnal personality, but lovely balance and a very long, vibrant and still completely refined finish. This wine continues to drink with great grace and charm and shows no signs of slowing down in the immediate future. A really outstanding example of 1928 Rioja! 2015-2030+. **92.**

1925 Castillo Ygay Rioja Reserva Especial- Marqués de Murrieta

The 1925 vintage has produced an utterly classic example of Castillo Ygay Reserva Especial and we were fortunate to have a pristine bottle in Saarbrücken in March of this year. The beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a complex and still quite vibrant mélange of red and black cherries, celery seed, autumnal soil tones, clove, Rioja nuttiness, brown spices, dried eucalyptus and fallen leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with stunning complexity, a superb core of red fruit, melted tannins and a very, very long, vibrant and wide open finish. This is a timeless legend in Rioja and this particular bottle delivered one hundred percent of the legendary depth, breed and complexity of the one of the greatest vintages ever of Ygay Reserva Especial! 2015-2035. **95.**

1925 Rioja Reserva- Marqués de Riscal

The 1925 vintage of Marqués de Riscal Reserva is another great, great wine, and one that I had the pleasure to taste one time previously (back in 2009) prior to our tasting in Saarbrücken in March. This bottle was even better than the fine bottle of 2009 and was absolutely brilliant and clearly one of the greatest wines we tasted in this amazing embarrassment of riches that was Dr. Lappas' tasting! The nose is more black fruity than the 1952 served ahead of it, reflecting perhaps a bit more cabernet sauvignon in the blend back in this day, as the bodegas was famous in the early years for including some of this varietal in its blends. The bouquet is a stellar blend of desiccated black cherries and dark berries, cigar ash, meaty tones, dried eucalyptus, brown spices, acorns and forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very vigorous for a ninety year-old wine, with a lovely core, great focus and grip and a very long, very complex and stellar finish. A timeless classic from the golden age at Marqués de Riscal. 2015-2040. **97.**

THE AUGUST 2015 IN THE BOTTLE CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINE REPORT



As the last issue of the newsletter included a long feature on Champagne, based primarily on my fortnight in the region at the end of April, I will keep the introductory remarks for this article uncharacteristically brief. The following wines have been tasted between my return to New York after my trip to South Africa in mid-May and the beginning of September, and include many of the current releases in the market today. I should note that the recent range of samples included another small grower who was completely new to me and whose wines I was extremely impressed with named Jean-Marc Sélèque, who is based in the village of Pierry. He only took over his family's 7.5 hectare estate a few vintages back and is now farming four hectares of these vines under organic farming practices. As the family's vines are scattered across several different villages in the area around Épernay, at the present time, Monsieur Sélèque finds it too difficult to farm all 7.5 hectares of vines without resorting to some chemical treatments, as in the event of climactic issues that need immediate attention, he cannot get around to all of the parcels quickly enough to prevent problems in the vines. So, for the present time, it is the four hectares of vineyards that are closest to the domaine in Pierry that are farmed organically. He is making terrific wines already, and my gut instinct is that his current releases are only the tip of the iceberg and his wines will only get more precise and complex as the years

go by, so make an effort to search out his wines and get to know one of the up and coming young *vignerons* in the region whose talent seems manifest- at least based on the lovely wines I tasted from him in preparation for this current report.

This article also afforded me the opportunity for the first time to taste a range of wines from Bouzy's famed Benoît Lahaye, who is one of the most highly-respected young *vignerons* in the growing firmament of organic growers in the Champagne region. As subscribers may already recognize Monsieur Lahaye's name from his supplying pinot noir for Benoit Marguet's *Tête de Cuvée* bottling of Sapience, I was very, very happy to have the opportunity to taste through a handful of current releases from this small and very important *biodynamique* producer in Bouzy. The wines were everything I had expected them to be and are clearly amongst the finest grower Champagnes produced today. The following notes are arranged in typical fashion for these reports, with the wines grouped first by type of wine, with non-Champagne sparkling wines followed by Brut Nature and Extra Brut non-vintage bottlings. After this are the non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottlings, followed by cuvées of non-vintage Brut, non-vintage Brut and Extra Brut Rosé and then vintage-dated bottlings, with these also broken down by type. Within each subsection, the wines are listed alphabetically by producer. I have tried, where possible, to supply dates of disgorgement and background winemaking techniques for each wine, such as whether or not the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented or raised in stainless steel, and whether or not they went through malolactic fermentation. Typically, I will supply an index of wines tasted for this report, but as this is not quite as amorphous as last issues feature on the region (and the US Open Men's Final is calling ☺) I have eschewed that exercise for this slightly more petite Champagne report.

Sparkling Wines

FRV 100 Rosé NV de Jean-Paul Brun (Beaujolais)

The current release of FRV 100 Rosé from Jean-Paul Brun hails from the 2009 vintage. This is a sparkling gamay, as the wine is allowed to ferment to about six percent alcohol and then bottled with its remaining yeasts intact, so that the fermentation continues in the bottle for another degree or two to give the wine its delicate *mousse*. The wine is a fairly dark color and offers up a lovely nose of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of cinnamon stick and rye toast. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and frothy, with a lovely core, fine focus and balance and a nice touch of residual sweetness on the tangy finish. This is delicious. 2015-2018. **88.**

Château de la Greffière Crémant de Bourgogne Brut NV (Mâcon)

The current release of Château de la Greffière's Crémant de Bourgogne is made entirely from chardonnay and delivers a fine bouquet of pear, apple, gentle nuttiness and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, youthful acids, quite nice, pinpoint bubbles, and good length and grip on the bright and bouncy finish. This is not particularly long on complexity, but it delivers plenty of chardonnay character in a frothy and well-balanced format that is quite easy to drink. 2015-2025. **86.**

Non-Vintage Sec and Demi-Sec

Lanson "White Label" Sec NV (Reims)

Lanson's Sec bottling of "White Label" has more chardonnay in the blend than their non-vintage Brut bottling of "Black Label", as the wine includes thirty-eight percent chardonnay, thirty-seven percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier. The non-malo house style at Lanson carries the more generous *dosage* quite well. The bouquet is quite floral and fairly

sweet in its mélange of peaches, lilacs, a nice touch of soil, brioche and white lilies. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, as the traditional acidity here really carries the *dosage* well, with elegant *mousse*, fine cut and grip and a long, vibrant finish. This is a very well done example of Sec. 2015-2025. **90.**

Louis Roederer “Carte Blanche” Demi-Sec NV (Reims)

The Louis Roederer’s bottling of “Carte Blanche” Demi-Sec is comprised of a blend of forty percent each chardonnay and pinot noir, with twenty percent pinot meunier. Five percent of the blend is barrel-fermented and the wine is aged three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, with the wine also spending an additional six months after *dégorgement* recovering in the cellars in Reims prior to its release. The cuvée was finished off with a *dosage* of thirty-eight grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and serious, offering up a fine blend of apple, white peach, *patissière*, spring flowers and a lovely base of complex minerality. On the palate the wine is pure and full-bodied, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, brisk acids, moderate backend sweetness and lovely cut and grip on the long and classy finish. There is impressive precision on the tail-end of this wine, as the combination of residual sweetness, minerality and acidity are woven together beautiful. Fine juice. 2015-2025+. **91.**

Taittinger “Nocturne” NV Sec (Reims)

To my palate, Taittinger makes the finest Sec bottlings currently produced amongst the *Grandes Marques*, and the iteration presently in the market is excellent. The house always manages to leave sufficient cut and backend minerality to carry the residual sweetness of this bottling, which this year has a *dosage* of eighteen grams per liter. The wine is a blend of forty percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier. It offers up a bright and complex bouquet of apple, white lilies, chalky soil tones, brioche and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a lovely base of minerality, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, poised and very well-balanced finish. This is another outstanding example of its genre. 2015-2025. **91.**

Non-Vintage Extra Brut and Brut Nature

Ayala Brut Nature NV (Aÿ) Disgorged September 2014

The new release of Ayala Brut Nature has a *cépages* of forty percent each of pinot noir and chardonnay and twenty percent pinot meunier and spent four years aging *sur latte* in the maison’s cellars in Aÿ. The wine offers up a very fine nose of apple, fresh-baked bread, a touch of peach, a fine base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with brisk acidity nicely rounded off with its time aging in the cellar, a very good core, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is drinking very well today and clearly will age well for the next ten to fifteen years. A very impressive example of *non-dosé* bubbly. 2015-2030. **90.**

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Extra Brut NV (Épernay) Disgorged March 2012

The current release of Besserat de Bellefon’s non-vintage Extra Brut is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir, and having now been disgorged three and a half years ago, it is really starting to drink at its apogee. The fine nose offers up a mélange of peach, fresh-baked bread, lovely soil tones, a bit of smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, refined *mousse*, and lovely length and grip on the complex and nicely balanced finish. This is a suave middleweight, and as it is done in a *Crémant*

style of bubbly (with lower pressure), it really works very well at the table. Good juice. 2015-2023+. **90.**

Jacquesson “Cuvée Number 737” Extra Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged January 2014

Jacquesson’s “Cuvée Number 737” Extra Brut is base year 2009, with thirty percent of the blend comprised of reserve wines from the preceding two vintages. The *cépages* on Cuvée Number 737 is quite different from the 738, as this is comprised of forty-three percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot meunier and twenty-seven percent pinot noir, which is nearly twenty percent less chardonnay than the follow-up release. The *dosage* on the 737 is also slightly different from the following year, having been finished with 3.5 grams per liter. The wine delivers a superb bouquet of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a dollop of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, frothy *mousse*, superb complexity and outstanding length and grip on the still quite vibrant finish. This wine beautifully couples the generosity of 2009 with a superb girdle of acidity that will carry it many, many years into the future. A superb bottle. 2015-2030+. **92.**

Benoît Lahaye “Blanc de Noirs” Extra Brut NV (Bouzy)

Benoît Lahaye uses solely pinot noir from Bouzy and Tauxières for this bottling, with all of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented and going through full malolactic. The wine was finished off with a *dosage* of five grams per liter and bottled unfiltered. The nose is deep and outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of white peach, apple, a complex base of chalky minerality, *patissière* and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core, bright acids, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the complex and very polished finish. Fine, fine juice that is drinking with great style today, but also seems capable of ten to fifteen years of continued evolution in bottle. 2015-2030. **92.**

Benoît Lahaye “Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV (Bouzy)

The Benoît Lahaye Brut Nature is comprised of a blend of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay, with eighty percent of the pinot hailing from Bouzy and twenty percent from Ambonnay. The *vins clairs* are fermented entirely in older casks and go through full malolactic fermentation. The wines spend two and a half years resting in the cellars *sur latte* and the wine is finished with no additional sulfur. The bouquet is excellent, delivering a deep and pure blend of apple, white peach, *patissière*, a complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a delicate topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with superb mid-palate depth, refined *mousse*, lovely complexity and excellent grip and precision on the long, bright and still fairly youthful finish. This is an absolutely beautiful bottle of Brut Nature, with the structural elements seamlessly buffered and the overall balance of the wine simply stunning. 2015-2030. **93.**

Lamiable “Grand Cru” Extra Brut NV (Tours-sur-Marne)

The current release of non-vintage Extra Brut from Lamiable is really a lovely wine, with its *cépages* of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay showing plenty of pinot character on the fine bouquet of apple, bread dough, a touch of *patissière*, a complex base of soil tones, a discreet note of quinine and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with pinpoint bubbles, fine complexity, brisk acids and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This wine is now drinking very well, but with its quite low *dosage*, there is plenty of cut on the backend and this is at its best at the table, as it is still a little tensile for casual sipping. Very well-made juice. 2015-2025. **90+.**

Nicolas Maillart “Platine” Premier Cru Extra Brut NV (Écueil) Disgorged November 2013

This is the same release of Platine that I tasted back in January and I was very interested to see how the wine was continuing to unfold with a bit more bottle age. Readers may recall that this is a blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, with a bit higher percentage of the blend made up of the former, and it was aged three years *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement, so this is from the base year of 2009. It was finished with a *dosage* of three grams and includes at least thirty percent reserve wines. The bouquet has continued to deepen and broaden over the course of this year and offers up a beautiful blend of apple, white peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a lovely core, very refined *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding complexity on the poised and perfectly balanced finish. High class juice that is really starting to sing more than eighteen months out from its disgorgement. 2015-2030. **92+**.

Nicolas Maillart Premier Cru Brut Nature NV (Écueil) Disgorged December 2014

The current release of the Nicolas Maillart Brut Nature is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. The wine offers up a very refined aromatic constellation of green apple, lemon, a touch of menthol, bread dough, gentle smokiness and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and lovely length and grip on the brisk and complex finish. As this is *non-dosé*, it is really best-suited for work at the table, though for fans of very low *dosage*, there will be no problem drinking this as an *aperitif*. Very impressive Brut Nature. 2015-2025. **91**.

Arnaud Margaine “l’Extra Brut” Premier Cru NV (Villers-Marmery) Disg. Sept. 2014

The non-vintage Arnaud Margaine Extra Brut is actually a Blanc de Blancs bottling, but it does not state this anywhere on the label. Monsieur Margaine does not allow the *vins clairs* to go through malo for this bottling, which offers up a lovely nose of apple, brioche, white peach, a complex base of soil, a touch of nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully brisk from its non-malo base wines, with a good core, fine soil signature, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the finish. This is starting to show some nice signs of secondary complexity emerging on the palate, but remains a youthfully snappy wine on the backend, with a fine spine of acidity. Good juice. 2015-2030. **90**.

Robert Moncuit “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Mesnil) Disg: Dec. 2014

The Robert Moncuit non-vintage Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs is finished off with a *dosage* of between two and four grams per liter and the *vins clairs* are fermented and raised in stainless steel and go through full malo. Like the non-vintage Brut here, the wine spends six months aging on its fine lees prior to bottling. The current release offers up a fine youthful nose of tart pear, chalky minerality, bread dough, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core, bright, well-integrated acids, fine *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish. I really like the balance of this wine, as the acids are buffered very nicely at its low level of *dosage*. A fine example. 2015-2025. **91**.

J. L. Vergnon “Eloquence” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Mesnil) Disgorged May 2014

The new release of the Vergnon “Eloquence” Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs is a beautiful young wine, with lovely purity and precision on the palate and fine aromatic complexity. The bouquet offers up absolutely classic Mesnil notes of pear, delicious apple, chalky minerality, brioche and a gentle topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and youthfully complex, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, crisp, well-buffered acids and fine

length and grip on the poised and well-balanced finish. The *dosage* here is very well-suited to the structure of the wine, so it delivers fine early drinkability, though clearly it will age quite gracefully. Mesnil fruit can sometimes emphasize more power than finesse, but this is a very elegant rendition of the village. 2015-2025+. **91**.

J. L. Vergnon “Murmure” Blanc de Blancs Nature Brut NV (Mesnil) Disg: October 2014

The Brut Nature bottling of Murmure from J. L. Vergnon is excellent, as it delivers impressive complexity on both the nose and palate. The deep and pure nose wafts from the glass in a blend of tart pear, lemon, a touch of quinine, bread dough, chalky minerality and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite minerally in personality, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, bright, well-buffered acids and excellent length and grip on the low fat and complex finish. This is a lovely bottle of Brut Nature. 2015-2025+. **91+**.



Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut

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

The new release of Besserat de Bellefon’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is a lovely wine, with a racy chassis and lovely soil drive on the palate. The bouquet offers up a bright and youthful blend of apple, lemon, chalky minerality, bread dough, dried flowers and citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, snappy acids and lovely focus and grip on the well-balanced and still fairly youthful finish. This is an

elegant wine that is quite approachable, but probably still a year away from fully blossoming, and which will be even better once it has opened up completely. 2016-2026+. **90+**.

Bollinger “Spéciale Cuvée” Brut NV (Aÿ)

The current release of Bollinger “Spéciale Cuvée” non-vintage Brut offers up a deep and vibrant nose of apple, lemon peel, lovely minerality, a touch of caraway seed, bread dough and a slightly saline topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with a fine core, lovey *mousse*, very good focus and balance and impressive mineral drive on the long finish. This is still on the young side and more complexity will emerge with a bit more bottle age, but there is plenty of potential here and the score should climb a bit with bottle age. 2015-2025+. **90+**.

Pierre Callot “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize) Disgorged July 2014

The Pierre Callot non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is made from fruit from the domaine’s vineyards in Avize, Cramant and Chouilly. The *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel and the wine is aged twenty-eight months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, making the current release from the base year of 2011. The wine offers up a fine and very classic nose of pear, apple, fresh almond, pastry cream, chalky soil tones and a bit of smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and frothy, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance, crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. The wine is just a tad tight on the backend still today and will be even better with another year in the bottle to more fully blossom, but really is not a bad drink by any stretch of the imagination today. Good juice. 2016-2025+. **90+**.

Pascal Doquet “Horizon” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Vertus) Disgorged March 2014

The Horizon bottling from Pascal Doquet hails from fruit grown in his 3.5 hectares of vines outside of the Côte de Blancs, in Vitry le François, which lies to the southeast of Épernay on the southeastern limits of the appellation. The current release is two-thirds from the 2011 vintage and one-third from the 2010 vintage, with all of the vineyards here farmed organically. The *vins clairs* are raised entirely in stainless steel and did not undergo malo, with the finishing *dosage* seven grams per liter. The wine offers up a very pretty bouquet of pear, lemon, fresh almond, bread dough and a very good base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very tightly-knit, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, moderate complexity and good length and grip on the finish. This could use a year or two in the cellar to more fully blossom, and if more complexity emerges with bottle age, then the score will certainly move up. 2016-2025+. **87+**.

Pascal Doquet “Premier Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Vertus) Disgorged February 2014

The fruit for Monsieur Doquet’s premier cru bottling of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs hails from his vineyards in the villages of Vertus, Vergers-les-Vertus and le Mont Aimé and spent nearly seven years resting *sur latte* in the cellars prior to disgorgement. This is a blend of sixty-eight percent 2007, eighteen percent 2006 and fourteen percent 2005 vintage juice and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine nose of apple, fresh almond, lovely minerality, bread dough and a nice topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with brisk acids, fine focus and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. I would be inclined to give this another year’s worth of bottle age to allow it to soften up a bit more, as it is still very early days for this well-made wine. 2016-2030. **90**.

Pascal Doquet “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Vertus) Disgorged May 2014

Pascal Doquet’s grand cru bottling hails entirely from his 1.67 hectares of vines in the village of Mesnil-sur-Oger. The wine is a blend of eighty-four percent 2006 vintage and sixteen

percent 2005, with half the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented and the wine finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and promising, as it wafts from the glass in a youthful mélange of apple, pear, a touch of almond, chalky minerality and a fine topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, frothy *mousse* and a very long, powerful and still quite primary finish. This is amazingly youthful for a wine that is primarily from the base year of 2006 and I would tuck it away in the cellar for at least another four or five years to really let it blossom and start to show its secondary layers of complexity. It will be a fine wine in the fullness of time. 2019-2035. **91+.**

Lanson “Extra Age” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged January 2012

The current release of Extra Age Blanc de Blancs is produced solely from grapes sourced in the Côte de Blancs, and is produced from fruit from the vintages of 2003, 2004 and 2005. The wine spent more than five years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement, and has now seen an additional three and a half years of bottle age and is drinking beautifully. The bouquet is deep, complex and now showing some lovely development in its mélange of pear, toasted almond, chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread, a touch of saltiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, snappy acids, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and vibrant finish. This is drinking very well, but has such a fine chassis of acidity that it should continue to improve for decades. Fine juice. 2015-2035. **92.**

Lilbert-Fils “Perle” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Cramant)

The Perle cuvée from Lilbert-Fils is an old vine bottling of Blanc de Blancs that is bottled with a lower pressure than their standard non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut NV. It is the house’s most limited release cuvée, as only one hundred and sixty-five cases are produced each year. The current release is from the base year of 2009 (fifty percent) and twenty-five percent each from the preceding two vintages. The wine was finished with a low *dosage* of under five grams per liter and offers up a lovely bouquet of pear, fresh-squeezed oranges, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, fresh almond, brioche and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and very fine length and grip on the focused and classy finish. A really lovely wine. 2015-2030. **92.**

Robert Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Mesnil) Disgorged March 2014

Champagne Robert Moncuit has been run by Pierre Moncuit, who is the fourth generation to run this eight hectare family estate, based solely in the village of Mesnil-sur-Oger. The vineyards are all farmed without use of chemical insecticides or herbicides. The *vins clairs* for the non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling are fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks, with the wines undergoing full malolactic fermentation. The wine offers up a deep and complex bouquet of pear, hazelnut, complex, chalky minerality, brioche, gentle leesy tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with excellent mid-palate concentration, lovely soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, crisp and complex finish. This is a Blanc de Blancs with broad shoulders, impeccable balance and plenty of vinosity, and it is absolutely superb at the table. 2015-2030+. **92.**

Non-Vintage Brut

Ayala “Brut Majeur” NV (Aÿ) Disgorged February 2015

The bottling of non-vintage Ayala “Brut Majeur” that is currently in the market is comprised of a blend of forty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier. It spent three years aging *sur latte* and was finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, white

peach, a touch of *patissière*, lovely soil tones, a hint of menthol and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthfully brisk, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and zesty finish. This is a lovely bottle, but still a bit primary and more complexity will emerge with another year or two in the bottle. It should age quite well, as it is impeccably balanced. Fine juice. 2016-2030+. **90.**

Champagne Baron-Fuenté “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Charly-sur-Marne)

Champagne Baron-Fuenté’s non-vintage Brut bottling of “Grande Réserve” is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir, with the *vins clairs* all fermented in stainless steel and going through full malo. It is aged three years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely, meunier-dominated nose of white peach, brioche, a potpourri of gentle floral tones, chalky soil and a lovely element of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nascently complex, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, and fine length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is still a puppy and needs a few more years of bottle age to start to develop some secondary layers of complexity, but it is well-balanced and seems quite promising, if given a bit of cellaring. It is more of an *aperitif* weight example of Champagne, but should be quite tasty once it starts to blossom a bit more on the palate. 2017-2027. **89.**

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut NV (Épernay) Disgorged March 2014

The version of Besserat de Bellefon’s “Cuvée des Moines” non-vintage Brut that is currently in the market is drinking very well indeed and quite complex on both the nose and palate. The classy bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, fresh-baked bread, lime peel, lovely minerality, a touch of ocean breeze and a topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, minerally and light on its feet, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and lovely transparency on the long, vibrant and complex finish. This has quite low *dosage* and is really a wine built to excel at the table. A fine example. 2015-2025+. **91.**

H. Billiot Fils “Brut Réserve” Grand Cru NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged September 2014

Serge Billiot farms five hectares in Ambonnay, with all of his *vins clairs* fermented in enamel-lined tanks and not undergoing malolactic fermentation. The *cépages* is always at least seventy-five percent pinot noir, with the balance of the blend made up of chardonnay. The current release offers up a fine nose of peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, really lovely soil tones, blossoming notes of *patissière* and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, properly broad shoulders, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the focused and still fairly youthful finish. This is quite tasty today, but there will be even more backend generosity here with a couple of years in the cellar. A fine example. 2015-2030+. **91.**

Gaston Chiquet “Brut Tradition” NV (Dizy) Disgorged July 2014

The Gaston Chiquet “Brut Tradition” is made from a blend of forty percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir, with the current release from the base year of 2010. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of peach, apple, warm biscuits, a fine base of soil tones, hints of the nutskin to come and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine acids, pinpoint, very slightly coarse bubbles and excellent length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is certainly approachable today, but another year or two in the cellar will really round out its youthful structural elements and the wine will really come into its own from that point forward. A very fine non-vintage Brut. 2016-2030+. **90+.**

Joël Falmét Brut “Tradition” NV (Rouvres-les-Vignes) Disgorged March 2014

Joël Falmét’s latest rendition of his non-vintage Brut “Tradition” is made up of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and fifteen percent each of chardonnay and pinot meunier, which represents five percent more chardonnay (and that much less pinot meunier) than last year’s version. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. It is a classic Aube Champagne, with plenty of minerality in its aromatic and flavor profiles, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of white peach, *patissière*, a lovely base of minerally soil tones, gentle smokiness and a nice touch of walnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and fine length and grip on the focused and classy, soil-driven finish. Lovely juice. 2015-2025+. **90+**.

Benoît Lahaye “Brut Essential” NV (Bouzy)

Benoît Lahaye’s non-vintage “Brut Essential” bottling is comprised of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay and was finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. It was bottled without filtration after spending two and a half years aging *sur latte*. The wine is youthfully stunning on the nose, soaring from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, brioche, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of nutskin and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core, very elegant *mousse*, zesty acids and outstanding length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. This is delightful to drink today, but its real apogee is still several years in the future, as this wine is made for some serious extended aging. An absolutely stellar bottle of non-vintage Brut and perhaps my favorite non-vintage bottling from Monsieur Lahaye this year. 2017-2035+. **93+**.

Jean Lallement et Fils “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Verzenay) Disgorged May 2014

The Jean Lallement non-vintage Brut is made up from a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, which sounds just about right for fruit from the fine villages of Verzenay and Verzy, where pinot noir thrives so exceptionally. All the *vins clairs* for this bottling were raised in stainless steel and went through full malo. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of apple, fine minerality, gentle smokiness, *patissière* and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and classically broad-shouldered, with a fine core, excellent acids, slightly coarse *mousse* and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. My only quibble with this wine is that its bubbles are not as refined as the competition, but there is plenty of personality and depth here. 2015-2025+. **89**.

Lamiable “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Tours-sur-Marne)

The current release of Lamiable’s non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* fermented in older casks and the wine spending eighteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a very fine bouquet of apple, white peach, a touch of *patissière*, lovely soil tones, gentle smokiness and just a hint of nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and fine length and grip on the complex finish. The *dosage* here is a tad on the generous side, but it is nicely buffered by acidity and is not out of place at all on the backend. Good juice. 2015-2025. **91**.

Lanson “Black Label” Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged January 2013

The current release of Lanson’s flagship bottling of “Black Label” non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of fifty percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot meunier. This wine was aged thirty months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and spent an additional six months in the *maison’s* cellars in Reims prior to its release. As this is a non-malo Champagne, additional bottle age is always welcome and this wine has had another

couple of years in the bottle, so it is really starting to drink with great style at the present time. The complex bouquet is deep and classy, offering up scents of apple, a touch of peach, complex soil tones, fresh-baked bread, discreet smokiness and a whisper of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still racy in structure, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and still plenty snappy finish. This wine is really drinking nicely today, but will cruise along for many more years on this fine chassis of acidity. 2015-2035. **91.**



Lanson “Extra Age” Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged March 2013

The current release of Extra Age from Lanson is really lovely, and seems a bit deeper at the core than the bottle disgorged in November of 2012 that I reported on in the last issue, which may simply be the function of the different bottles. This is a blend of wines from the 2000, 2002 and 2004 vintages and spent nearly eight years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is a superb blend of apple, peach, *patissière*, complex soil tones, plenty of smokiness and a gentle topnote of spice tones suggestive of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very long, with a rock solid core, excellent complexity and grip, the snap of no malo and outstanding length on the focused backend. This is a superb bottle of bubbly that is very tasty today, but which will be even better with a bit more bottle age. Today, it is not necessarily superior to the lovely bottle disgorged in November of 2012, but it is younger and

has more backend energy, and there is little doubt that this one will last considerably longer and may eventually eclipse its predecessor. 2015-2035+. **92+**.

Nicolas Maillart “Platine” Brut Premier Cru NV (Écueil) Disgorged September 2014

The new release of Platine Brut from the Maillart family is from the base year of 2011, with twenty-eight percent of the cuvée comprised of reserve wines. The blend has a touch more pinot noir this year than last year’s rendition, coming in at eighty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is excellent, jumping from the glass in a deep and classy mélange of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully snappy, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, excellent soil signature and a long, perfectly balanced finish. This is probably not quite as deep as last year’s version, which was base year 2010, but equally complex and promising. Fine juice that is quite tasty today, but will be even better with a year or two more bottle age. 2015-2030+. **91+**.

Arnaud Margaine “le Brut” Premier Cru NV (Villers-Marmery) Disg. Sept. 2014

As Monsieur Margaine grows primarily chardonnay in his vineyards (ninety percent), I assume that this is almost entirely based on chardonnay, but could not find any information to confirm this on the web. The wine is typically comprised of a significant percentage of reserve wines in the blend, with the base wine here probably from the 2011 vintage, with most of the *vins clairs* not going through malolactic fermentation. The bouquet wafts from the glass in youthful blend of apple, tart pear, a touch of almond, chalky soil tones, warm bread and a hint of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and snappy, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles, fine cut and grip and a long, primary and very nicely balanced finish. This is still a young wine and needs some bottle age to really emerge from behind its girdle of acidity, but all the constituent components are in place to produce a lovely bottle with a bit of cellaring. 2017-2030. **90+**.

Pierre Paillard “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Bouzy) Disgorged September 2014

The current release of Pierre Paillard’s non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with the wine from the base year of 2010 and with 2009 juice used as the reserve wine. It was finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter and offers up a fine nose of apple, white peach, brioche, a lovely base of complex soil tones and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, brisk acids and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. This is drinking very well today, but another year or two of bottle age would allow its acids to relax a bit more and the wine to deliver even a bit more amplitude on the backend. Good juice. 2015-2030. **91+**.

Ployez-Jacquemart “Extra Quality” Brut NV (Ludes) Disgorged October 2014

The current release of Ployez-Jacquemart non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2009, with thirty percent of the blend hailing from the previous vintage. The *cépages* is forty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier and was finished with a *dosage* of 5.2 grams per liter. The wine offers up the classic Ployez precision on the nose in its constellation of pear, a touch of tangerine, brioche, chalky minerality, a touch of citrus zest and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and vibrant, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. Fine, fine juice, with immediate appeal, as it is based on the generous and quite high quality 2009 vintage. 2015-2030+. **92**.

Louis Roederer “Brut Premier” NV (Reims)

The current release of Louis Roederer “Brut Premier” non-vintage Brut is made from a blend of forty percent each chardonnay and pinot noir, with the remaining twenty percent being pinot meunier. Like many of the Roederer bottlings, the *vins clairs* include both wines that went through full malo and others that did not, and the wine was aged *sur latte* for three years prior to release. Ten percent of this release is reserve wines that have spent their lives in large old *foudres*. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a lovely blend of apple, tart peach, chalky soil tones, *patissière*, lovely meunier-derived floral tones and a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, lovely mineral drive and exceptional length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is one of the finest recent releases of Brut Premier that I can recall for the cellar, as this has the balance and spine of acidity to age long and very gracefully! 2015-2035+. **92.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque Brut “Tradition” NV (Pierry) Disgorged November 2014

Jean-Marc Sélèque farms 7.5 hectares of vineyards in the villages south of Épernay surrounding his home base of Pierry, with four of the hectares farmed biodynamically and the other 3.5 hectares (in the villages furthest from the domaine) farmed organically. He ferments his *vins clairs* in a combination of stainless steel and older Burgundy casks and is quite agnostic about malolactic, as if a *vin clair* goes through it, that is fine, and if not, that is also fine. He uses only indigenous yeasts and the current release of Brut Tradition is from the base year of 2012 and comprised of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, forty-five percent pinot meunier and five percent pinot noir. The superb bouquet offers up a bright and youthful nose of apple, pear, a touch of *crème patissière*, brioche, discreet notes of fresh nutmeg, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a gentle touch of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and racy, with impeccable balance, very refined *mousse*, a lovely core and excellent length and grip on the still pretty youthful finish. Monsieur Sélèque is considering stretching out the amount of time this cuvée spends on its fine lees a bit more, and I think that would be an excellent idea, as this is still a tad young for primetime drinking. Given its exceptional quality, it would be nice to see this wine have just a bit more evolution on the palate when it hits the market. A superb wine from a grower who is completely new to me, but whom I will most assuredly be visiting in Pierry on my next trip to the region! 2016-2030. **92.**

Taittinger “Brut la Française” NV (Reims)

The current release of Taittinger “Brut la Française” is comprised of a blend of forty percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier. The house in the last few years has been reducing the *dosage* of this bottling a bit, and the result has been more minerality and precision on the backend. The bouquet on the current release is lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of lemon, apple, brioche, chalky minerality and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. I have always liked this bottling, but the lower *dosage* has really added precision and purity. Fine juice. 2015-2030. **91+.**

Taittinger “Folies de la Marquetterie” Brut NV (Reims)

The Folies de la Marquetterie bottling is Taittinger’s single vineyard wine, produced from the vineyards located around the Château de la Marquetterie in Pierry. Readers will recall that I tasted an older release of this wine for the previous issue, which was not singing, but the current release, which I assume is from the base year of 2009, is outstanding. The *cépages* of the

new release is the customary forty-five percent chardonnay and fifty-five percent pinot noir, with a portion of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented and the wine aging five years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a fine blend of apple, peach, brioche, complex soil tones, plenty of smokiness and a very faint suggestion of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impeccably well-balanced, with a fine core, lovely soil drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, crisp, complex and energetic finish. This is a terrific release of the Folies de la Marquetterie that is drinking nicely out of the blocks, but clearly will be even better five years down the road. High class juice! 2015-2035. **92+**.

Taittinger “Prélude” Grands Crus Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of Taittinger’s “Prélude” Grand Cru bottling is again a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay from the Côte de Blancs and pinot noir from the Montagne de Reims and was aged for five years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. While the date of disgorgement is not available on the label, I would guess that this is base year 2009, based on the structure of the wine. Like every previous iteration of Taittinger “Prélude” that I have had the pleasure to taste, this wine is outstanding, as it jumps from the glass in a superb blend of apple, white peach, lovely smokiness, a complex base of gently chalky soil tones, warm bread, discreet spice tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and marvelously generous on the attack, with a rock solid core, vibrant acids, laser-like focus, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the youthful, but very, very promising finish. This is a cuvée that is emphatically made for the cellar (and I cannot wait to finally sink my teeth into a vertical of this on my next visit to the Abbey Niçaise cellars), but this most recent release shows some lovely generosity on the attack that makes it eminently approachable out of the blocks. Yes, it will be even better ten years down the road, but it is uncharacteristically accessible in its youth. As has been the case since I tasted the first release of this bottling many years ago, this remains one of the great bargains in the world of top class bubbly and the new release is absolutely superb. It deserves to be far better known to serious collectors! 2015-2040. **93+**.

Marie Weiss Brut NV (Ludes) Disgorged January 2015

As I have noted in the past, the Marie Weiss label is made by Ployez-Jacquemart and effectively is their second label, as the Ployez family makes this bottling from purchased grapes. In my experience, it is consistently one of the great values in the realm of non-vintage Champagne. I am assuming that the current release has maintained its standard blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, as this has been the *cépages* for several years in a row. The wine shows lovely purity and delicacy in its classy bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of fresh nutmeg, brioche, chalky soil tones and a touch of white lily in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with elegant *mousse*, good mid-palate depth, bright acids and a long, complex and wide open finish. This is just a really refined middleweight style of bubbly from one of the surest hands on the Montagne de Reims. 2015-2030. **90+**.



Non-Vintage Brut and Sec Rosé

Champagne L. Aubry Fils Brut Rosé NV (Jouey-les-Reims) Disgorged September 2013

The Aubry Fils non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot noir and fifteen percent pinot meunier, which is all added as still red wine to the blend and hails from sixty year-old vines. For the *vins clairs*, the chardonnay is barrel-fermented in older casks and the pinot noir and pinot meunier are raised in stainless steel. All of the wines in the current release are from the 2010 vintage, as the Aubry family always makes this cuvée from a single vintage. The wine is salmon-colored and offers up a fine, youthful nose of blood orange, wheat toast, lovely soil tones, plenty of smokiness, a touch of pepper and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and snappy, with a lovely core, elegant, frothy *mousse*, fine nascent complexity and excellent length and grip on the focused and very promising finish. This is still a young wine, and though it is very, very easy to drink today, it will be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age. 2015-2025+. 91.

Ayala “Rosé Majeur” Brut NV (Aÿ) Disgorged December 2014

The current release of Ayala “Rosé Majeur” has a bit more chardonnay in its blend than the non-vintage Brut Majeur bottling, as its *cépages* is fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot noir and ten percent pinot meunier. Six percent of the pinot noir is still red wine to give this cuvée its lovely, pale salmon color and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The nose wafts from the glass in a gently spicy blend of tangerine, chalky minerality, rye

toast, a bit of clove, gentle smokiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, young and still fairly snappy, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, and nice mineral drive on the long and still quite primary finish. This is still a tad on the young side for primetime drinking, but all of the constituent components are in place for a fine bottle of Brut Rosé with a bit more bottle age. 2017-2027+. **89+**.

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

Besserat de Bellefon’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of forty percent pinot meunier and thirty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir and spent three years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a fine nose of dried cherries, tangerine, wheat bread, chalky soil tones and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a fine core, brisk acids, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. This is quite tasty today, but will be even better with another year or two in the cellar. 2015-2025+. **90**.

H. Billiot Fils “Brut Rosé” Grand Cru NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged October 2014

Like the non-vintage Brut, the Billiot Brut Rosé is comprised of between seventy-five and eighty percent pinot noir, with a bit of still red wine blended in to give its lovely salmon color. As with all of the Billiot bottlings, the *vins clairs* do not go through malo. The excellent bouquet jumps from the glass in a pure and classy blend of white cherries, tangerine, a touch of cinnamon, wheat toast, gentle smokiness and a complex base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and lovely length and grip on the poised, focused and zesty finish. This is not as expressive on the palate today as it is aromatically, but all of the constituent components are in place for an exquisite bottle of Brut Rosé with a bit more bottle age, so just tuck this lovely bottle away in a cool corner of the cellar for a couple of years and let time work its magic- it will be well worth the wait! 2018-2030+. **92**.

Bollinger Brut Rosé NV (Aÿ)

The current release of non-vintage Bollinger Brut Rosé is a blend of sixty-two percent pinot noir, twenty-four percent chardonnay and fourteen percent pinot meunier. Five percent of the reds are added as still wines, and though it is not mentioned in the literature from the maison, I assume that all of the still wine is pinot noir, as we are in Aÿ after all. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter and offers up a lovely and quite spicy nose of strawberries, blood orange, rye bread, cloves and cinnamon, chalky minerality, dried flowers and a suavely smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely complex, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. Lovely juice that will only get better with bottle age. 2015-2030. **91**.

Delamotte Brut Rosé NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The Delamotte non-vintage Brut Rosé is produced by the *saignée* method, with its chardonnay and pinot noir co-fermented and spending a short time in contact with the pinot skins to give the wine is light salmon color. All of the fruit for this bottling hail from grand cru villages, with its eighty percent pinot noir sourced in Bouzy, Ambonnay and Tours-sur-Marne and its twenty percent chardonnay all from Mesnil. The wine is aged *sur latte* from three to four years on its fine lees and the *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel. The current release offers up a young and very promising nose of tangerine, melon, chalky minerality, plenty of smokiness, a touch of *patissière*, orange peel and a delicate topnote of spice tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, elegant *mousse* and brisk acids

perking up the long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This will be even better with a year in the cellar, but it is a lovely, refined example. 2015-2025+. **90+**.

Pascal Doquet “Premier Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Vertus) Disgorged September 2013

Pascal Doquet’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot noir, with all of the pinot noir added in as still wine. Pascal is rather unique in keeping back multiple vintages of still pinot noir in his cellars, so that he can have some reserve red wines to add to the blend for this bottling. The wine is from the base year of 2009 and was finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter; the 2009 *vins clairs* did not go through malolactic fermentation for this bottling. The wine offers up a pretty nose of strawberries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite snappy, with a fine core, slightly large bubbles, brisk acids and good length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This is still a puppy and will be even better with a few more years’ worth of bottle age. 2018-2030+. **88+**.

Champagne Baron-Fuenté “Rosé Dolorès” Brut NV (Charly-sur-Marne)

The Baron-Fuenté non-vintage “Rosé Dolorès” Brut is fairly dark in color for a Rosé Champagne and offers up a superb nose of cinnamon, blood orange, tangerine, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of smokiness and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bright, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the light on its feet finish. With its slightly darker color, I was expecting a more vinous example of Brut Rosé, but this wine would work just fine as an aperitif. Good juice. 2015-2025. **90**.

Lanson “Rose Label” Brut Rosé NV (Reims) Disgorged May 2013

Lanson’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is always a fairly light-colored Rosé, with the current release comprised of a blend of fifty-three percent pinot noir, thirty-two percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot noir. As the *cépages* is very similar to the Black Label bottling, I am guessing that this is the same original cuvée with a couple extra percent of still pinot noir added to the blend to give it its pale salmon color, but I will have to clarify this on my next visit to the cellars. In any event, it has spent the same thirty months aging *sur latte* and six more months in bottle after disgorgement, allowing it to now offer up a fine nose of white cherries, orange peel, rye toast, chalky soil tones and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, very good focus and a long, complex and still fairly brisk finish. Good juice that is drinking very well today, but clearly has plenty of life ahead of it. 2015-2030+. **90+**.

Lanson “Extra Age” Brut Rosé NV (Reims) Disgorged December 2011

The current release of Lanson’s “Extra Age” Brut Rosé has now also seen almost four years out from its disgorgement and is really drinking beautifully. It is comprised of a blend of the vintages of 2002, 2004 and 2005 and spent five years aging *sur latte* in the cellars. As Lanson is a non-malo house, their wines always age very gracefully and the Extra Age Rosé is really starting to come into its own today, as it soars from the glass in a complex aromatic constellation of tangerine, blood orange, chalky minerality, a touch of clove-like spice tones, rye toast and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with a rock solid core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, snappy and complex finish. This is an excellent wine that is starting to blossom beautifully, but still has many years of life ahead of it. 2015-2035. **93**.

Pierre Paillard “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Bouzy) Disgorged November 2014

The current release of Pierre Paillard’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir. It is from the base year of 2011 with

some 2010 blended in as reserve wine. It was finished with a fairly low *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter. The wine is a pale salmon color and offers up a superb nose of melon, white cherries, *patissière*, a touch of rye toast, lovely soil tones and a gently spicy topnote redolent of cloves and cinnamon. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a superb core, fine focus and balance, ever so slightly large bubbles, but excellent length and grip on the very classy finish. In the past, I have been a tad critical of the Paillard house's slightly coarse bubbles, but the underlying wine is so fine that I am starting to come around! The *mousse* could still be a bit finer, but this is high class juice! 2015-2025+. **91+**.

Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Rosé NV (Ludes)

The new release of the Ployez-Jacquemart non-vintage Extra Brut Rosé is another absolutely beautiful bottle of rosé. The *cépages* is a rather unique and compelling blend of fifty-five percent pinot meunier, thirty-nine percent chardonnay and six percent pinot noir, with ten percent of the blend made up of still red wines (a combination of pinot noir and pinot meunier). As is typical with this bottling, the color is a delicate, pale salmon and the bouquet is absolutely superb, offering up an aromatic constellation of tangerine, white cherry, chalky minerality, bread dough, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, very elegant *mousse* and a long, poised and complex finish. Lovely juice. 2015-2025+. **92+**.

Jean-Marc Sélèque Brut Rosé NV (Pierry) Disgorged December 2014

The Jean-Marc Sélèque non-vintage Brut Rosé is quite ruby in color and is produced from a blend of forty-five percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent pinot noir. Monsieur Sélèque uses some *saignée* for this bottling, as well as blending in a bit of still pinot noir from Pierry that he barrel-ferments. The current release is from the base year of 2012 and includes thirty percent reserve wines. It was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter and offers up a deep, vinous and serious nose of cherries, pomegranate, chalky soil tones, a hint of clove, woodsmoke, wheat toast and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a long, youthfully complex and low fat finish of excellent energy and grip. This is a superbly crafted bottle of non-vintage Brut Rosé that is drinking well out of the blocks, but seems destined to be even better with a couple of years' worth of bottle age. High class juice. 2015-2030. **92**.

Taittinger "Nocturne" Rosé NV Sec (Reims)

The current release of Taittinger "Nocturne" Rosé non-vintage Sec is a very well-balanced and classy example of a slightly sweeter Champagne. The wine is a blend of thirty percent chardonnay and seventy percent red grapes- both pinot noir and pinot meunier, with the wine finished off with a *dosage* of 17.5 grams per liter. The color is a pale salmon and the wine wafts from the glass in a classy aromatic blend of tangerine, peach, wheat toast, sweet pastries, rose petals and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with excellent acids, fine balance and a long, complex and gently sweet finish. The interplay of acidity, minerality and residual sweetness here is finely-woven and the wine is very easy to drink, with a pristine and vibrant backend. Lovely juice that would be a great late night bubbly when out on the town. 2015-2025. **90+**.

Taittinger "Prestige Rosé" NV Brut (Reims)

The current iteration of Taittinger's non-vintage "Prestige Rosé" Brut is comprised of a blend of fifty percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot meunier, with fifteen percent of the blend made up of still red wine to give the wine its lovely salmon color. The bouquet is bright, complex and classy, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of blood

orange, white cherries, rye toast, chalky minerality, citrus zest and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, vibrant and full-bodied, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip, a good core and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. I love the lightness of step this wine has on the backend- perhaps from the pinot meunier in the blend? This release has lovely structure and should age very gracefully. 2015-2025+. **91.**

J. L. Vergnon “RosÉmotion” Extra Brut Rosé NV (Mesnil sur Oger) Disgorged July 2014

This is the same release of J. L. Vergnon “RosÉmotion” non-vintage Extra Brut that I tasted last year, and, as readers may recall, this is a non-malo bottling made entirely out of pinot noir. I liked this very well last year and felt it could use a bit more bottle age to blossom, which it has now done beautifully with twelve more months in bottle. The nose is a beautifully expressive mélange of strawberries, white cherries, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality, plenty of smokiness and a dollop of rose petals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with a good core, lovely mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the complex and now ready to go finish. A fine bottle of Rosé that really works best at the table. 2015-2025+. **90+.**

Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs

2009 Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2009 Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime was aged just under five years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. All of the *vins clairs* for this bottling were barrel-fermented in *foudres* and did not go through malo in this vintage, with the wine finished off with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The bouquet is outstanding, delivering a superb constellation of pear, delicious apple, a touch of fresh almond, *patissière*, chalky minerality, an exotic touch of lavender and a very discreet hint of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful in profile, with a rock solid core, excellent cut and grip, very refined *mousse*, impeccable balance and a very long, nascently complex and mineral finish. With the *vins clairs* here not undergoing malolactic, the wine has a lot of cut for a 2009 and will be a long-distance runner in the cellar. It is quite enjoyable to drink today, but is really built for the cellar and will reward handsomely those patient enough to give it some additional bottle age. 2019-2040. **93.**

2008 Robert Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut Millésime (Mesnil) Disg: 3/14

The 2008 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime from Pierre Moncuit is a bit broader-shouldered in personality than the 2007 version (please see below), but it too is a very good bottle of bubbly. The superb and quite complex nose offers up a classic Côte de Blancs blend of pear, apple, brioche, fresh almond, vanilla custard, gentle notes of acacia blossoms and a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with fine depth on the attack, elegant *mousse*, good, but not great depth at the core and lovely length and grip on the zesty and well-balanced finish. I was expecting just a touch more mid-palate concentration here, based on the beautiful breadth this wine shows on the attack, but this is a very minor complaint on a wine that offers up loads of character and complexity. 2015-2030+. **91.**

2008 J. L. Vergnon “Confidence” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Mesnil) Disg: Dec. 2013

The 2008 J. L. Vergnon “Confidence” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature spent four and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and offers up a simply beautiful bouquet of pear, delicious apple, plenty of smokiness, brioche, chalky soil tones, orange zest and a nice touch of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bone-dry in

personality, but with impeccable balance, a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the finish. To my palate, I might have liked this even better with three or four grams of *dosage*, but it is a beautifully done rendition of Brut Nature and will find a legion of enthusiasts amongst fans of this style. 2015-2025+. **90+**.

2007 Pierre Callot “les Avats” Vignes Anciennes Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize) Disg: 7/14

Pierre Callot’s old vine bottling from the single vineyard of les Avats in Avize was planted back in 1951. The *vin clair* here does not undergo malo and was bottled after more than six years aging *sur latte*. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of almond paste, brioche and a dollop of apple blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still youthfully brisk (from the lack of malo), with lovely focus and depth at the core, with slightly coarse *mousse*, but fine budding complexity and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. I would love to see the bubbles a bit finer, but this wine has depth and complexity coming and will be a very tasty bottle with a few more years bottle age. 2017-2035. **90+**.

2007 Delamotte Blanc de Blanc Brut Millésimé (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The 2007 Delamotte Blanc de Blanc Brut Millésimé is comprised of grapes from the villages of Mesnil-sur-Oger, Cramant, Avize and Oger. The wine wafts from the glass in a deep and still quite youthful blend of lemon, apple, chalky minerality, spring flowers, gentle smokiness and a touch of the *crème patissière* to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still youthfully snappy, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, refined *mousse* and a long, brisk and very promising finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it really deserves three or four years in the cellar to blossom a bit more from behind its racy structural attributes. Fine juice. 2018-2030+. **92**.

2007 Robert Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut Millésime (Mesnil) Disg: 10/13

The 2007 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime from Pierre Moncuit is a lovely example of the vintage, with a still fairly youthful personality on both the nose and palate, but fine depth and nascent complexity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic blend of pear, apple, a touch of almond paste, chalky minerality, gentle smokiness and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, elegant *mousse* and just a touch of oak still sticking out on the long, complex and classy finish. There is plenty of stuffing here to eventually absorb the wood more fully, and I would be inclined to tuck this away in the cellar for a few more years and allow the oak to fade to the background a bit more. It will be a very good wine at its apogee, but the oak treatment here is not quite up to the same level as the other qualities of the wine. 2017-2030+. **91+**.

2005 Pascal Doquet “Mont Aimé” 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut (Vertus) Disg. Oct. 2013

The 2005 Mont Aimé bottling from Pascal Doquet undergoes full malolactic and forty percent of the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented for this cuvée. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter, after spending seven years aging on its fine lees. The bouquet offers up a deep and classy constellation of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, a hint of walnut, fresh-baked bread and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. This is quite approachable today, but I would still be inclined to give it a few more years in the cellar to allow it to relax just a touch more structurally. Good juice. 2017-230+. **91**.



The village of Mesnil-sur-Oger, nestled in amongst the rolling hills of vines in the Côte de Blancs.

2005 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Ludes)

The 2005 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is aging very gracefully and starting to really blossom on the palate with a bit more bottle age. This wine spent six years on its fine lees, so it was probably disgorged in the latter half of 2012 and is now really coming into its own on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is starting to show some secondary layers of complexity in its blend of apple, pear, almond paste, chalky minerality, a bit of caraway seed, plenty of smokiness and a discreet touch of oak (from the *vins clairs* in the cuvée that were barrel-fermented). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still beautifully structured, with a fine chassis of acidity, impeccable focus and grip, very refined *mousse*, a rock solid core and outstanding length and grip on the complex finish. This is drinking very well, but is clearly built to age and will be even better with a bit more time in the cellar. A very high class bottle of bubbly. 2015-2030+. **93+**.

2005 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut (Reims)

The 2005 Comtes de Champagne is a stunning young wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and youthfully complex, as it offers up a very classy blend of pear, delicious apple, fresh almond, incipient notes of *crème patissière*, chalky minerality, brioche and just a whisper of vanillin oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with exquisite balance, refined *mousse*, crisp acids and simply superb length and grip on the seamless, youthful and oh, so promising finish. The style of the 2005 vintage gives this some

early accessibility that was not evident with the more tightly-knit 2004 out of the blocks, but this wine has the structure to also age long and very, very gracefully. It has been a year since I last tasted this wine and it has started to show more precision to go along with its early generosity and is a classic in the making. My gut feeling today is that it will be superior to the 1989 version, to which I compared it to a year ago. Brilliant wine. 2015-2045+. **95+**.

2004 Pascal Doquet “Coeur de Terroir” 1er Cru Blc. de Blc. Brut (Vertus) Disg. Sept. 2013

The 2004 Coeur de Terroir bottling from Monsieur Doquet, which hails entirely from his 1.1 hectare of vines in Vertus and spent fully nine years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The bouquet is quite high-toned and vibrant, offering up notes of white peach, apple, almond, limestone, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and offers up a fine core, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, still slightly adolescent finish. Ironically, given that this was disgorged nearly two years ago, the *dosage* has still not fully settled into the structure of the wine and seems to stick out a bit- despite its quite modest five grams per liter- and the wine still needs a bit more time in the cellar to more fully integrate this component. But, the underlying materials here are first rate and all this wine needs is a bit more time. 2018-2030+. **90+**.

2004 Pascal Doquet “Coeur de Terroir” le Mesnil “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut

Pascal Doquet’s 2004 bottling of le Mesnil was disgorged in May of 2015, after having spent ten years aging *sur latte* and is produced from forty-nine year-old vines in the family’s 1.67 hectares in this village. This was Pascal’s first year as director of the family domaine and the wine is excellent, though still quite young and deserving of more time in the cellar. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of delicious apple, pear, pastry cream, a touch of walnut, complex, chalky minerality and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, primary and very promising finish. Give this puppy time to blossom! 2020-2040+. **92**.

2004 Nicolas Maillart “Les Chaillots Gillis” Blanc de Blancs 1er Cru Extra Brut (Écueil)

The 2004 Nicolas Maillart “Les Chaillots Gillis” Blanc de Blancs is made up entirely of old vines, with no parcels under sixty years of age, and all of the *vins clairs* for this superb bottling were barrel-fermented. The wine was disgorged in October of 2013, after having spent eight and a half years resting *sur latte* in the Maillart cellars and was finished off with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The bouquet is stunning, jumping from the glass in a very classy blend of pear, almond, brioche, a complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a very, very discreet whiff of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, elegant, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and a very, very long, mineral-driven finish. This is still a puppy and will be even better with a few more years’ worth of bottle age, but it is going to be awfully hard to resist right now, as it is drinking with great class and style. 2015-2035. **93+**.

2002 Pol Roger “Cuvée Winston Churchill” Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 2002 Pol Roger “Cuvée Winston Churchill” is still a young wine, but it is showing lovely potential and is probably only four or five years from starting to really drink with some of the generosity of maturity. The deep and pure bouquet offers up a still quite primary blend of apple, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of soil, gentle leesiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with a lovely girdle of

acidity, pinpoint bubbles and lovely length and grip on the vibrant and very promising finish. Fine juice in the making. 2019-2040. **94.**

1995 Henriot “Cuvée Enchanteleurs” Brut Millésime (Reims)

I have always enjoyed the 1995 Cuvée Enchanteleurs from Henriot and have drunk the wine with some frequency since its release, but this was the first bottle where it really seemed to have entered into its plateau of peak maturity and was starting to drink at its apogee. The deep and very classy nose is now showing superb secondary layering in its constellation of apple, peach, *patissière*, gentle smokiness, complex soil tones, orange peel and lovely, savory notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sports excellent mid-palate depth, with elegant *mousse*, superb complexity and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. For much of its life, this wine was racy and held its depth in check behind excellent structural elements, but it has now fully blossomed and is really drinking superbly well at the present time. 2015-2035. **94.**

1993 Dom Riunart “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime(served from magnum)

The 1993 Blanc de Blancs from Dom Riunart is one of the finest vintages of this wine I have had the pleasure to taste and the wine is now at its apogee of peak drinkability and offering up exceptional quality. The outstanding nose jumps from the glass in a blend of baked apple, toasted nuts, chalky minerality, brioche and a nice touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and wide open in personality, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the focused and complex finish. A really lovely bottle in full bloom and with years of life still ahead of it. 2015-2030+. **94.**

Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut

2009 H. Billiot Fils “Brut Millésimé” Grand Cru (Ambonnay) Disgorged January 2015

The 2009 H. Billiot Fils “Brut Millésimé” is once again more than three quarters pinot noir, with the remainder of the *cépage* made up of chardonnay, with the wine spending four years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The nose is a classic expression of this ripe, but well-structured vintage, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, peach, fresh-baked bread, gentle nuttiness, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and generous on the attack, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, fine acids and lovely grip on the long and focused finish. This is really a fine bottle that offers up plenty of pleasure already, but which will be even better with some time in the cellar. 2015-2035. **92+.**

2009 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Cuvée Partition” Extra Brut (Pierry) Disgorged June 2014

Jean-Marc Sélèque’s “Cuvée Partition” is a wine that he created when he returned to the family domaine in Pierry in 2008. It is made from a blend of seven different prime parcels scattered amongst the family’s vineyard holdings, with the *cépages* seventy-two percent chardonnay and fourteen percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. Jean-Marc has begun adding Burgundy casks to the cellar, as his father used to ferment everything in stainless steel, and I would guess that a majority of the casks are used for this bottling today. The wine was finished off with a *dosage* of two grams per liter, after having spent at least four years aging *sur latte*. The next vintage of the wine, the 2010, has been aged in bottle under cork, rather than crown cap, and it will be interesting to compare that with this lovely 2009 when it is released next year. In the meantime, the 2009 Cuvée Partition is superb, wafting from the glass in a

complex aromatic blend of apple, pear, a beautiful base of soil, brioche, gentle smokiness, a touch of almond and a very discreet framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, good acids and soil signature and fine length and grip on the focused finish. I would assume that the casks for this wine were fairly youthful for the 2009 vintage of Cuvée Partition, and the wood shows a bit on the backend-which may not be the case in future years of this lovely wine. But, there is still a great wine here that has no difficulty getting itself heard amongst the slight touch of wood and it should age very well indeed. A very impressive young Champagne! 2015-2030. 92.



2008 Louis Roederer Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2008 Louis Roederer Brut Millésime is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with none of the *vins clairs* undergoing malolactic fermentation in this vintage. Thirty-seven percent of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented and the rest raised in stainless steel, with the wine aging four years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of nine grams per liter. This is an outstanding bottle in the making, as it wafts from the glass in a deep and youthful blend of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, great minerality, gentle leesiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a great girdle of acidity, outstanding focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and nascent complexity on the pure and racy finish.

This is a dynamite wine in the making, and though it is a delight to drink today, the wine really deserves five to seven more years of bottle age to blossom fully. Great juice. 2020-2045. **93.**

2006 Champagne Baron-Fuenté “Brut Millésime (Charly-sur-Marne)”

The 2006 Brut Millésime from Baron-Fuenté has quite a bit of chardonnay in the blend for this pinot meunier specialist, with the *cépages* being forty-five percent chardonnay, forty percent meunier and fifteen percent pinot noir. The wine spent seven years aging *sur latte* and was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet offers up a deep and classy blend of apple, brioche, a hint of *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of nutskin and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, lovely focus and complexity and a long, dancing and vibrant finish. This is cut very much in the elegant style of the house, but has depth and backend dimension on the palate and is a lovely drink. 2015-2030. **91.**

2006 Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Extra Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The *cépages* of the 2006 vintage bottling from Besserat de Bellefon is fifty-four percent chardonnay, thirty-one percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent pinot noir and the wine spent six and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in November of 2013. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of dried apple, warm biscuits, stony minerality, a touch of lemongrass and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and brisk, with an excellent core, elegant *mousse*, fine nascent complexity and very impressive backend energy on the long and very promising finish. Aromatically, this wine is a bit shy at the moment, but on the palate the wine is vibrant, pure and excellent. I would still give this very strong example of the vintage a year or two more in the cellar to allow the aromatic complexity to catch up a bit with the palate. It is a lovely bottle in the making. 2017-2030+. **91+.**

2006 Taittinger Brut Millésimé (Reims)

The 2006 Taittinger Brut Millésimé is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, with all of the chardonnay and most of the pinot noir hailing from grand cru villages. It spent more than five years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and is really starting to drink with peak complexity as it closes in on its tenth birthday. The excellent nose wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, brioche, a touch of tangerine, complex soil tones, lovely spice elements and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite snappy, with a wide open attack, fine core, elegant *mousse*, very good focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. The warmer year of 2006 has given this wine lovely generosity as it nears age ten, but on the flip side, I suspect this will not be a real long-distance runner by the high standards of this bottling and will probably be best drunk up over the coming decade. Good juice. 2015-2025. **92.**

2005 Ayala “Cuvée Perle d’Ayala” Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

As readers may recall, Ayala’s *Tête de Cuvée*, the “Cuvée Perle d’Ayala” is comprised of a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir in the 2005 vintage. The wine is aged *sur latte* under cork, rather than crown cap, for nine years prior to disgorgement. I tasted this wine a year ago and was very impressed, so I was very much looking forward to revisiting it this year. The wine is aging beautifully and now offers up a complex bouquet that offers up some lovely secondary layers of complexity in its aromatic constellation of apple, pear, fresh nutmeg, a complex base of soil tones, brioche, chalky minerality and a floral topnote redolent of white lilies (making it a particularly appropriate Prestige Cuvée for fans of the

Ancienne Regime). On the palate the wine is deep, pure and utterly suave on the attack, with a fine core, bright acids, very refined *mousse* and superb length and grip on the gently leesy finish. This is a superb bottle of bubbly that I could score even higher, if it were not that just a touch of precision is lost to the backend leesiness, which I am guessing is the result of a bit of *battonage* during the wine's early days in the cellar. But, this is a wine of breed and complexity that will please even the pickiest of Champagne palates! 2015-2035. **93+**.

2005 Bollinger “La Grande Année” Brut Millésime (Aÿ) Disgorged February 2015

The 2005 Bollinger “La Grande Année” is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with fully ninety-five percent of the fruit hailing from grand cru villages. The pinot originates in the villages of Aÿ and Verzenay, whereas most of the chardonnay is sourced from Avize, Chouilly and Mesnil-sur-Oger. The wine was finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter after having spent nine and a half years on its fine lees. The wine delivers a superb bouquet of apple, peach, gentle notes of nutskin, complex soil tones, plenty of smokiness and a lovely topnote of *patissière*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with a rock solid core, elegant *mousse*, snappy acids and outstanding complexity on the long, focused and really classy finish. This is an utterly classic vintage of La Grande Année, which should age long and gracefully, but which is drinking superbly well right now. 2015-2035. **93+**.

2002 Lanson “Gold Label” Brut Millésime (Reims) Disgorged February 2012

The 2002 Lanson “Gold Label” Brut Millésime is still a fairly young wine and is one of the youngest examples I have tasted from this vintage in several years. With a bit of air the wine starts to blossom a bit on the nose and offers up a leesy blend of apple, a touch of walnut, a fine base of soil, warm bread and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite brisk in personality, with a fine core, lovely complexity, elegant *mousse* and a long, crisp and focused finish. This is essentially a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and chardonnay and spent fully nine years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. With its non-malo chassis of acidity, this has decades of life ahead of it, but it is starting to drink with quite a bit of style once it opens up in the glass. 2015-2040. **92**.

1996 Dom Pérignon- Moët et Chandon

The 1996 vintage of Dom Pérignon is a beautiful bottle of bubbly, wafting from the glass in a deep and complex blend of lemon peel, apple, lovely minerality, incipient notes of pastry cream, just a hint of red berry fruit and a nice touch of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, refined *mousse*, and a long, complex and zesty finish. This wine is certainly accessible today, but it still seems quite primary in the mid-palate and the full range of fireworks here are still several years in the future. It seems likely to eventually rate as one of the absolute classic vintages of Dom Pérignon. 2015-2040+. **95**.

Vintage-Dated Brut Rosé

2010 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)

The new vintage of Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime is made from their standard *cépages* of seventy percent pinot noir from Cumières and thirty percent chardonnay from the Côte des Blancs villages of Cuis. The wine is typically very pale, pale salmon in color and offers up a beautiful, youthful nose of white cherries, tart orange, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of

cinnamon, brioche, a dollop of orange blossoms and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very elegant right out of the blocks, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This is very easy to drink today, but I would be inclined to tuck this away in the cellar for four or five years and really let its secondary layers of complexity take center stage. Excellent juice! 2015-2035. **93.**

2005 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Brut Rosé (Reims)

The 2005 Comtes de Champagne Brut Rosé from Champagne Taittinger is a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with fifteen percent of the pinot being red still wine from Bouzy fruit. All of the fruit for this bottling hails from grand cru villages and is first-press. The wine offers up a deep and utterly superb aromatic constellation of strawberries, blood orange, rye toast, complex, chalky soil tones, plenty of smokiness, a touch of orange zest and lovely spice tones in the upper register, with notes of cumin and clove predominant. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with a great core, superb complexity, bright acids, superb *mousse* and great length and grip on the crisp and nascently complex finish. This is still very early days for the 2005 Comtes Rosé, and though it is very easy to drink today, it will be even better with four or five more years of bottle age. Another absolutely brilliant Comtes Rosé from Taittinger. 2015-2040+. **95+.**

2004 Bollinger “La Grande Année” Brut Rosé Millésime (Aÿ) Disgorged July 2014

The 2004 Bollinger “La Grande Année” Brut Rosé was disgorged only a couple of months prior to my tasting the wine, after spending fully nine and a half years aging *sur latte* in the maison’s cellars in Aÿ. The wine is comprised of a blend of seventy-two percent pinot noir and twenty-eight percent chardonnay and was finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. Five percent of the pinot noir in the blend is still wine to give its lovely salmon color. The wine offers up a superb and very refined bouquet of blood orange, white cherry, rye toast, chalky minerality, lovely spice tones and a gentle topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with outstanding mid-palate concentration, bright, seamless acids, elegant *mousse* and exceptional focus and grip on the long, complex and very energetic finish. This is a stellar bottle of vintage Rosé and perhaps the finest I have ever tasted of this cuvée from Bollinger! 2015-2030+. **95.**