

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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DOMAINE DUJAC'S FLAGSHIP BOTTLING OF CLOS DE LA ROCHE



Domaine Dujac is one of the great estates to be found in all of Burgundy. Given its amazing lineup of top vineyards these days, which has few rivals in the Côte d'Or, it is easy to forget that this is one of the younger domaines in the region, having only been formed in 1967. While that is nearly fifty years ago today, this is still hardly a venerable estate by Burgundy standards, as many of the families producing wine here today can trace back their family's lives as *vignerons* many generations. Domaine Dujac was originally formed in 1967 when Jacques Seysses purchased the former Domaine Graillet in Morey St. Denis to form the foundation of Domaine Dujac. At the time, Domaine Graillet owned 4.5 hectares of vines, almost all of them in the village of Morey St. Denis (not counting their fine parcel in the premier cru of Gevrey-Chambertin "aux Combottes" that I wrote a feature on back in 2010), as well as the house and cellars that are still home to Domaine Dujac. Amongst the original vineyard holdings bought in 1967 was a nearly half a hectare plot in the fine grand cru vineyard of Clos de la Roche, which would serve as the cornerstone parcel in this grand cru for the Seysses family. The plots of vines in Clos de la Roche would grow in the decade of the 1970s, as Jacques Seysses bought parcels from Domaine Bertagna in 1970 and Domaine Jacquot in 1977, so that by the time of the start of the growing season in 1978, the domaine's holdings in the grand cru would amount to 1.78

hectares, which is large enough to make Domaine Dujac the second largest holder of vines in Clos de la Roche today, behind Domaine Ponsot's 3.4 hectares. This vineyard patrimony in Clos de la Roche was brought up to its present 1.95 hectares with another small plot of vines in 1988 that were purchased from Domaine Battachi in Gevrey-Chambertin. Today the family estate has grown in total to fully fifteen hectares of vines, with the most recent additions coming with the purchase of some of the old Domaine Thomas-Moillard parcels in 2005, but the extent of their holdings in Clos de la Roche has remained constant since their last purchase of vines in this vineyard from Domaine back in 1988.

As I wrote about back in 2010, the Seysses family was not of a line of *vignerons*, but they were already quite well known in the region back in 1967, as both Jacques Seysses and his father Louis had been visiting Burgundy as passionate amateurs for many years by the mid-1960s. Louis Seysses was a successful businessman based in Paris with a great passion for *haute cuisine* and the world's greatest wines, and consequently he was the President of the Club des Cent, a fabled epicurean group of comfortable wine collectors and gourmets who cherished three star Michelin meals and amassed beautiful personal cellars of the world's finest wines. Louis Seysses had introduced his son Jacques to all of the magic of fine wine and *haute cuisine* at a very early age- Jacques recalls that his first starred Michelin meal with his father was at La Tour d'Argent in Paris at the age of seven- and he had accompanied his father on tasting trips to the cellars of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and Domaine Ramonet while still a young boy. Jacques dipped his toe in the water of the business world after receiving his university degree, working for two years with the Morgan Guarantee Bank in New York after completing his studies, and then returning to the family business in Paris in the position of Marketing Director for the family firm of Biscuits Belin. But he had already been bitten by the wine bug, and his passion now lay further south amongst the rolling vineyard slopes of the Côte d'Or, rather than in the family firm's offices in Paris. Fortunately, at this time, his father Louis Seysses was already a shareholder in the Domaine de la Pousse d'Or in Volnay (primarily owned by a close friend and fellow Club des Cent member, Jacques Féré), which was run with great distinction at this time by Gérard Potel, and so a fine winemaking training ground for Jacques was already in place. After attaining a degree in oenology from the University of Dijon, Jacques Seysses joined Domaine de la Pousse d'Or for two harvests in 1966 and 1967 and he was ready to start looking for a domaine of his own by the end of 1967.

Marcel Graillet had been an important vineyard owner in Morey St. Denis for many years, but as his primary occupation was as a diplomat based for the French government in China and Turkey throughout much of his career, he was an absentee vineyard owner and sold off his production to many of the top *négociants* in the region, rather than estate bottling his wines. As I noted in my previous article on Domaine Dujac's Combottes bottling, by the mid-1960s, Monsieur Graillet had recently married a young lady from Nice who began longing for the more temperate climes of the south, and so the estate was for sale when Jacques Seysses began looking for a property to base a domaine on in the late fall of 1967. At this time, Jacques was twenty-six years of age and had completed his *stage* at Domaine de la Pousse d'Or in Volnay and was well prepared to start his own domaine. The initial 4.5 hectares of vines owned by Monsieur Graillet and which would become the nexus of Domaine Dujac included parcels in Clos St. Denis, Clos de la Roche, Gevrey-Chambertin "aux Combottes" and several parcels of Morey *villages* level vines, as the Graillet estate had already sold off their *monopole* Morey St. Denis premier cru of

the Clos de la Bussière to Domaine Roumier back in 1959. Though the sale was finalized at the end of 1967, the first vintage of Domaine Dujac to be sold in bottle was 1969, as the very difficult year of 1968 was all sold off in bulk to *négociants*. However, Jacques Seysses had success from his first bottled vintage of 1969 and the domaine prospered from the outset, with additional parcels of vines added as opportunity allowed over the ensuing years. Today, the family domaine is run primarily by the second generation of the Seysses family, which includes Jeremy Seysses, his brother Alec (the middle of the three Seysses boys) and Jeremy's lovely wife Diana, whose family originates in the Napa Valley and runs their own winery there, Snowden Vineyards. Jeremy Seysses first vinified a vintage alongside his father in 1994, with his slowly transitioning to take over the main responsibility for the winemaking at the domaine by the 2004 vintage. But this is very much a family affair, with Jacques Seysses still actively taking an interest in the decision-making and Diana and Alec also very much involved in all facets of the domaine.

Today, Domaine Dujac is one of the most illustrious domaines in all of Burgundy, farming fully fifteen hectares of vines scattered throughout some of the very finest *climats* to be found in the Côte de Nuits, as well as two premier crus in Puligny-Montrachet that were just added to the lineup in the 2014 vintage. However, while the domaine has grown and can now boast no less than six grand crus and some of the finest premier crus in all of Burgundy, their parcels in Clos de la Roche remains their largest single grand cru holding of any that they produce, with its 1.95 hectares only eclipsed in size by the Domaine Ponsot holdings in this superb vineyard. Consequently, the Domaine Dujac Clos de la Roche remains the flagship grand cru in their portfolio and probably the wine that the widest range of Burgundy lovers are familiar with at the grand cru level from the Seysses family. Like many of the grand crus of Burgundy, the cru of Clos de la Roche is actually comprised of several different *lieux à dits* beyond the one from which the grand cru vineyard takes its name. The incorporation of several neighboring parcels within the official appellation of Clos de la Roche took place in the late 1930s, when the *Appellation Contrôlée* system was codified, with the criteria being that if *vignerons* could demonstrate a history of the wines from neighboring *lieux à dits* having been sold as Clos de la Roche, then the parcel would be included in the official classification. In the case of Clos de la Roche, this amounted to fully eight different *climats* (or portions thereof) being incorporated into the AOC of Clos de la Roche. These are, from north to south: Monts Luisants, Clos de la Roche, les Mochamps, les Genavrières, les Froichots, les Chaffots, les Fremières and les Chabiots.

The Domaine Dujac holdings in this vineyard are nicely spread out over several different *lieux à dits* in the grand cru, so that one gets a very homogenous example of entirety of Clos de la Roche in their stellar bottling. The original half hectare parcel (more precisely forty-eight *ares*) that Jacques Seysses purchased from Domaine Graillet in 1967 lies in the *lieu à dit* of Monts Luisants; this is the section of Clos de la Roche that sits up above the premier cru of Gevrey-Chambertin “aux Combottes” and is the most northerly portion of the grand cru. (As an aside, Monts Luisants is the only vineyard in Burgundy to be split into three different levels of crus, as the lowest section on the slope is part of Clos de la Roche, the middle section is ranked as premier cru and the top part of the vineyard is relegated to *villages* status.) The purchase in 1970 from Domaine Bertagna also comprised forty-eight *ares*, with thirty-five of these located in the *lieu à dit* of Clos de la Roche in the original heart of the vineyard, and thirteen *ares* in the *climat* of les Fremières, which lies right along the Route des Grands Crus as one drives north out

of the center of Morey in the direction of Gevrey. The parcels that were added in 1977 from Domaine Jacquot totaled eighty-two *ares*, with the plots spread out thusly: twenty-four more *ares* in Clos de la Roche, forty-three *ares* in les Chabiots and fifteen *ares* in les Froichots. (The *lieu à dit* of les Froichots lies adjacent on the slope to the *lieu à dit* of Clos de la Roche, whereas les Chabiots lies a bit further south, below Clos St. Denis on the slope, closer to the village center.) The last addition of vines in the grand cru of Clos de la Roche arrived in 1988, with seventeen *ares* again in the *lieu à dit* of les Chabiots from the Battachi family. So the Domaine Dujac parcels in the grand cru of Clos de la Roche total up as follows: sixty *ares* in les Chabiots, fifty-nine *ares* in Clos de la Roche, forty-eight *ares* in Monts Luisants, fifteen *ares* in les Froichots and thirteen *ares* in les Fremières.

The domaine has been farming naturally for many, many years, with the viticulture here having made the transition from *lutte raisonnée* to organic and finally biodynamic farming over the years. As all the members of the team at the domaine will tell you, the wines have simply gotten better with each passing year, once they started to farm by more organic principals, with the most dramatic change occurring when Jacques Seysses stopped using herbicides in his vineyards many, many years ago. As each transitional phase occurred, from *lutte raisonnée* to organics to biodynamics, the quality of the fruit to emerge from each vineyard just continued to improve and the precision of expression of underlying *terroir* mounted commensurately. The Clos de la Roche from Domaine Dujac was one of the first vineyards in their lineup to be fully converted over to biodynamics, with the transition starting in 2001. While the reputation of the domaine is to use a large percentage of new oak, the Clos de la Roche has not been raised in all new barrels for many, many years now, with Jeremy Seysses typically using between eighty and eighty-five percent new casks each year for this bottling. Like all of the Domaine Dujac wines, the Clos de la Roche will generally include a large percentage of whole clusters, as since his very first vintage, Jacques Seysses preferred to retain the stems, rather than damage the grapes by destemming them prior to the onset of fermentation. The domaine will vary the percentage of whole clusters used each year, depending on the ripeness of the stems, but I cannot recall a year where the Clos de la Roche was ever destemmed completely- if indeed this has ever happened. The use of whole clusters always gives the younger Domaine Dujac wines a youthful aromatic and flavor signature, as the stems certainly show in the early years after bottling. Interestingly, the early influence of the stems, which can be gently herbaceous in character, will often transition with sufficient bottle age into the scent and savor of cinnamon, and this is often one of the signature notes I look for when tasting older red Burgundies blind to see if it might be a wine from Domaine Dujac.

The style of Clos de la Roche is truly exceptional, but this is not the most flamboyant grand cru that one will find amongst the constellation of crus in the Côte de Nuits. It is a wine that always shows superb depth and purity out of the blocks (this is particularly true at Domaine Dujac), but there is a youthful veneer of structural integrity to the wine as well, and the top vintages of Clos de la Roche take fully twenty years to start to really show all of their classic elements and drink with true generosity. At the vertical tasting that served as the foundation for this report, I sensed that many in attendance did not have a lot of experience with younger vintages of Clos de la Roche and were perhaps a bit underwhelmed with how the inherent generosity of the wine was bound up a bit behind its structure. But this is the nature of a great many of the grand crus of the Côte de Nuits, as they were initially prized for their extended

potential for longevity, and in most cases, one is not going to drink well sixty or seventy years down the road if the wine is easily accessible out of the blocks. There are a very small handful of grand crus that offer that early appeal, coupled to potential for great longevity- Musigny and Richebourg are a couple that come to mind- but they are most emphatically exceptions, and many more grand crus are cut along the lines of Clos de la Roche and one simply has to exercise patience if one wishes to experience all of the magic of the vineyard.



However, if one is willing to wait patiently for a young bottle of Clos de la Roche to really blossom, one is rewarded with one of the great grand cru red Burgundy experiences to be found in the Côte de Nuits. While the village of Morey appended the name of another of the village's grand crus to it in the 1930s, choosing Clos St. Denis over the neighboring Clos de la Roche (perhaps as much for the more lyrical sound of Morey St. Denis over Morey la Roche?), I would argue that Clos de la Roche is truly the quintessential grand cru of Morey and the wines of this commune find their highest and most classical expression in a mature example of Clos de la Roche. Of the other grand crus to be found in Morey St. Denis, Clos de Tart is never quite as complex or complete to my palate as Clos de la Roche, Clos des Lambrays is outstanding and can give Clos de la Roche a run for its money in terms of sheer quality, but it is typically a more black fruity wine in most vintages than is Clos de la Roche, and this is one of the reasons that I would choose Clos de la Roche as my prime example of Morey St. Denis, as the echoes of its own fruit tones are found in so many of the premier crus in the village. A small slice of Bonnes-

Mares is also found over the border in Morey St. Denis, but I always think of this grand cru as firmly entrenched stylistically in the firmament of Chambolle-Musigny, despite a small portion of the vineyard lying within the borders of Morey. Clos St. Denis is another beautiful grand cru of Morey, but it is more inherently delicate in style than Clos de la Roche, and to my palate, less emblematic of the village of Morey St. Denis in general for this reason.

I have read a few descriptions in preparation for this article of the style of Clos de la Roche, and to my mind, they were written by folks that really do not drink a whole lot of Clos de la Roche and were rather off base. While Clos de la Roche is a big wine, in proper grand cru fashion, it is never a wine that is short on elegance or complexity and really has little to do stylistically with the grand crus of Gevrey-Chambertin, as one (perhaps inexperienced?) writer opined. To my palate, it is utterly Morey St. Denis in personality, and there is no reason to look for similarities to other villages' grand crus, as the similarities simply are not there. For starters, Clos de la Roche's fruit component is quintessentially Morey, which means quite often a mix of red and black fruit tones, often somewhat plummy in character, but so often also tied to savory or gently vegetal elements that Michael Broadbent once called "beetroot" and which seems absolutely spot on for describing this characteristic. One will often find a similar touch of this vegetable side of pinot noir in wines from places like the Sonoma Coast, but it really reaches its most beautiful expression of this aspect of the pinot noir grape in Morey St. Denis. In most vintages, if one waits long enough (and we are talking two, three or four decades), the fruit will inevitably turn primarily red fruity in composition, but always with this touch of beetroot and plumminess remaining in a mature example of Clos de la Roche. This is often coupled with notes of proper Côte de Nuits game elements, which in Clos de la Roche I often think of as venison-like in tone. And there is always a deep and complex base of soil tones in Clos de la Roche, which invariably turn autumnal with the receding waves of time. Clos de la Roche also has its signature element of fresh herb tones from cradle to grave, which I often associate with thyme and mustard seed and which marry so beautifully with that vein of beetroot that so often seems to run through the fruit tones of the wine.

Beyond the general stylistic profile of Clos de la Roche, there are of course, a few elements that are very much signatures of Domaine Dujac's version of this marvelous grand cru. For starters, there is always the influence on the bouquet and flavor profile of the significant percentage of whole clusters that are used in the fermentation of all the Seysses family wines. This will give the wine a touch of its included stems early on in its evolution in bottle, and which with time, so often turns to the scent of cinnamon in the Dujac Clos de la Roche at its apogee. There is also the element of new oak, which is present in the domaine's Clos de la Roche, though always impeccably well done to my palate. This is in notable contradistinction to the largest owner of vines in the vineyard of Clos de la Roche, Domaine Ponsot, as the Ponsot family does not use any new wood at all for their version of this wine. The Dujac bottling of Clos de la Roche is one of the great grand crus to be found in the firmament of the Côte de Nuits, and it is one of the longest-lived wines in the Seysses family's impressive roster of grand crus. The following wines were primarily tasted here in New York in June of this year. At our vertical tasting, we did not have the 2007, so I have added that note from a recent bottle. We also had a bit of bad luck, as our bottle of the 1972 was not pristine (the wine can be absolutely brilliant!), so one of the earliest vintages of this wine was not able to be included in the notes that follow. Our lineup was also short of the 1985 vintage of Clos de la Roche, so we tasted the '85 Domaine

Dujac Clos St. Denis in its place. I have not printed that note below, as I hope to one day soon do an equally in-depth feature on the domaine's bottling of Clos St. Denis. As I hope the notes below will attest, the Domaine Dujac Clos de la Roche is one of the most beautiful grand crus to be found in all of Burgundy.

2012 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 2012 vintage of Clos de la Roche from Domaine Dujac is still a very, very young wine, but it is going to be magnificent in the fullness of time. Today it offers up superb purity and transparency, though still a tad marked by its new oak component in this very early stage. The bouquet is a fine, fine blend of red and black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, a fine base of soil and plenty of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and marvelously soil-driven for such a young wine, with a sappy core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a very long, suavely tannic finish. The balance here is just perfect, and once the new wood is fully integrated into the base of the wine, it will probably close down for an extended period of hibernation. I would not touch it again until it has celebrated its twentieth birthday- not because it is not going to be impressive to drink younger- but there is so much waiting in the wings here that it is crazy not to give this great wine time to develop all aspects of its beauty! 2032-2075+. **96+**.

2011 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 2011 Clos de la Roche from the Seysses family is far more settled in than the 2012, with everything now seamlessly integrated and the wine showing all of its fine potential. This will not need as much time in the cellar as the 2012 to fully blossom, but is equally well-balanced and may end up lasting nearly as long in bottle. The fine, youthful nose offers up scents of cherries, red plums, incipient notes of beetroot, gamebird, a lovely base of soil, a touch of cocoa, a gentle base of new oak and just a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and focused, with lovely intensity of flavor, tangy acids, moderate tannins and lovely complexity and bounce on the elegant finish. This will not have the depth of vintages such as 2012 or 2010, but it lacks for nothing and is just a different vintage interpretation on this magical *terroir*. 2025-2065. **94**.

2009 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 2009 vintage at Domaine Dujac is more successful than at many of their neighbors, as the wines tend to show plenty of plump fruit tones, but do not stray over the line into *sur maturité*. The bouquet on the 2009 Clos de la Roche is excellent wafting from the glass in a fine blend of plums, black cherries, roasted venison, a great base of soil, vinesmoke, fresh herb tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe, but impressively pure for the vintage, with a sappy core, ripe tannins and lovely focus and grip on the well-balanced and voluptuous finish. This is a very elegant rendition of the 2009 vintage. 2022-2050+. **95**.

2008 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

Since day one, I have loved the entire range of 2008s from Domaine Dujac and the Clos de la Roche is still showing beautiful potential as it starts to approach its tenth birthday. The wine has now moved into a stage where one can really sense what it will be like at maturity, with the first stirrings of secondary layers of complexity showing on both the nose and palate. The vibrant bouquet delivers scents of cherries, beetroot, mustard seed, coffee, still a touch of its youthful stems, gorgeous soil tones, woodsmoke and a discreet framing of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a lovely core of red fruit, excellent soil signature, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the vivid finish. To my palate, this is an utter classic in the making. 2020-2050+. **96**.

2007 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

Jeremy Seysses has crafted an outstanding 2007 Clos de la Roche. The wine is deep and classy, but also decidedly less far along its evolutionary path than the domaine's Clos St. Denis, as it offers up a very pure and primary nose of red and black cherries, plums, cocoa, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, suave, seamless tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and youthful finish. This will be dynamite wine in the fullness of time, but this is one of those top 2007 grand crus that still needs some more cellaring. 2020-2050. **95+.**

2005 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 2005 vintage remains the single greatest young vintage of this wine that I have ever tasted, and at age eleven, there is nothing going on in this wine that dissuades me from this conviction, as this is sheer brilliance from tip to toe. However, like so many of the very finest 2005s, this wine is still in its infancy and is years and years away from truly blossoming, so opening up bottles now is pure infanticide. However, for research purposes, we sacrificed a bottle at our vertical, with the wine offering up an absolutely brilliant, albeit primary, bouquet of sappy plums, red and black cherries, venison, raw cocoa, a superb base of soil, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and gloriously sappy at the core, coupled to stunning transparency, ripe tannins, great acids and laser-like focus on the very long, very young and perfectly balanced finish. All this legend needs is time. 2030-2100. **98.**

2002 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 2002 Clos de la Roche from Domaine Dujac is showing very well, and is more enjoyable today than any time in the past that I have had the pleasure to taste it. Out of the blocks, this vintage seemed to me to be a bit more extracted in style than many others at the domaine, but I do not have this impression today (and I have had a handful of other Dujac 2002s in the last year). The bouquet is pure and beautifully defined by its red fruity mélange of red plums, cherries, cocoa, violets, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, adequate soil signature, still a bit of suave tannin and a long, vibrant and still fairly youthful finish. It is very easy to drink this wine today, as has been the case with most 2002s since the outset, as it has really lovely and very accessible fruit that carries the wines beautifully. In our vertical tasting, my lone criticism of the vintage still seemed quite apparent, as this is far more defined by its fruit than its soil component, which remains fairly discreet in comparison to each and every other vintage in this lineup. But, there is an awful lot to love here with this fruit! 2020-2060. **94.**

2001 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 2001 Domaine Dujac Clos de la Roche has now reached its apogee of maturity and is drinking beautifully at the present time. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows lovely tertiary elements in its constellation of cherries, *sous bois*, venison, mustard seed, a touch of beetroot and *champignons*. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite mature in profile, with good depth of fruit, but not the same density or sappiness of so many of the more recent vintages. The tannins are fading away, the wine has good acids, focus and grip, but the finish is not as long as either the 2000 or 2002 today. This is a very good bottle of wine for current drinking, but I initially thought that this might land a rung or two higher up the quality ladder. Put it in the good, but not great camp and simply enjoy it on its own, rather than in a vertical Clos de la Roche tasting, with so many other vintages surrounding it! 2016-2040. **92.**

2000 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

In contrast to the good, but not exceptional showing of the 2001 Clos de la Roche, the 2000 was absolutely singing at our vertical tasting and really showed how beautifully this wine has developed with the passing years. The bouquet is deep, focused and beautifully complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, roasted game, forest floor, a touch of cinnamon, marvelous soil tones and a very suave and understated base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows marvelous mid-palate depth, with a velvety palate impression, superb complexity, melting tannins and really impressive length and grip on the very classy finish. This is a really a beautiful 2000 red Burgundy and one of the best vintages of this bottling for current drinking. 2016-2030+. **94.**



Jeremy Seysses in the vineyard of Gevrey "Combottes", with the Monts Luisants climat of Clos de la Roche above.

1999 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

In a great vintage like 1999, it is not surprising that the Dujac Clos de la Roche is a marvelous wine. Like so many of the top grand crus from this vintage, this is still on the young side, and despite it being quite accessible today, it makes far more sense to keep it tucked away in the cellar for at least a few more years and let more of the secondary layers of complexity fully emerge. The bouquet is deep and very fine, but still a tad primary in personality, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, plums, venison, chocolate, marvelous soil tones, a touch of the cinnamon that is coming and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with superb focus and grip, impeccable balance and a very long, still moderately tannic, albeit utterly seamless finish. This is a great wine in the making, but it is

still a puppy and I would leave it in the cellar for many more years to come and let it start hitting on all cylinders before broaching it in earnest. 2025-2075+. **96.**

1996 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 1996 vintage *chez* Seysses is very successful (perhaps the most consistently excellent group of '96s in the entire Côte) and their Clos de la Roche was showing superbly well at our vertical tasting in June of this year. The bouquet is pure, complex and nicely mature, offering up a fine, red fruity mix of cherries, strawberries, *sous bois*, gamebird, coffee, a bit of bonfire and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and a touch more reserved in personality than the nose suggests, with a fine core, impressive focus and balance, bright, well-integrated acids and fine grip on the long, complex and tangy finish. This wine is just starting to enter its plateau of maturity, where it should cruise along beautifully for at least another quarter century. It is more a middleweight vintage for this bottling, but it is long on intensity of flavor and breed. 2016-2040. **93.**

1995 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 1995 Clos de la Roche from Domaine Dujac is starting to drink beautifully at age twenty and offers up a complex and tertiary blend of cherries, forest floor, fresh thyme, cinnamon, gamebirds, summer truffles and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite suave structurally (particularly for a 1995), with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and tangy finish. The elegant house style here has really worked nicely to soften up those sharp edges of the vintage. 2016-2035+. **93.**

1993 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 1993 Clos de la Roche from Jacques Seysses is starting to get very close to full maturity, but another few years of bottle age would certainly cause no undesirable effects. This was a very short crop for the domaine in this vineyard, with the Clos de la Roche only producing twenty-eight hectoliters per hectare in 1993. The bouquet is truly stunning, soaring from the glass in a blaze of red and black plums, dark chocolate, gamebird, a very complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and sappy at the core, with its full-bodied format both vibrant and soil-driven, with a very long, transparent and gently tannic finish. This is just blossoming beautifully, but there is more to come from this stage of development and I would be inclined to let it sleep just a couple more years in the cellar, so that this wave of complexity can fully come front and center. It is a great wine. 2020-2060+. **96.**

1991 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

For drinking at the present time, the 1991 Dujac Clos de la Roche is certainly one of the most charming and complete wines in this superb lineup. The wine is now at its absolute apogee, delivering a great and complex aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, cocoa powder, gamebirds, again, that signature, complex base of soil tones, a touch of nuttiness and a gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly seamless, with a velvety palate impression, great focus and grip and a very, very long, refined and utterly classic finish. A stunning bottle for current drinking. 2016-2050. **94.**

1990 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 1990 Clos de la Roche is also a fully mature example, but though it is a very successful example of its vintage, it is also very much a child of that year. The bouquet is deep, complex and roasted in profile, wafting from the glass in a blend of baked cherries, beetroot, forest floor, roasted venison, coffee and nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core of fruit, fine complexity and a long, meltingly tannic, velvety finish. There is plenty of length and grip here and the wine is drinking quite well today,

but the elements of breed and purity found in the 1993 or 1991 vintages are not prevalent in the 1990 version. A fine 1990. 2016-2040. **92.**

1988 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

I have had varying showings of the '88 Dujac grand crus over the last few years, with some still a bit tangy and slightly hidden behind their girdle of acidity and others drinking very nicely, but none have been as impressive as this most recent bottle of Clos de la Roche. This wine is showing superbly well, offering up a deep, complex and gently autumnal mix of cherries, strawberries, forest floor, summer truffles, gamebird, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a good core of fruit, great focus and grip, bright, integrated acids and excellent grip and soil signature on the long and complex finish. This wine is now reached its apogee, but it should continue to drink with fine style for many, many years to come. This showed even better than I anticipated! 2016-2035+. **94.**

1987 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 1987 Côte de Nuits wines hold a very special place in my heart, as this was one of the first vintages of red Burgundy that I cut my teeth on. It was a largely overlooked vintage, coming right in front of the run from 1988 to 1991, but the wines were very good out of the blocks in their middleweight style and offered loads of pleasure in the first decade or so of their lives. I drank all of my bottles up over this time frame, but this most recent bottle of Dujac Clos de la Roche showed that there are still 1987s that are holding up well. The bouquet is pure and tertiary, offering up a lovely blend of cherries, plums, roasted venison, forest floor, cinnamon and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and complex, with nice intensity of flavor, autumnal complexity, sound, well-integrated acids and very respectable length and grip on the focused finish. While not in the same league as most of these vintages, the '87 Dujac Clos de la Roche remains a very enjoyable bottle. 2016-2025. **88.**

1978 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The 1978 Dujac Clos de la Roche has to be one of the finest wines of Jacques Seysses' first two decades in charge of his own domaine, and like so many of the top wines from this year, the wine is fully at its apogee and continues to drink with great vibrancy, breed and complexity. The simply stunning bouquet soars from the glass in a brilliant blend of red plums, black cherries, chocolate, gamebird, nutskin, a marvelously complex base of gently autumnal soil tones, woodsmoke and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still rock solid at the core, with great poise and complexity, melting tannins, bright acids and impeccable balance on the very long, focused and utterly refined finish. Glorious and seemingly timeless juice. 2016-2050. **96.**

THE 2015 BEAUJOLAIS VINTAGE



Spring starting to feel the sap rising in the vineyards of Régnié.

The 2015 Beaujolais vintage is the product of another hot summer in France, with very warm temperatures throughout the midsummer creating another early start to picking and wines that are big, structured and loaded with fruit. It is a very interesting vintage, as the heat of the summer was also accompanied by some hydric stress, so that there were periods when maturation was blocked (particularly true of younger vines and those planted on sandier soils), and the wines have often finished up with a surprising amount of tannin, despite their copious levels of plush fruit. The heat in France in the month of July 2015 was indeed substantial (and has only been surpassed twice in the last century), and precipitation was less than a quarter of what is normal in the month, so some vines shut down during the peak temperatures. Happily, there was rain in August to get the ripening process rolling again, but this varied in quantity by sub-region, so that thirty millimeters fell in the southern half of Beaujolais, but only ten millimeters in Moulin-à-Vent and twenty in St. Amour. Growers were quick to point out however that 2015 is most emphatically not a second coming of the equally torrid 2003 vintage in the region, as they noted that August was far cooler than was the case in 2003, which gave the vines a bit of a respite from the heat of the summer leading up to harvest, so that the most successful 2015s are far fresher out of the blocks than their counterparts from 2003. The *Ban de*

Vendange was very early in 2015, with picking in Beaujolais allowed to start as soon as August 24th in this year, but not everyone immediately rushed to bring in their grapes off of the vines, as the hydric stress of the summer months meant that tannins were often not as far along as one might have hoped when the *Ban de Vendange* was announced. As is often the case in hot years where hydric stress is also a factor, the key question for *vignerons* was how to balance climbing sugar levels with tannins that were still not optimally ripe. Some producers opted to start gathering bunches and reconciled themselves to producing wines with a bit more tannin than one might expect from a summer such as 2015, whereas others opted to focus on getting the tannins fully ripe and, as a result, have produced wines with a significantly higher degree of alcohol than normal.

Therefore, the resulting crop of 2015s is a bit more heterogeneous in Beaujolais than one might expect, with many growers very enthusiastic about what they have been able to produce, but others perhaps less sanguine about what they have in bottle or still in the cellar and are just trying to ride the hype surrounding the vintage. Georges Duboeuf, the octogenarian “King of Beaujolais” has made comparisons of the 2015s to the 1976 and the 1947 vintages in the region (and he is one of the few in Beaujolais that can probably still remember back to drinking a bit of the ‘47s in his early days in the wine trade), and this comparison with 1947 has also been picked up by few merchants touting the vintage out of the blocks in the UK. I too have drunk a few 1947s from Moulin-à-Vent over the years and I could imagine that the very, very best 2015s turning out like those wines with long aging, but I have a hard time imagining that the more overripe examples of 2015 will have the staying power to replicate the very long and healthy lives of the few 1947s that I have been lucky enough to drink. This is not to say that there are not indeed some very, very impressive examples of 2015 Beaujolais already on the market, as those who were able to negotiate the more difficult aspects of the growing season have indeed made stellar wines, but there are also some top-heavy, overripe wines that are heady and already showing a distinct lack of freshness out of the blocks. As I noted above, it is a bit of a mixed vintage in Beaujolais and one really will need to select bottles “wine by wine” to realize the excellent potential of the top examples of 2015 Beaujolais, while steering clear of those that could not successfully navigate the potential pitfalls presented by the growing season.

I should note that the pace of release of the 2015 vintage is slower than in most recent vintages in Beaujolais, as normally by the time I am putting this report together, the vast majority of bottlings of the most recent year have already shipped to New York. This is not the case with the 2015s, as the more structured aspect of many of the wines has led *vignerons* to extend the *elevage* of many of their cuvées, so that a significant percentage of 2015 Cru bottlings will not ship for another few months. I do not know what the statistics would show, but based on the samples of 2015 that I have tasted thus far, this is the most tannic vintage to emerge from the region since the structured 2011s, with the 2015s coupling their substantial chassis of tannin with bold, sappy fruit tones and plenty of muscle. Where the combination works, it works extremely well, as there are really some outstanding 2015s already in the pipeline, and I have to imagine that many of the very best (and most structured) wines of the vintage are still resting in *foudres* in the cellars. Where *vignerons* have excelled in 2015, the wines are powerful, loaded with ripe (but not overripe) fruit tones and often have plenty of tannins that will need time in the cellar to resolve before the wines will really drink with generosity. In the examples that are not so successful, there are overripe elements to the fruit (often still with a fair bit of tannin still buried

in the wines, despite a *vigneron's* apparent decision to let the bunches hang longer to ripen up those tannins) and one really wonders how long it will be until they turn overtly prune-y in personality?

One of the interesting characteristics of the 2015 Beaujolais is just how vibrant the fruit elements show out of the blocks in so many of the wines, as I was expecting to find a bit more of the “baked fruit” tones of a very hot summer reflected in the finished wines. There are a few that I have tasted that have this baked or roasted element to their fruit components, but for the most part, the 2015s that I have tasted have really been quite fresh for their level of ripeness. One actually finds a bit more of this roasted or baked fruit component in some of the 2014s than the 2015s, as the previous vintage was characterized by a couple of days of “heat spikes” that sunburned grape skins, but in 2015, this was not really an issue. But, due to the very hot summer of 2015, the time from flowering to picking was shorter than normal, as only eighty-five days separated the two (as compared to a normal span in the region of ninety-five days from *floraison* to *vendange*.) No doubt, this is one of the elements that has contributed to the more tannic impression of many 2015s, and I should mention that the tannins can be a bit “grainy” or “gritty” in texture in the young wines, as a result of the hot and shorter growing season. There are also some notable differences in levels of alcohol in the 2015s- and this does not always correlate to the relative success of a particular wine- and I would guess that this is one of the recent vintages with the widest range of alcohol levels from wine to wine. Some are in the thirteen percent range (though often still printing 12.5 percent on the label) and others that I have tasted are probably north of 14.5 percent. I have read reports of grapes being brought in at harvest with potential alcohols as high as seventeen percent, but happily, I have not seen any of these wines in my lineup of samples! As the notes below will show, occasionally one of these riper examples will show some heat on the palate, but often the riper wines are beautifully balanced at their higher than normal octane levels.

The two most recent vintages in Beaujolais that seem to share some commonalities with 2015 are 2011 and 2009, and it is interesting to contrast these two vintages with 2015. The 2011 vintage was quite tannic out of the blocks as well, but the size and shape of the wines was quite typical of a young Beaujolais vintage, and the tannins from the beginning seemed riper and more seamlessly-integrated into the base of the wines than is the case with many of the 2015s. However, 2011 did not have the same depth or generosity of ripe fruit to go along with its tannic structure, and so many of the 2011s simply demanded time in the cellar before they could start to blossom and drink with generosity. In contrast, there is so much (often very beautiful) fruit to be found in 2015 that many of these wines will be quite drinkable early on, despite often a rather significant spine of tannin. In contrast, 2009, which was the last really ripe year in Beaujolais prior to 2015, produced nowhere near the same structural chassis as is commonly found in the latter vintage. While the 2009s shared a similar abundance of ripe fruit with 2015, they do not have that same backbone of tannin that promises very long evolution in bottle, and which in many cases in 2015 will also demand some bottle age before starting to drink the wines. With six years between the two vintages, it is hard to trust my memory on this count, but at least at this early stage (and I should reiterate that a lot of 2015s have not yet shipped and consequently I have not yet had a chance to sample as many cuvées as I normally would by this time in the year), it seems to me that the top 2015s have a leg up on freshness of fruit tone on their equally successful counterparts from 2009. I would also expect that the 2015s will retain their veneer of

vibrancy longer in bottle than the 2009s have generally done, as a significant portion of the '09 wines today show a bit of a roasted quality to their fruit elements as a result of their also quite warm growing season.

I should note that it took me longer than usual to taste through my lineup of 2015 Beaujolais in preparation for this report, as I have found that in this vintage, the wines really start out a bit monolithic when first poured in the glass and often some extended aeration is necessary to really start to see all of the inherent complexity to be found in so many of the successful examples. There is a density to both the nose and flavors that is admirable in the top 2015s and which I have not encountered in past vintages from the region. This depth and density is a signature element of the vintage in general, and it is as true with the straight Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages bottlings as it is with more traditionally structured wines such as Morgon or Moulin-à-Vent. All of this augurs very well for the potential longevity of the top wines of 2015, and one of the key elements in their long-term evolution will be just how ripe the tannins ended up by the time the grapes were brought in. But, all in all, this is a very, very good vintage in Beaujolais for the most successful wines and one that is quite unique in style and character. There are some beautiful wines for earlier drinking, where the tannins do not play such a prominent role, and others (even at the Beaujolais-Villages level) that will need at least a few years' worth of bottle age to really start to drink with generosity on the palate. At this point in time, I like the overall balance of the 2011s better than I do the 2015s, but there are still a lot of top 2015s to taste, and perhaps by the time I complete my follow-up report on these later releases, my impressions of the relative merits of the two vintages may shift.

For those whose palate preferences do not run towards riper vintages like 2015, there are still a myriad of excellent options to be found from the two previous vintages in Beaujolais, 2014 and 2013. I have tasted quite a few 2014s in preparation for this report as well, as many remain the current vintages in the pipeline and readily available from the trade. As I noted last year, it is a very, very good vintage in Beaujolais and the wines are quite classic in profile, with the exception of the few that show some roasted characteristics from the heat spike that caused a bit of sunburn to the skins. It is a vintage that has the lovely leafiness (not greenies) and gentle pepper tones of classic young Beaujolais, and this personality trait is really quite evident when the wines are tasted alongside some of the 2015s. In several of my tastings of the two vintages for this article, I would work my way through a range of 2015s, and then tackle similar wines from the 2014 vintage. This served to contrast the two years stylistically quite nicely and it was very easy to appreciate the lovely and quite different attributes inherent in the top wines from each vintage. The 2014s do not have the depth and power, nor the tannins, of the 2015s, but they are very pure, soil-driven and classic examples of young Beaujolais and they will also age long and gracefully. There also remains a fair bit of 2013 out on the market, and this too is a very good vintage for the region, which continues to remind me quite strongly of the 2010 Beaujolais crop. The wines are a bit less intensely flavored than their corresponding 2014, but they are complex, poised and well-balanced and offer up plenty of enjoyment in their own right.

As I finish up this article at the start of September, there are still on their way to me many of the top crus bottlings from 2015, and I will have a follow-up article on the vintage in Beaujolais in one of the next issues as well. As has been the case for the last several years now, the notes below are organized by appellation first, followed a chronological sorting and finally,

alphabetical listing by producer within each vintage section. So all of the 2015 Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages wines are listed together in their own section, followed by their counterparts from 2014 or 2013, and this organization is then mirrored amongst the Cru bottlings, with the communes listed geographically from north to south.

Beaujolais Blanc

2015 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaine des Terres d'Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2015 Beaujolais Blanc from Jean-Paul Brun is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up ripe fruit, coupled to impressively vivid soil tones. The bouquet shows a touch of the exotic in its mélange of pear, peach, esthery bee pollen notes, hazelnut, lovely soil tones and a whisper of acacia blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with a good core, fine transparency, sound framing acids and lovely length and grip on the focused finish. This is a touch deeper-pitched in profile than is customary in most vintages, but it remains fresh and light on its feet and will drink well over the near-term. 2016-2020. **88.**

2015 Beaujolais Blanc “Terroir de Châtillon”- Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2015 Beaujolais Blanc “Terroir de Châtillon” from Domaine Chasselay is fairly ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent octane this year, but shows lovely minerality and freshness on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is just a touch deep-pitched as a result of the torrid summer, offering up scents of peach, fresh apricot, musky floral tones, a touch of fruit skin and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite wide open in personality, with a juicy attack, fairly modest acids and grip, but good length on the slightly warm finish. This will be for drinking over the near-term, but it has depth and is tasty. 2016-2018. **86.**

2014 Beaujolais Blanc “les Vignes de la Roche”- Château de Lavernette

The 2014 Beaujolais Blanc “les Vignes de la Roche” from Château de Lavernette hails from a parcel of twenty-five year-old vines. The wine is very pretty on the nose, offering up scents of nectarine, crab apple, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of almond. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and wide open in personality, with nice balance and a long, juicy finish. Not overly complex, but good, honest juice. 2016-2018. **87.**

Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages (and One Bourgogne Rouge)

2015 Beaujolais “Quatre Saisons”- Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The 2015 Beaujolais “Quatre Saisons” from Claire et Fabien Chasselay is a very nice example of this ripe vintage, with an extra depth of fruit and a bit more tannin than is customary for this bottling, but also a very good base of soil and the purity one expects from this fine producer. The complex bouquet offers up a precise and sappy blend of red and black cherries, gamebird, woodsmoke, a touch of dark chocolate, fresh thyme and lovely soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly ripe in personality, with a lovely core, good focus and grip, a dollop of backend tannin on the vibrant finish. The label here claims 12.5 percent octane, but I have to believe it is a bit higher than this, but the wine really has lovely freshness for a 2015 and is a very successful example. 2016-2025. **90+.**

2015 Beaujolais “Les Grands Eparcieux”- Domaine Claire et Fabien Chasselay

The Les Grands Eparcieux from Claire et Fabien Chasselay is the oldest vine cuvée of their straight Beaujolais bottlings, and the 2015 version is really strong, offering up a deep, pure and sappy nose of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of gamebird, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, hints of the *garrigue* to come and violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows a fair bit of tannin for a straight Beaujolais bottling, with a rock solid core,

fine focus and grip and a long, chewy and impressive finish. The wine is 13.5 percent octane on the label, and this seems correct, but it is a nicely ripe and broad-shouldered example of Beaujolais that really could do with a year or two in the cellar to fully blossom. The bouquet is very fresh for the vintage, but the palate is not quite as vibrant as the nose, with a bit more of a baked fruit element on the backend. However, this is a strong 2015 and should age quite nicely over the middle term, as it does not cross the line into the realm of *sur maturité*. 2018-2025+. **91.**

2015 Beaujolais-Villages- Damien Coquelet

The 2015 Beaujolais-Villages from Damien Coquelet is really a beautiful example of the vintage, as the ripeness of this year adds depth and a plushness to the palate, without changing the character from true Beaujolais. The bouquet is deep and exuberant, jumping from the glass in a blend of red plums, black cherries, a dollop of chocolate, nutskin, a nice touch of spice and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is succulent, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core, lovely nascent complexity and like so many 2015s, a bit of backend tannin that adds a nice sturdy note on the long finish. The label reads 12.5 percent, but I would suspect this is about a point higher, but it has retained lovely freshness and bounce for what is really a pretty big example of Beaujolais-Villages. Fine juice. 2016-2025+. **91.**

2015 Beaujolais “Cuvée Kéké”- Kevin Descombes

Kevin Descombes’ 2015 version of his Beaujolais “Cuvée Kéké” (a barrel fermented Beaujolais that bears his nickname of Kéké) is outstanding. The wine is ripe and very pure for the vintage, offering up a sappy and classy bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, violets, dark soil tones and a topnote of clove-like spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very sappy at the core, with excellent focus and grip, just a whisper of backend tannin and fine complexity on the juicy and very long finish. Again, this is listed at 12.5 percent octane, but it is well north of that, though perfectly balanced. A really lovely 2015. 2015-2025. **91+.**

2015 Beaujolais-Villages “1940 Vignes”- Jean-Michel Dupré

The “1940 Vignes” bottling of Beaujolais-Villages from Jean-Michel Dupré is, as the name implies, made from very old vines, which are more than seventy years old today. The 2015 version is ripe and succulent, jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of pomegranate, black cherries, granite soil tones, violets and a gentle topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and well-balanced, with fine freshness to its profile, a lovely core, bright acids and fine focus and balance on the gently tannic and impressively long finish. This is really a superb bottle of Beaujolais-Villages and a great value! 2016-2025+. **91.**

2015 Beaujolais- Michel Guignier

The 2015 Michel Guignier Beaujolais bottling is a bit riper than its 2014 counterpart, but equally fresh and vivacious in personality. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a sappy blend of black cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of raw cocoa, woodsmoke, a touch of walnut, lovely soil tones and a topnote of lavender and rosemary. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very broad-shouldered for this bottling, with some chewy backend tannin, a fine core and a long, youthful and fairly ripe finish. Like several of the 2015s I tasted for this report, this wine seems quite accessible on the nose, but is still quite primary and structured on the palate and could do with a bit of bottle age to really blossom. This is a big-boned example of Beaujolais and should age quite well. 2017-2025+. **89+.**

2015 Gamay “Poppy”- Yohan Lardy

Yohan Lardy is based in Fleurie and owns vines also in Moulin-à-Vent and the Beaujolais-Villages appellations. His Gamay “Poppy” is a bottling he makes from part of his

Beaujolais-Villages production, with the cuvée's name and label aimed at the local bistros in Lyon. The 2015 is really lovely, offering up a bright and impressively deep bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, violets, a nice touch of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and sappy at the core, with lovely focus and grip, just a touch of the vintage's tannin on the backend and very good length and grip on the finish. This is an impressively serious wine for its idiom. 2016-2022+. 89.



2014 “en 2014 Simone c’est moi” Vin de France- Julie Balagny

I assume that this bottling is Beaujolais that was deemed “atypical” by the INAO and denied its proper appellation in 2014 (as if there was *typicité* in all those banana bubblegum-scented Georges Duboeuf wines from the decade of the 1990s?). The wine is certainly pale in color, but long on personality and intensity of flavor. The bouquet offers up a fine and quite classic blend of cherries, cranberries, complex soil tones, a touch of mustard seed, woodsmoke and a spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and a tad volatile, with lovely intensity and transparency, just a whisper of backend tannin and a long, tangy and complex finish. I assume that it was the volatile acidity that denied this wine its AOC, as there is a fair bit, but this blows off quite a bit with some extended aeration and there is no denying that this wine is just loaded with personality. Certainly this level of volatility is a flaw, but so are spit-polished wines shaped exclusively by commercial yeasts, extraction enzymes, powdered tannins and the

aesthetic philosophy of McDonalds, and how many of those are denied their AOC? Despite the volatility, I really, really like this wine! 2016-2020+? **90.**

2014 Beaujolais “Cuvée Ancienne”- Domaine des Terres d’Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2014 Cuvée Ancienne Vieilles Vignes bottling from Jean-Paul Brun is once again excellent, as this very consistently outstanding wine never seems to miss a beat. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a pure and classic constellation of black cherries, cranberries, fresh herb tones, a complex base of soil and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely structured for the long haul, with a good core, fine focus and balance, just a bit of backend tannin and lovely bounce on the long and soil-driven finish. This is another classic in the making and I would opt to give it a bit of bottle age before starting to drink it. 2018-2035. **92.**

2014 Bourgogne Rouge- Domaine des Terres d’Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2014 Bourgogne Rouge from Domaine des Terres d’Orées is really a beautiful bottle of pinot noir, and would have no trouble holding its own with some of the very best examples from the Côte d’Or. The bouquet is pure and youthfully complex, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of cherries, raspberries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, fresh thyme and incipient notes of gamebird. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and tangy, with a bit of youthful *herbacité*, tangy acids, lovely sappiness at the core and a long, focused and soil-driven finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to grow out of its slightly herbal adolescence, but it is going to be a dynamite example of its level when it has had a chance to blossom. 2020-2040. **90.**

2014 Beaujolais- Maison Louis Jadot

The 2014 straight Beaujolais from Maison Jadot is a very pretty example of the vintage, offering up a bright nose of cherries, sweet cranberries, a bit of vinesmoke, gentle nuttiness, herb tones and a really lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and has good intensity at the core, with zesty acids, fine focus and pretty impressive complexity on the crunchy and well-balanced finish. This is a very serious bottle of “straight” Beaujolais and a wine that is really tasty right now, but clearly has the stuffing to age a decade! Fine value. 2016-2026. **88.**

2014 Beaujolais-Villages- Maison Louis Jadot

The 2014 Beaujolais-Villages from Maison Louis Jadot has more depth on both the nose and palate than the straight Beaujolais, as well as more precision and is really an excellent bottle. The beautifully focused nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pomegranate, cranberry, a touch of raw cocoa, a touch of violet, lovely, granite-like soil tones, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine medium-full, tangy and more structured and soil-driven, with a good core, just a bit of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the vibrant and still youthful finish. This will clearly cellar well and could easily be a fifteen or twenty year example of Beaujolais-Villages. It is one of the most impressive young vintages of this bottling I have tasted. 2016-2030+? **90+.**

2014 Beaujolais-Villages- Château de Lavernette

The 2014 Beaujolais-Villages from Château de Lavernette is a lovely wine that is produced from organically-farmed vineyards, as Château de Lavernette is Ecocert certified and has been in the process of transition to full biodynamics since 2007. The bouquet offers up a pure and vibrant blend of sweet cranberries, cherries, woodsmoke, just a whisper of pepper and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite sappy at the core, with lovely focus and grip, a trace of backend tannin, good acids and fine length on the

youthfully sappy finish. This has just a touch of the leafiness of 2014, but really has impressive stuffing and complexity for a young Beaujolais-Villages. 2016-2025+. **89.**

2014 Beaujolais-Leynes “le Clos”- Château de Lavernette

Château de Lavernette is located in the north of Beaujolais, on the border with Mâcon, and their Beaujolais-Leynes bottling is from forty-eight year-old vines in this sector of the region. The wine is entirely whole clusters and is barrel-fermented in four year-old casks. The 2014 version is excellent on both the nose and palate, jumping from the glass in a complex aromatic mix of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of cola, lovely soil tones, a whisper of oak toast and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with a sappy core, fine transparency, a bit of backend tannin and lovely tanginess and focus on the long and youthfully vibrant finish. This is really fine juice! 2016-2030+. **91+.**

2014 Beaujolais “Beau!”- Loron et Fils (screwcap)

As I noted last September, the 2014 version of “Beau!” Beaujolais from Loron et Fils is really good wine, but as it is bottled under a screwcap, it is a wine that must be drunk in its youth. I was very happy to see another sample bottle arrive this August, as I wondered how the wine would have fared under its closure. The wine has evolved in a very interesting direction over the last ten months, offering up a touch of maturity today in its bouquet of sappy black cherries, a bit of cookie dough, violets, sarsaparilla, a dollop of herb tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and getting just a tad reductively pinched from the mid-palate back, but still with a good core and complexity. The finish has not lost any length, but has lost dimension from the screwcap and is rather clenched on the backend. The wine has certainly evolved since last year, and while it remains quite youthful in its constituent elements, it is not the same charmer it was a year ago. I would drink up. 2016-2018. **86.**

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

It had been two years since I last saw a bottle of the 2013 La Platière from Domaine Chasselay. This is a single vineyard cuvée that is raised in older Burgundy casks and the 2013 is evolving beautifully and making good on all the promise it showed a couple of years back. The bouquet is starting to show some secondary development in its complex mélange of cherries, cranberries, bonfire, roasted gamebird, gently autumnal soil tones and coffee. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, bright and complex, with fine transparency, lovely sappiness at the core, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long and beautifully balanced finish. This wine can still be found in the New York market and is an excellent option for those looking for classic Beaujolais with a bit of the complexity of bottle age. High class juice. 2016-2025. **91.**

2013 Beaujolais-Villages “Cuvée l’Ancienne”- Domaine Marcel Joubert

Marcel Joubert has been running the ten hectare family domaine since 1972. All of the vineyards are now certified organic and have been farmed biodynamically for several years. Monsieur Joubert ferments with indigenous yeasts and bottles all of his wines unfinned and unfiltered. The 2013 Beaujolais-Villages “Cuvée à l’Ancienne” from Marcel Joubert is a lovely wine, offering up a bright and classic nose of cranberries, tart cherries, fresh thyme, a touch of bonfire, lovely soil tones and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and light on its feet, with fine intensity of flavor, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long and well-balanced finish. A lovely middleweight that still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2016-2025. **90.**

2011 Beaujolais-Villages “Clos de Creuse Noire”- Domaine du Tiellet

The Domaine du Tiellet is owned by Isabelle and Patrick Giloux, which is located in the northern end of the Beaujolais region and is actually far closer to the city of Mâcon and the Cru Beaujolais villages of the north than it is to the lion's share of Beaujolais-Villages ranked vineyards, which lie in the southern half of the appellation. The Clos de Creuse Noire is a vineyard planted to fifty year-old vines and the 2011 version offers up a vibrant bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, violets, a touch of gamebird, a very impressive base of soil tones and a dollop of vinesmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and sappy at the core, with impressive transparency, a whisper of remaining tannin and outstanding length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This has superb stuffing for Beaujolais-Villages (it is a 2011 after all) and also very impressive soil signature. It is now drinking at its peak at age five, but clearly has plenty of life still ahead of it. Domaine du Tiellet is a completely new producer to me, but if this wine is any indication of their customary level, then this is a name that I intend to follow very closely in the years to come. A dynamite example of Beaujolais-Villages! 2016-2025+. **91.**

Saint-Amour

2015 Saint-Amour “Esprit de Séduction”- Pascal Berthier

The 2015 Saint-Amour “Esprit de Séduction” from Pascal Berthier is produced from a plot of vines in the superb Clos des Billards vineyard, made famous by Domaine des Billards. Monsieur Berthier's parcel is fifty years of age and the wine is raised in cement tanks. The bouquet on the 2015 is ripe and quite black fruity for young Saint-Amour, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, espresso, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful for Saint-amour, with a fine core, very good balance and grip, moderate tannins and a long, primary and black fruity finish. This is a good bottle, but like so many of the 2015 Crus, it will be better with a bit of time in the cellar. 2017-2030. **90+.**

2014 St. Amour- Domaine des Billards

As readers already know, Domaine des Billards is one of my absolute favorite Cru Beaujolais producers, and I put them in my top five estates in the region. These wines age magnificently and really are the Chambolles of Beaujolais when they are fully mature (perhaps this explains my affinity?) and can rival the top wines of Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent at their apogees. They are probably not as long-lived, but at age twenty or thirty, Domaine des Billards is a great glass of wine! The 2014 Billards is an outstanding example of the vintage, offering up a pure and youthful bouquet of black cherries, red plums, a touch of nutskin, violets, complex soil tones, woodsmoke and a bit of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tangy and tightly-knit still, with a lovely core, impeccable focus and balance and a long, tangy and primary finish. This wine is still a year or two away from starting to seriously blossom and probably a decade away from its true zenith. Great juice. 2017-2035. **93.**

2014 St. Amour- Domaine de la Pirolette

It has been a year since I last tasted a bottle of the 2014 St. Amour from Domaine de la Pirolette, which is now owned by a partnership that includes the Barbet family. The wine is a touch reductive when first opened and needs a bit of extended aeration to blossom, but with a bit of time, it offers up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, blood orange, bonfire, spit-roasted gamebird, fresh thyme and a beautifully complex base of dark soil. On the palate the wine is deep, nascently complex and full-bodied, with plenty of structure, a great core and a

long, focused and very promising finish. I am just a bit worried about the reduction here, as after an hour in decanter, it seemed to reclose and go reductive again on me, so I wonder if this is locking in and the wine will always have to deal with this characteristic. If this proves to be the case, the score will fall with passing time. However, if this is just a youthful phase, then the wine should be very good indeed with another couple of years of bottle age. 2018-2035? **87-91?**

Chiroubles

2015 Chiroubles “l’Aurore des Côtes”- Fabien Collonge

The 2015 Chiroubles “l’Aurore des Côtes” from Fabien Collonge is produced from forty-five year-old vines and is fermented and aged in cement tanks. The 2015 version is really a beautiful example of the vintage, synthesizing the ripeness of the year with lovely vibrancy and soil signature. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vivid blend of pomegranate, black cherries, woodsmoke, just a whisper of fresh thyme and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite structured for Chiroubles, with a sappy core of black fruit, fine transparency, a fair bit of ripe tannin and a long, primary and very promising finish. This is still a puppy and will be even better with a few years of bottle age, but it is also really enjoyable to drink today in its infancy. Outstanding Chiroubles. 2016-2030. **92.**

2015 Chiroubles- Damien Coquelet

The 2015 Chiroubles from Damien Coquelet is a fine, fine follow-up to his beautiful 2014 version. The lovely and sappy nose shows just a whisper of baked fruit elements in its mélange of black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, violets, lovely soil tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and really nicely structured, with a sappy core harnessed behind a bit of tannin, bright acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long and still quite youthful finish. This is an absolutely superb young bottle of Chiroubles that seems to want to be a Morgon this year, as it shows uncanny structure for the long haul and is destined to be an absolutely gorgeous wine with a bit of bottle age. The hint of baked fruit tones meld beautifully into the vibrancy of the wine and really give this high class Chiroubles a bit of 1982 Bordeaux personality. It is approachable today, but I would opt for giving it at least a couple of years in the cellar to more fully blossom, as this is going to be a very uncharacteristically long-lived and epic bottle of Chiroubles. 2018-2035+. **93+.**

Chénas

2015 Chénas “en Rémont”- Pascal Aufranc

The 2015 Chénas “en Rémont” from Pascal Aufranc hails from a parcel of vines that was planted in 1939, making them seventy-six years of age in this ripe vintage of 2015. The wine offers up a deep and black fruity bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, charred wood, gamebirds, chicory and a gentle topnote of cardamom. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, black fruity and fairly roasted in personality, with a good base of soil, a fine core, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and nascently complex finish. This is hardly a classic bottle of Chénas, being far more a product of its vintage, with the fruit tones borderline overripe, but with good depth and impressive length. It is quite clearly one of the most serious examples of Chénas out there, but a bit atypical in the ripe year of 2015. 2016-2023. **88.**

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

I had loved the 2011 Chénas “la Carrière” from Domaine Chasselay, and the 2013 version is a fine follow-up to that excellent wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and expressive,

wafting from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of raw cocoa, dusty rose, a stylish base of soil and a whisper of sweet nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and a bit more reserved than the nose suggests, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and slightly peppery finish. Good juice that will continue to improve with a bit more bottle age, but which is quite tasty today. The cool fruit tones and bit of backend pepperiness comes as a bit of a shock after tasting all these buxom 2015s! 2016-2023. **91.**

2012 Chénas “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Sancy (Bernard Broyer)

The 2012 Chénas “Vieilles Vignes” from Bernard Broyer is produced from a parcel of ninety-five year-old vines. The wine is quite black fruity on both the nose and palate, offering up a complex bouquet of dark berries, espresso, dark soil tones, a bit of marjoram, hints of curry and fresh dill and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and well-balanced, with a good solid core, a touch of tannin and good length and grip on the long, focused and ever so slightly herbal finish. 2012 was a very, very difficult growing season and the moderate ripeness of this wine is evident, but the old vine depth compensates nicely and makes it still quite a tasty bottle and a heroic effort for the vintage. I would love to taste this cuvée in a top flight year such as 2011 or 2014! 2016-2023. **87.**



Juliéna

2015 Juliéna “les Cerisiers”- Pascal Aufranc

The Juliéna “les Cerisiers” cuvée from Pascal Aufranc takes its name from the cherry trees that are planted within the vineyard. The vines here are sixty-five years of age and the wine is partially raised in older casks for part of the *elevage*. The 2015 les Cerisiers offers up a deep and sappy nose of black cherries, a bit of charred wood, roasted gamebird, a touch of coffee grounds and dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and broad-shouldered for Juliéna, with a fine core of fruit, a bit of gritty backend tannin and a very long, chewy and nascently complex finish. This really shows the stuffing of the vintage and is quite a robust example of its village, but there is impressive depth and nascent complexity here as well. This is as structured as 2011 Cru Beaujolais, but with more of the ripe fruit personality of the 2015 vintage. Good juice that will be even better with some bottle age. 2017-2027. **89+**.

Moulin-à-Vent

2015 Moulin-à-Vent “les Thorins”- Lucien Lardy

The 2015 Moulin-à-Vent “les Thorins” from Lucien Lardy is a new bottling from this Fleurie-based *vigneron*, as this is the first vintage where he has produced a bottling from this fine parcel of seventy year-old vines. The wine is raised primarily in cement tanks, but fifteen percent spent its *elevage* in older Burgundy casks. The wine offers up a superbly vibrant nose of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of grilled meat, chicory, a fine base of dark soil and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great focus and grip, impressive transparency for the vintage, moderate tannins and a long, poised and tangy finish. This has harnessed the ripeness of 2015 seamlessly and will be a long-distance runner of impressive quality! It is approachable today, but really built to age and I would try to tuck it away in the cellar for at least a few years before starting to drink it in earnest. It reminds me quite a bit of some of the 2005 Moulin-à-Vents I tasted in their youth a decade ago! 2018-2040+. **92+**.

2015 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine Richard Rottiers

The Moulin-à-Vent bottling from Richard Rottiers is comprised of fruit from several of the *lieux à dits* in the appellation, with the vines averaging a very respectable sixty-five years of age. The wine is raised in a combination of sixty-five percent old, big Beaujolais *foudres* and thirty-five percent aged Burgundy casks sourced in Chablis. The 2015 is ripe, but not overtly overripe out of the blocks, with the complex bouquet offering up scents of sweet cassis, grilled squab, dark chocolate, sarsaparilla, dark soil tones, fire pit and a touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with moderate tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the focused and still quite primary finish. This pushes up to the boundaries of *sur maturité* and this would incline me to drink it on the younger side, as right now, it is certainly not overripe in personality and quite delicious to drink, despite a bit of youthful tannin. But, it could end up seeming overripe if forgotten in the cellar for a decade, as it can see over the border! 2016-2025+? **90**.

2014 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine les Terres d’Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Monsieur Brun’s 2014 Moulin-à-Vent is a classic in the making, the slightly leafy overtones of 2014 nicely synthesized here into a fine mix of cassis, dark berries, chicory, dark soil tones, gamebird and currant leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and properly reserved out of the blocks, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a

long, vibrant and still very primary finish. The 2014 Morgon from Jean-Paul Brun is similarly built for the long haul, but with that wine, its balance makes it quite accessible in its youth, but this is a 2014 Moulin-à-Vent that will demand some time alone in the cellar before it starts to blossom. 2020-2050. **92+**.

2014 Moulin-à-Vent “les Michelons”- Yohan Lardy

The 2014 Moulin-à-Vent “les Michelons” from Yohan Lardy hails from a parcel of old vines, with the plantation of this parcel having occurred between 1911 and 1950, making the youngest vines sixty-four years of age and the oldest now in excess of one hundred! The wine is fermented traditionally with native yeasts and aged in older Burgundy casks. The 2014 les Michelons offers up a pure and classic bouquet of dark berries, chicory, spit-roasted gamebird, dark soil tones, a touch of pepper and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still fairly youthful in profile, with a fine core, modest tannins, good acids and a long, primary and quite promising finish. This is very well-balanced and today, a bit buttoned up behind its lovely structure, but it will age long and gracefully and is a classic 2014 vintage example of Moulin-à-Vent. Impressive! 2017-2035+. **91+**.

2014 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes de 1903”- Yohan Lardy

The Vieilles Vignes de 1903 bottling of Moulin-à-Vent from Yohan Lardy also hails from a plot of vines in the *climat* of les Michelons, but all of these vines were planted in 1903 (as the label implies), making them one hundred and eleven years old in 2014! This bottling sees a bit of carbonic maceration, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and is raised in cement tanks prior to bottling. The 2014 VV offers up a fine, fine nose of cassis, sweet dark berries, espresso, a dollop of fresh herbs, a beautiful base of dark soil tones, a touch of Gevrey-like grilled meats and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature, just a bit of tannin and a long, balanced and complex finish. The signature of the 2014 vintage imparts a savory element here on the nose and palate that I find very exciting. 2016-2040. **93**.

2013 Moulin-à-Vent- Xavier et Nicolas Barbet

The 2013 Moulin-à-Vent from Xavier et Nicolas Barbet is a lovely example of this very classic, low fat vintage, wafting from the glass in a fine aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, a touch of currant leaf, espresso, complex, dark soil tones, pepper and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and still youthfully leafy, with a lovely core and signature of soil, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the still quite primary and palate-staining finish. This is already quite enjoyable to drink, but it is still a couple of years away from reaching its apogee of peak drinkability. I would be inclined to cellar it for a few more years and really let it start to hit on all cylinders. 2018-2040+. **91+**.

2010 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Moriers

This is the first time that I have tasted the 2010 vintage of Moulin-à-Vent from Domaine des Moriers and the wine is absolutely stellar. The bouquet is now wide open and offers up a very pure and vibrant bouquet of cassis, black cherries, espresso, a fine, fine base of dark soil tones, balsam bough and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, lovely balance and complexity and a long, soil-driven and utterly classic expression of Moulin-à-Vent on the finish. This is just starting to blossom properly, but it will still continue to improve as the last bit of remaining tannins continue to fall away, and there is nothing wrong with giving this fine wine another couple of years to reach its apogee. Like all

of the vintages that I have tasted of François de Nicolay's Moulin-à-Vent, the 2010 is outstanding. 2017-2035. **92+**.

2006 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Moriers

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2006 Moulin-à-Vent from François de Nicolay's Domaine des Moriers in five years and was curious to see how it was evolving, as it was *à point* when it last crossed my path. In proper Moulin-à-Vent fashion, the wine is denying the passage of time and continues to drink splendidly, offering up a complex bouquet of cassis, chicory, spiced meats, forest floor, woodsmoke, a touch of espresso and fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and transparent, with a lovely core, tangy acids and excellent intensity of flavor on the long and vibrant finish. Just a lovely bottle at its apogee and still with plenty of life ahead of it. 2016-2030. **94**.

Fleurie

2015 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2015 Fleurie Clos de la Roilette from Alain Coudert is a ripe and flamboyant example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a sappy mix of black cherries, pomegranate, chocolate, dark soil tones, gamebird, a hint of lavender and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush on the attack and a bit chewy on the backend, with a sappy core, fairly low acids for this bottling, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and fairly powerful finish. The label here claims thirteen percent octane, but this is a bigger boy than that and is probably at least fourteen percent. It is plenty ripe in personality, but very well-balanced in its broad-shouldered style and quite tasty. It is as ripe as the 2009, but chewier and a bit denser in profile. 2016-2025+. **90**.

2015 Fleurie "Chapelle des Bois"- Domaine de la Grand'Cour (Jean-Louis Dutraive)

The 2015 Chapelle des Bois from Jean-Louis Dutraive hails from a parcel of vines that range from twenty to over seventy years of age, with slightly deeper soils than his other vineyards in Fleurie. His 2015 Chapelle des Bois comes in at fourteen percent and offers up a deep and fruit-driven nose of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, lovely spice tones and a dollop of dark soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a generous core of fruit, just a touch of tannin and fine length and grip on the focused and voluptuous finish. This is always the most fruit forward bottling in Monsieur Dutraive's lineup and the 2015 will drink well from the moment it hits these shores. It is a big, bold example of Fleurie with no signs of overripeness and a fine example of the vintage. 2016-2022. **90**.

2015 Fleurie "Cuvée Vieilles Vignes Le Clos"- Domaine de la Grand'Cour (J-L. Dutraive)

These eighty year-old vines from Monsieur Dutraive have produced a slightly riper wine in 2015, as this wine tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol. However, the nose shows no signs of overripeness in its fine constellation of plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, beautiful, dark soil tones, gamebirds, a touch of fresh thyme and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, but with a nice sense of reserve that is not evident on the Chapelle des Bois bottling this year. The core is sappy and rock solid, there is some ripe tannin perking up the finish and the wine is balanced, focused and nascently complex. This is a terrific 2015 Fleurie that is approachable out of the blocks, but will be even better with a year or two in the cellar. 2016-2030. **93**.

2015 Fleurie "Clos de la Grand'Cour"- Domaine de la Grand'Cour (J-L. Dutraive)

The 2015 Clos de la Grand'Cour is also 14.5 percent alcohol, but this is the lightest in color of the three Fleuries from this vintage that I tasted from Monsieur Dutraive. The wine

offers up an excellent bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, raw cocoa, gamebird, really pretty spice tones, roses and a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and impressively transparent, with a sappy core of fruit, a bit of backend tannin, good acids and fine length and grip on the complex and well-balanced finish. This manages its ripeness very nicely and shows no signs of heat on the backend, but one can sense the octane a tad here on the finish. I like this wine very much, but my gut instinct is that this will drink best in its relative youth, and the ripeness may start to undo its beautiful balance with extended bottle age. 2016-2025+? **92.**

2015 Fleurie “les Roches”- Lucien Lardy

The 2015 Fleurie “les Roches” from Lucien Lardy and his son Yohan hails from one of the pink granite-based, hillside vineyards in the village, planted to sixty-seven year-old vines. The wine offers up a ripe and slightly roasted bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, French roast, dark soil tones and scorched earth. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe, bordering on notes of *sur maturité*. The core has plenty of depth, the tannins are modest and the finish is long and nascently complex, but this is one 2015 that may turn overripe in profile fairly quickly. Very much a child of its vintage. 2016-2025. **87.**

2015 Fleurie- Julien Sunier

The 2015 Fleurie from Julien Sunier is notably light in color for the vintage, with a classic ruby red color, rather than the purple tones that are so typical in 2015. The wine is 13.5 percent octane and offers up a bright and vibrant bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of nutskin, beautiful soil tones, hints of mustard seed and thyme and a very discreet bass note of oak spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more emblematic of the vintage than the nose suggests, with a plush core of fruit, a good dollop of soil, a touch of backend tannin and a long, focused and complex finish. This is a very successful 2015 that stays admirably light on its feet. 2016-2025. **92.**

2014 Fleurie- Domaine des Terres d’Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2014 Fleurie from Domaine des Terres d’Orées is just a touch tight when first opened, so give it a bit of time in decanter if you are going to drink it early on. Once it blossoms, the wine is stellar, offering up a pure and classic nose of cherries, pomegranate, coffee, herb tones, a nice base of soil and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a lovely structural integrity, tangy acids, laser-like focus and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and discreetly leafy finish. This is not your plush, *vin de soif* example of Fleurie, but a serious wine that needs a couple of years in the cellar to really start to hit on all cylinders. It will be outstanding once it has fully blossomed. 2018-2035. **92+.**

2014 Fleurie “Grille Midi”- Domaine des Terres d’Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The single vineyard bottling of Grille Midi (one of the top *climats* in the village of Fleurie) is once again outstanding from Monsieur Brun in 2014. The wine is again fairly reserved when first opened and deserves a bit of time in decanter to start to stir, but once it opens up, it delivers a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gamebird, dark soil tones, a touch of chicory and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great purity on the attack, a touch of fine-grained tannin, excellent balance and nascent complexity and a very long, tangy and youthful finish. This is a great Fleurie in the making that shares the structural sensibilities with the best examples of Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent. 2020-2040+. **93+.**

2014 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The 2014 Château de Fleurie has begun to open beautifully since I last saw a bottle one year ago, as the youthful structure has really begun to relax and the wine is drinking with great style and generosity today. The bouquet is deep, complex and classic, wafting from the glass in a blend of sappy black cherries, sweet dark berries, bitter chocolate, fresh thyme, dark soil tones, a touch of gamebird and a touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, still a touch of backend tannin and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is really a terrific bottle of Fleurie. 2016-2030+. **92+**.

2014 Fleurie- Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

I tasted this wine as well last December in Beaune and was happy to have a chance to revisit it this summer. As I noted last year, the Hospices de Belleville has six hectares of vines in the village of Fleurie, spread over three *climats*, with one of the three being the well-known La Madone. A percentage of the whole clusters were included in the fermentation of the Fleurie 2014, and the wine still shows a touch of their influence on the nose at this point in its evolution. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of pepperiness from the stems and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and still quite primary, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, tangy and slightly peppery finish. I would opt for tucking this away in the cellar for another year and really let it blossom properly, as the stems are still a bit strident and this may give the wine a touch too much *herbacité* for some tasters. This is just the proper evolution of a wine with some whole clusters and this element will recede with a bit more bottle age (as it does for the domaine's Musigny and Griotte-Chambertin as well), so just be a bit patient, as there are really good things happening here! 2017-2030. **91**.

2014 Fleurie “les Chênes”- Lucien Lardy

The les Chênes bottling from the Lardy family is from an even older parcel of vines than their les Roches, with these vines fully seventy-two years of age. The wine is given a five day “cold soak” prior to the start of fermentation, fermented solely with indigenous yeasts and raised for one year in older Burgundy casks. The 2014 les Chênes delivers a fine, youthful nose of cassis, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme, espresso, woodsmoke and violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and well-balanced, with a fine core, just a whisper of tannin and a long, complex and soil-driven finish that closes with a note of botanicals. This is a very tasty bottle of Fleurie that will clearly age nicely, but is already quite tasty. 2016-2025. **88**.

2013 Fleurie- Claire et Fabien Chasselay

It had been two years as well since I last tasted the 2013 Fleurie from the Chasselay and the wine has blossomed beautifully. The bouquet is now showing lovely notes of maturity in its blend of cherries, woodsmoke, autumnal soil tones, gamebirds, a bit of acorn, herbs and a dollop of coffee in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with lovely depth at the core, tangy acids, impressive balance and a long, wide open and complex finish. This continues to be beautifully defined by its soil tones and is aging very gracefully indeed. 2016-2025. **92**.

2009 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2009 Fleurie Clos de la Roilette from Alain Coudert is really drinking beautifully today, after having gone through a couple of years where it seemed rather blowsy to my palate and rather unstructured by the high standards of this superb domaine. Today the '09 has

recovered its mojo and is really excellent (and every bit as impressive as it was in its earliest days), wafting from the glass in a wide open and complex bouquet of blackberries, black cherries, dark soil tones, chicory, woodsmoke, a touch of sarsaparilla and incipient notes of acorn and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil inflection, still a bit of tannin and a long, focused and nicely soil-driven finish. The last year of bottle age has really been good to this wine and it is finally moving out of its puppy fat stage and starting to drink with the breed and inherent complexity of the Clos de la Roilette. Fine juice that is still climbing. 2016-2030. **93+**.



THE CHURCH IN THE CENTER OF FLEURIE AS SEEN FROM A NEARBY VINEYARD.

Régnié

2015 Régnié “Haut Ronze” Vieilles Vignes- Jean-Michel Dupré

The 2015 Régnié “Haut Ronze” from Jean-Michel Dupré lies close to the Morgon border on similarly granitic soils and is planted with fifty-two year-old vines. The 2015 version offers up a very classic nose of cherries, sweet cranberries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, granite soil tones, pretty spice notes redolent of cardamom and a touch of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, modest tannins, sound acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. I really like the style of this wine, which has a touch of the reserve that one would associate with young Morgon, but is not as broad-shouldered in style and will be accessible early on. In fact, it is quite delicious

today, but it will be even better if given a few years in the cellar to blossom completely. A very impressive example of Régnié. 2016-2030. **91+**.

2015 Régnié- Antoine Sunier

The 2015 Régnié from Antoine Sunier is really quite a stunning example of the vintage. The ripeness here is 13.5 percent, which makes it fairly moderate by the heady standards of 2015 and the wine offers up lovely purity and sappiness on both the nose and palate, without straying into the realm of *sur maturité*. The lovely bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of sappy black cherries, plums, sweet balsamic tones, woodsmoke, a beautiful base of soil and peonies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure for 2015, with a sappy core, great granitic mineral drive, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the still primary, but nascently complex finish. This is a stellar 2015! 2016-2030+. **93**.

2015 Régnié- Julien Sunier

The 2015 Régnié bottling from Julien Sunier (Antoine's older brother) is another really outstanding example of this ripe and historic vintage. The bouquet is deep, vibrant and loaded with ripe fruit tones, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, a touch of fruitcake, spit-roasted game, spice tones redolent of cardamom, roses and a beautiful base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and quite broad shouldered for Régnié, with tangy acids, a fair bit of tannin and a long, powerful and slightly heady finish. This is listed at 13.5 percent octane, but seems just a touch higher than this and cannot match the elegant profile of the 2015 Fleurie and Morgon from Monsieur Sunier this year. It is still a very good bottle, but it pushes the envelope a bit in terms of ripeness and in the competition between the two Sunier brothers, Antoine has won in Régnié this year. 2016-2030. **89**.

Morgon

2015 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Damien Coquelet

Damien Coquelet's 2015 Côte du Py shows a bit more ripeness on the nose than his stunning Chiroubles from this vintage, but the wine has fine balance and structure to carry it far into the future. The bouquet shows just a bit of roasted fruit character in its blend of black cherries, blueberries, spit-roasted *pigeon*, granitic soil, lovely spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and chewy, with a rock solid core, fine soil inflection, ripe tannins, tangy acids and a long, nascently complex and very soil-driven finish. This is a touch more reticent in personality than the 2015 Chiroubles *chez* Coquelet, and at this stage in the two wines' development, it seems to me that the Chiroubles is just a touch more complete (particularly in terms of tannin integration), but this is an excellent example of Côte du Py and it may catch and surpass the Chiroubles with extended cellaring. Another outstanding 2015 from Monsieur Coquelet! 2020-2045+. **92+**.

2015 Morgon “Vignes de 1935”- Domaine Jean-Michel Dupré

As I have noted in the past, the Morgon “Vignes de 1935” bottling from Jean-Michel Dupré hails from the *lieu à dit* of Grand Cras at the base of the Côte du Py. These old vines celebrated their eightieth anniversary in 2015 and offer up a really superb bouquet of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, a touch of cola, woodsmoke, fresh thyme and just a touch of balsam bough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and gently chewy, with a superb core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the quite pure, albeit youthful finish. Like many of the most successful 2015s, this has a bit of tannin to resolve, but is focused and shows only a whisper of *sur maturité*. I suspect this will

have a gently roasted personality at full maturity, but it is fine juice in need of just a bit more bottle age to blossom. 2018-2040. **91+**.

2015 Morgon “Grand Cras” Vieilles Vignes- Laurent Gauthier

The old vine Grand Cras bottling from Laurent Gauthier is raised primarily in older *foudres*, but after one year of *elevage*, fifteen percent is racked into a bit of newer cask to finish its evolution, prior to bottling. The 2015 version is excellent, jumping from the glass in a deep and serious blend of black cherries, pomegranate, dark chocolate, a fine base of granite, a dollop of fresh thyme and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very classically structured (particularly for a 2015!), with a rock solid core of fruit, superb soil inflection, firm, ripe tannins and a very long, primary and promising finish. This wine is listed at 13.5 percent octane and this seems quite accurate, which is low octane by the standards of 2015. It should prove to age long and very gracefully. 2019-2040. **91+**.

2015 Morgon “Bio-Vitis”- Michel Guignier

The vines for Michel Guignier’s Bio-Vitis bottling are now sixty-five years of age, and as old vines have realized the greatest success in 2015, it is not surprising that this cuvée is outstanding. The wine offers up a deep, sappy and black fruity nose of plums, black cherries, a touch of balsamic overtones, gamebird, dark soil tones, violets and woodsmoke. This wine is ripe and sappy, but never even approaches the line towards overripeness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, firm, chewy tannins, very good balance and a long, youthful and very promising finish. This is a puppy and will need some bottle age to really blossom, but it is a very successful 2015 that should age long and gracefully. 2020-2045+. **92+**.

2015 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Michel Guignier

The 2015 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Michel Guignier is quite the classic example of the vintage, with deep, sumptuous fruit tones, firm tannins and plenty of potential longevity in evidence in its broad-shouldered and sappy format. The bouquet is still very primary, but also pure and loaded with fruit, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, bonfire, gamebird, dark chocolate, granitic soil and violets. On the palate the wine is deep, powerfully-built and sappy at the core, with fine soil signature, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. The balance here is really good and there is absolutely no difficulty drinking this wine out of the blocks, but it is still a woefully young wine and despite its accessibility, it really deserves to be tucked away in the cellar for at least the next three or four years to allow it to blossom and start to show its secondary layers of complexity. 2020-2045+. **92**.

2015 Morgon- Antoine Sunier

Antoine Sunier is Julien’s younger brother and he too is making fantastic examples of Cru Beaujolais. His 2015 Morgon is a bit darker in color than Julien’s example (though both tip the scales at 13.5 percent octane) and offers up a beautifully sappy and pure bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, a touch of woodsmoke and a gentle influence from its older Burgundy barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, fine soil signature, a bit of chewy tannin and excellent length and grip on the still very primary finish. This is a more typical, successful example of the 2015 vintage than Julien Sunier’s version, with broad shoulders, chewy tannins and the need for some extended cellaring to fully blossom. It is a very good 2015 that steers clear of any signs of *sur maturité* and simply will require a bit of bottle age to soften up. 2020-2045. **92**.

2015 Morgon- Julien Sunier

Julien Sunier has not been making wine here in Beaujolais for all that long a time, but he is quickly becoming one of my absolute favorite sources for classic, cellar-worthy Morgon. His 2015 version is excellent, showing off the sappy fruit of the vintage to fine effect in its deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, plums, really lovely spice tones, violets, granitic soil tones, hints of the gamebird to come and a very gentle touch of oakiness from the older Burgundy casks the wine is raised in. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a sappy core, excellent focus and grip, ripe, moderate tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is 13.5 percent alcohol, which is perhaps a touch higher than the 2014 version was, but this is a very sophisticated interpretation of Morgon and could just as easily have hailed from any number of recent, top flight vintages, as the fingerprints of 2015 are not very easy to find in the glass. A superb wine that is approachable today, but will be far better to drink after a few years in the cellar. *Chapeau!* 2017-2050. **94.**

2014 Morgon- Domaine les Terres d'Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2014 Morgon from Jean-Paul Brun is a beautiful wine, with a distinctly red fruity personality and stellar transparency and breed. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, a touch of raw cocoa, complex minerality, fresh thyme and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with great soil signature, fine-grained tannins, good acids and impeccable focus and grip on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is just a superb, low fat and intensely flavored Morgon in the making. 2018-2050. **94.**

2014 Morgon "Côte du Py"- Damien Coquelet

The 2014 Morgon "Côte du Py" from Damien Coquelet is a superb example of the vintage, showing some of the high toned leafy elements of 2014, but floating over beautifully pure red fruit and fine soil elements. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of cherries, quince, a touch of pepper, granite soil nuances, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and very transparent, with a fine core, moderate tannins and a long, focused and youthful finish. This has a touch of the youthful *herbacité* of the vintage, but with a bit of bottle age, this is going to be just lovely. 2019-2045+. **91+.**

2014 Morgon- Georges Descombes

The 2014 Georges Descombes Morgon is an excellent example of the vintage and a simply classic expression of young Morgon. The bouquet is deep, pure and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, gamebird, beautiful soil tones, gentle smokiness and a touch of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with moderate tannins, bright acids, fine balance and a long, tangy and wide open finish. This is drinking with great style right out of the blocks, but has the balance to age long and gracefully as well. Classic Morgon! 2016-2035+. **92+.**

2014 Morgon- Kevin Descombes

I loved the 2014 Morgon from Kevin Descombes when I last tasted it a year ago, and one year down the road, the wine has opened up beautifully and is drinking very well indeed. The very complex bouquet continues to be defined by its almost exotic spice tones, with notes of cardamom and cloves notes very much in evidence, augmenting notes of cherry, blood orange, a fine base of soil, gamebird and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and

beautifully balanced, with marvelous transparency, a fine core of red fruit, just a touch of backend tannin and a long, complex and focused finish. This wine is aging very gracefully and is every bit as impressive as it was a year ago. Not a powerful style, but a very classic expression of the beautiful underlying *terroir* of this commune. 2016-2035. **93.**

2014 Morgon “la Voute Saint Vincent”- Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes

The Desvignes family’s 2014 la Voute Saint Vincent is a classic, transparent Morgon in the making, offering up a pure and vibrant bouquet of cherries, sappy cranberries, lovely sweet herb tones, a complex base of soil, peonies, incipient gamebird and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature, modest tannins and a long, youthful and gently leafy finish. This is a classic, very well-balanced example of 2014 and will age very well indeed. 2016-2035. **90+.**

2014 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes

The 2014 Côte du Py from Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes is an outstanding young wine, with the depth and structural integrity one expects in a top vintage of young Morgon. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a black fruity and meaty blend of black cherries, pomegranate, a bit of grilled meat, fresh herb tones, granitic soil rose petal and a touch of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely reserved in profile, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This is lovely and in need of a couple of years in the cellar to fully blossom. 2018-2040. **92.**

2014 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes

The 2014 Desvignes Javernières is again a very, very strong example of this classic vintage. The wine is a touch deeper than the Côte du Py, as well as just a bit more reserved in personality. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of venison, superb soil tones, dark chocolate, fresh thyme and bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely leafy in personality (very much in keeping with the style of 2014), with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This may always be a touch herbal in personality, but in a good way that will turn into nicely interesting, savory elements with extended bottle age. 2020-2045. **92.**

2014 Morgon “les Impénitents”- Domaine Louis Claude Desvignes

The 2014 vintage of the old vine cuvée from Javernières from the Desvignes family is a fairly black fruity example of young Morgon, but it has outstanding depth and inner core sappiness that augurs very well for its future. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of black cherries, dark berries, gamebirds, a touch of nutskin, espresso, excellent minerality, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a touch of pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a rock solid core, ripe tannins, fine focus and balance and a very long, soil-driven and promising finish. This is going to be a long-distance runner (I have bottles of this cuvée in my cellar from the 2005 vintage and they are still plenty shut down!) and is going to need some extended cellaring, but it will be outstanding in the fullness of time. But, if you are not prepared to let this hibernate in the cellar, go for the 2014 Desvignes Côte du Py bottling, as that will drink with far more generosity from a younger age! 2022-2050+. **92+.**

2014 Morgon- Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

I tasted this wine also last November and was pleased to have another look at the wine. The Hospices de Belleville’s Morgon hails from a single parcel that comprises two hectares. As I mentioned at the close of last year, the Drouhins decided to completely de-stem the Morgon in

2014, but the wine was still showing just a bit of youthful weediness this summer. Underneath is a classic Morgon in the making, offering up scents of red and black cherries, bonfire, gamebird, a bit of autumnal elements, lovely soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, nascently complex and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, lovely transparency, impressive focus and a bit of backend tannin perking up the long and tangy finish. Though this wine is approachable today, it is still a young bottle of Morgon and really deserves a few years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to fully emerge. A fine bottle in the making. 2018-2040. **92+**.

2014 Morgon “le Griottier”- Domaine Dupré

The le Griottier bottling from Jean-Michel Dupré hails from a parcel of seventy-five year-old vines in the *climat* of Grands Cras. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in cement tanks prior to bottling. The 2014 le Griottier offers up a pure and perfumed bouquet of cherries, strawberries, roses, gamebird, a lovely base of soil, just a hint of raw cocoa and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, round on the attack and superbly well-balanced, with a very good core, lovely soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is focused and classy and is quite tasty out of the blocks, but it is also a proper Morgon and will be even better with a few years’ worth of bottle age and should evolve very nicely in the bottle over the long term. Fine juice. 2016-2035+. **92**.

2014 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Foillard

This particular bottle of the 2014 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Domaine Foillard was pretty volatile and one had to look past the acetic acid on the nose to find the serious wine below. With a bit of tunnel vision, this is not too bad, offering up scents of black cherries, plums, hung game, vinesmoke and chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still shows a bit of backend tannin in need of resolution. The finish is long and focused, with good grip. If one can tolerate a bit of volatile acidity, this is a pretty tasty bottle, but was expecting a bit more soil signature here- particularly in 2014. 2016-2025. **88**.

2013 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Georges Descombes

The 2013 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Georges Descombes is a superb wine that is just starting to stir on both the nose and palate at age three. The bouquet is pure, complex and gently spicy, offering up scents of cherries, quince, gamebird, vinesmoke, a touch of acorn, granitic minerality and a topnote of Descombes spices. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and soil-driven, with a fine core, impeccable balance, tangy acids, very good focus and a long, complex and utterly seamless finish that still has just a whisper of backend tannin to resolve. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2040. **93**.

2013 Morgon- Château de Grand Pré

The Château de Grand Pré is eight hectare estate that is run by the Bertrand family in 1972, with vineyards in the communes of Villié Morgon and Fleurie. Today the estate is run by the second generation of the Bertrand family, with grandson Romain Zordan also beginning to lend a hand in the vineyards and cellars. The Morgon is produced from forty year-old vines and is fermented with indigenous yeasts, prior to its *elevage* in three to five year-old Burgundy casks, with no added sulfites prior to bottling. The bouquet on the 2013 Morgon shows just a whisper of volatile acidity when first poured, but which quickly swirls away to reveal an excellent blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of allspice (from the used Burgundy casks?), lovely granitic soil tones, a bit of espresso and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly youthful, with a fine core, very good focus and grip, moderate tannins and

a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This is definitely built for the long haul and is still a few years away from fully blossoming, but will be quite good once it has reached its apogee. 2018-2035+. **89+**.

2011 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2011 Morgon “Côte du Py” From Château Grange Cochard is starting to drink well at age five, but this remains a fairly young example of this superb vintage and this bottling will have no difficulty cruising along for another thirty years or more. The bouquet is deep, sappy and starting to show a lovely balsamic tone in its beautiful blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, dark, stony soil, balsamic notes, gamebird, just a whisper of cedar and smokiness in the distance. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a sappy core, great soil signature, modest tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and classy finish. This is a great young Morgon. 2016-2040+. **94**.



Brouilly

2015 Brouilly “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Grand Cour (Jean-Louis Dutraive)

The 2015 Brouilly “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes” from Jean-Louis Dutraive is a ripe example of the vintage, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol. The quite attractive bouquet offers up a complex mélange of baked cherries and red plums, spit-roasted gamebird, a fine base of soil, *garrigue* and a nice touch of chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and

plenty powerful for young Brouilly, with a rock solid core, a surprising bit of tannin, tangy acids and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced and ripe finish. This is really a broad-shouldered example of Brouilly (and far from classic in profile), but I like it quite well, as it has harnessed its ripeness very well indeed. Good juice and a very successful example of the 2015 vintage. 2016-2030. **90.**

2015 Brouilly “l’Enfer des Balloquets”- Robert Perroud

As I mentioned last year, this wine takes its name from the very steep hill of Balloquets, which is traditionally a “hell” for harvesters each autumn. The wine is partially fermented carbonically and aged for nine months in large *foudres*. The 2015 version from Monsieur Perroud is quite dark in color for young Brouilly and offers up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of pomegranate, black cherries, espresso, rose petals, fresh thyme and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, sappy at the core, but nicely transparent at the same time, with bright acids, a touch of backend tannin and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This is a very well-made wine, though the vintage’s character has given this more of a Morgon profile than a classically Brouilly style! 2016-2025+. **90+.**

2014 Brouilly- Georges Descombes

The 2014 Brouilly from Georges Descombes has blossomed nicely since the last time I tasted the wine in the early fall of last year, with the bouquet starting to show a touch of development in its complex mélange of red and black cherries, gamebird, fine soil nuances, a bit of fresh thyme, walnut and a smoky topnote. On the palate this continues to be an example of Brouilly with a Morgon structuralist’s heart, as the wine still has a bit of backend tannin, a fine core of fruit and impressive length and grip on the focused finish. I really like the style of this wine, which has more backbone than one typically sees from Brouilly. 2016-2025+. **90.**

2014 Brouilly- Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

I was happy to have a chance to revisit this bottling of Brouilly, which I last tasted in Beaune in November of last year. As readers may recall, the Hospices de Belleville has six hectares of vines in the commune of Brouilly. The 2014 bottling of Brouilly is the first vintage to be vinified by the Drouhin family and it is a lovely middleweight in the making. The bouquet offers up a blend of cherries, cranberries, vinessmoke, a touch of coffee, nutskin and fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and elegant in profile, with a good core, lovely soil signature, a touch of tannin and good length and grip on the complex finish. This does not have the overt fruit forward personality of the *négociant* cru bottlings made by the Drouhins, and I would guess that this is not made entirely by carbonic maceration. I really like this wine, which is nicely understated in style and which will only improve with a bit more bottle age. Serious Brouilly. 2016-2025+. **90+.**

2014 Brouilly “Pollen”- Robert Perroud

The Brouilly “Pollen” bottling from Robert Perroud hails from a parcel of seventy-five years-old vines. The wine is fermented in cement tanks and raised in older Burgundy casks that hail from a producer in Auxey-Duresses. The 2014 offers up a fine nose of dark berries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a touch of gamebird, chicory and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and tangy, with a good core of fruit, lovely balance and a long, complex and low fat finish. After tasting so many 2015s, the more classic styling of this very good 2014 takes a bit of getting used to! But this is a very well-made and serious example of Brouilly that will age very nicely. 2016-2025. **89.**

2013 Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes”- Georges Descombes

The 2013 Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes” from Georges Descombes (again, not marked on the label, but differentiated from the regular bottling by the wax capsule) is a really fine example of the vintage, with a fine synthesis of pure red fruit and great soil signature. The vibrant bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of quince, cherries, a touch of acorn, complex soil tones, peonies, woodsmoke and gamebird. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still a touch peppery with youth, with a fine core, lovely transparency, a bit of backend tannin and a long, vibrant and focused finish. If the *herbacité* of young Beaujolais puts you off a bit, tuck this away in the cellar for a couple of years, but if this character does not bother you, this is already a really, really tasty glass of wine! 2016-2030. **91.**

2011 Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Joubert

The 2011 Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Joubert is just a touch reductive when first opened and needs a bit of aeration to blossom, but once it does, it is a deep, sappy and nicely structured example of Brouilly that perfectly exemplifies this fine vintage. The youthful nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a bit of gamebird, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, still a touch of tannin and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is starting to drink well, but will be even better with another year or two in the cellar. It is quite structured for Brouilly, but there is nothing wrong with that! 2016-2030. **90+.**

Côte de Brouilly

2015 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée des Ambassades”- Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes

The 2015 Cuvée des Ambassades from Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes is a big and bold example of the vintage, with excellent structure and quite good freshness and bounce. This is very much a creature of its vintage, offering up a deep and slightly roasted bouquet of black cherries, nutskin, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a bit of grilled venison, dark chocolate and a touch of balsam bough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and chewy, with a rock solid core, good soil drive and a long, still very primary and moderately tannic finish. This wine is ripe, but shows no signs of overripeness, and is nicely structured and will need a couple of years in the cellar to really start to stir and drink with customary generosity. It is a very successful 2015 and will be very long-lived. 2018-2035+. **91+.**

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

Nicole Chanrion’s 2014 Côte de Brouilly is a beautifully pure and vibrant example of this classic vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, a hint of peppercorn, fresh thyme and lovely, stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a good core, lovely intensity of flavor, bouncy acids and lovely length and grip on the still fairly tight-knit finish. This is an approachable middleweight today, but I would be inclined to tuck this away in the cellar for another year and really let it blossom properly. 2017-2030. **91.**

REFLECTIONS ON THE MOSEL AND OTHER RECENTLY TASTED GERMAN WINES



With the advent of the Rieslingfeier *fête* each year here in New York, not to mention the amazing generosity of both winegrowers and friends in Germany on my visits there each year, I am accruing tasting notes on great German wines in bottle at an impressive rate in recent times. Given that probably fifty percent of the white wines in my own cellar are also German wines, it is not surprising that I seldom go a week without a great bottle of Riesling finding its way into my glass. I had previously done my reports on German wines in the bottle on a more infrequent basis, but given my rate of accumulation of tasting notes on these beautiful wines, it seems that I should be putting these features together on an annual basis these days. The following tasting notes have all been accrued since my last feature on German wines in the bottle, which appeared about eighteen months or so ago, if memory serves me correctly. As I hope the notes below will attest, drinking aged German Riesling is one of the great wine pleasures in the world of wine, and given the fact that heretofore, the vast, vast majority of these wines have escaped the long reach of premature oxidation, which seems to have affected so many other regions and iconic wines in the last twenty years, this is one region that everyone should be paying utmost attention to these days. Couple this with the fact that German Rieslings still represent (with a handful of notable exceptions) some of the very finest values in the world of wine, and it seems to me that

every serious collector's cellar should have a wide array of German wines tucked away for future pleasure.

As I have written about fairly often over the years, the last couple of decades of climate change have been actually quite beneficial (thus far) for most German wine regions, and the struggle to attain adequate ripeness, that was very much part of the German wine equation when I was first being introduced to these wines in the vintages of the late '70s and early '80s, has now receded into the historical background here. These days, at least seven out of every ten vintages in Germany offer up excellent ripeness, and in warmer regions such as the Rheinpfalz, the bigger challenge these days is how to manage ripeness levels that can often get beyond what is ideal. However, in the traditionally cooler regions like the Saar and the Ruwer, ripeness in this era of global warming has been absolutely optimal in most vintages of the last two decades, and the string of utterly brilliant wines to emerge at so many great estates throughout Germany in this timeframe is absolutely unprecedented in the history of German wine. For much of this period, the current "golden age" of German wine went nearly unnoticed within Germany itself, as wine lovers in this country were content to focus more on French and Italian wines for their long-term cellaring plans and lighter Italian whites for their immediate drinking needs. However, the domestic market has woken up to the beauty of their own Rieslings (and other grapes) in the last few years and it is great to see some of the top line estates finally getting the recognition in their home country that they previously only received abroad. This has pushed prices up across the board a tad, but there is still serious market resistance to very high prices for most German wines (a few estates have earned the right to charge at levels more approaching their true quality in the international marketplace, but they remain the exceptions) under the level of the tiny production dessert wines, so the great buying opportunities presented by top German wines remains intact today. How long this will last is anyone's guess, but logic would suggest that it cannot go on forever.

I tend to drink my German wines with plenty of bottle age on them these days, with most of the bottles that I pull out of my cellar from the decade still of the 1990s at this point in time, but this should not be considered a necessity with most German wines, as so many can offer absolutely beautiful drinking right out of the blocks or with only a handful of years in the cellar. This was one of the difficulties I faced in my early days in the wine trade, when I was first building my wine cellar, as when all of the red wines in the cellar are still woefully too young for primetime drinking, it is awfully easy to grab bottles of German Riesling for dinner that night and let the red wines hibernate. I bought and drank a lot of German wine from the top vintages of the 1980s in my formative years, with many of the wines only a year or two in age at the time of their consumption, but most were absolutely delicious to drink at that point in their evolutions and I have never had the sense that I wasted those bottles (which cannot be said about wines from several other regions that were pulled from the cellar in that era for tastings- years and years before they had reached their true peaks). Of course, in this era, I was buying almost exclusively Prädikat wines for my own cellar and had very few, if any, Trocken wines laid down from these vintages, so I had the benefit of the seamless balance of youth in many of these wines. This is one of the great advantages that German Prädikat wines have (in most cases) over other wine regions that produce very long-lives wines, for the wines can drink brilliantly in their very early days. However, in my opinion, this is not the case with dry Rieslings from Germany and I strongly urge readers who have cellared some of the top examples of Grosses Gewächs or other

Trocken bottlings to treat them like white Burgundy (back in the old, pre-premox days) and anticipate tucking them away for at least a minimum of seven to eight years in the cellar before really starting to pull corks on them. The gorgeous chassis of acidity that so many of the very best German Rieslings possess, when not buffered by additional residual sugar, can lead to very, very shut down wines during adolescence and most dry Rieslings in my cellar do not come up to the table until they have enjoyed at least a decade of bottle age.

The following tasting notes are arranged from dry to sweet, with older Trocken and Grosses Gewächs bottlings in the first section, and then each subsequent section grouped by Prädikat from Kabinett up to dessert wine levels. Within each section, the wines are grouped by vintage, from youngest to oldest, and within each vintage section, they are listed alphabetically by estate. I hope the notes will nicely convey just how amazingly user-friendly German wines are, as most of these wines can be delicious right out of the blocks (more structured and slow to unfold producers such as Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm being an obvious exception to this precept), but age as long as any white wines on the planet these days. When you see notes on wines from the decades of the '50s or '60s that still have another twenty years or more of potential longevity to them, it is not an aberration, as this is simply the amazingly wide window of peak drinkability that so many German wines offer. With so many of the world's great wines today suffering from premature oxidation syndrome, it is a very good time to focus on the superb wines that have emerged from Germany in the last ten to fifteen years, as the consistent excellence of the very top producers in the country has probably never been matched in the long history of winegrowing in this country.

Trocken, Feinherb and Grosses Gewächs Bottlings

2012 Doctor Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch

I am not sure when Sofia Thanisch and her team started producing a GG from the Doctor vineyard, but the 2012 vintage is the first one that I had ever tasted. The wine is absolutely superb on both the nose and palate, but still a puppy and in need of further bottle age to really blossom. The bouquet offers up a youthfully promising mix of apple, tart pear, laurel, slate, lime, petrol, wild yeasts and hints of the saltiness to come with more bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip, bright acids and a very long, racy and primary finish. All this lovely Doctor Grosses Gewächs needs is further time in the cellar! 2021-2050+. **93+**.

2010 Stettener Pulvermächer Riesling Kieselsandstein Trocken- Weingut Jochen Beurer

This was the first wine I had tried from Weingut Jochen Beurer in Remstal and the wine was very good. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of grapefruit, tart orange, a fine base of soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and focused, with good depth at the core, lovely soil signature and a long, vibrant finish. Good juice. 2014-2025+. **90**.

2009 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

Like the 2006 Kirchspiel (please see below), the 2009 Hubacker from Klaus-Peter Keller is currently in an adolescent phase and it is not a great time to be opening up bottles of this wine, as there is a lot more potential here than is currently available for pleasure in the glass. The bouquet is deep, reserved and fairly ripe in profile, offering up scents of grapefruit, blood orange,

wild yeasts, petrol, lemongrass and lovely soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, broad-shouldered and closed down, with a rock solid core, fine cut and grip, but an emphatically youthful and primary finish that still needs years of bottle age to unwind. This will be a fine bottle and should march up in score dramatically with further cellaring, but today it is a bit on the grumpy side when opened. 2022-2060. **93+**.

2009 Rausch Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Zilliken

The 2009 Rausch GG from Hanno and Dorothee Zilliken is just starting to blossom and emerge from behind its lovely girdle of acidity, but it is still early days for this fine wine. The bouquet is starting to show some development in its mélange of green fruit tones, tart pineapple, gentle mossiness, slate, plenty of smokiness, wild yeasts, a touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined structurally, with a rock solid core, bright, ripe acids and excellent length and grip on the still quite primary, but oh so promising finish. This is not a bad drink today, but it will be even better five to ten years down the road! 2016-2040. **93+**.



2007 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller (magnum)

The 2007 Hubacker GG from Klaus-Peter Keller is drinking quite nicely, even from magnum, and seems in a better place for current drinking than the 2006 Kirchspiel. The bouquet is still a tad youthfully reductive, but with a bit of swirling offers up a superb blend of grapefruit, wild yeasts, red slate, dried flowers, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is

deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully delineated today, with a rock solid core, great transparency, bright acids and outstanding cut and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. I know that this is still many years from its true apogee, but it was awfully hard not to enjoy it immensely at the Rieslingfeier this year! 2016-2040. **95+**.

2007 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch

The 2007 Doctor Spätlese Trocken from Sofia Thanisch is a beautiful bottle that is just starting to blossom nicely and drink with generosity and style. The bouquet is a classic blend of *mirabelle*, white cherry, beeswax, a lovely base of soil tones, spring flowers, a gentle dollop of petrol and a touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows lovely depth at the core, with ripe, suave acids, great focus and balance and a very long, vibrant and shapely finish. This is 12.5 percent alcohol and just a beautiful interpretation of the magical *terroir* of the Doctor vineyard. 2015-2035+. **93**.

2006 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2006 Kirchspiel Grosses Gewächs from Klaus-Peter Keller is a very good wine, but in comparison to the superbly filigreed examples of this wine that he has made in the last five or six years, this wine comes across as just a bit more “burley” in style- though some of this is the style of the 2006 vintage as well. I was tempted to open a bottle out of my cellar recently and it was probably too early for this wine, as it remains in a bit of an adolescent stage, offering up a maturing nose of apple, tangerine, petrol, chalky minerality, citrus zest and incipient notes of sea salts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and broad-shouldered, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip and a long, powerful and nascently complex finish. This is a very good bottle, but it absolutely needs to be tucked away in the cellar for at least another four or five years, as it is not in a great phase for current drinking. 2020-2040. **93+**.

2006 Berg Schlossberg Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Josef Leitz

The 2006 Berg Schlossberg Grosses Gewächs from Weingut Josef Leitz is a very good example of this vintage, with the broad shoulders of 2006 showing in its more masculine style. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of grapefruit, tart orange, petrol, lemongrass and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and fairly muscular in style, with very good depth in the mid-palate, bright acids and very good cut and grip on the long finish. Good juice that is starting to drink well, but will continue on for several decades. 2016-2035. **91**.

2006 Felseneck Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schafer-Fröhlich

It is interesting that the 2006 Kirchspiel from Weingut Keller is so grumpy when opened today, but Tim Fröhlich’s 2006 Felseneck is far less closed down at the present time and is quite approachable. The bouquet is blossoming beautifully and now offers up scents of sweet grapefruit, tangerine, petrol, a fine base of slate, lemongrass, wild yeasts and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and filigreed, with lovely purity on the attack, a fine core, racy acids and outstanding balance on the long and vibrant finish. This is really excellent today, but has years of life ahead of it. 2016-2040. **96**.

2006 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch

The 2006 version of the Doctor Spätlese Trocken is a bit more muscular in style, as readers will recall that the vintage was very heavily botrytized in style in the middle Mosel and some glazed berries clearly were included in this wine. The touch of botrytis gives the wine a very exotic bouquet today, with scents of pineapple, yellow plum, sweet corn, laurel, a touch of beeswax and a fine base of soil wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and complex, but cannot quite match the precision and filigree of the 2007 version. The finish is long, quite ripe (this is fully fourteen percent alcohol in 2006) and well-balanced, but a touch burley in style in comparison to the aerodynamic 2007 Doctor Spätlese Trocken. Good juice, but I would be tempted to drink the 2006 over the relative near-term, as I suspect the influence of the botrytis here will become less flattering over the long haul. 2015-2025. **90.**

1991 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken- Weingut Reinhold Haart

The 1991 Goldtröpfchen Kabinett Halbtrocken from Theo Haart is a very pretty wine that is now drinking with plenty of style and generosity at age twenty-four, wafting from the glass in a complex and *à point* blend of apple, almond, slate, a nice dollop of wild yeasts, petrol and apple blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful resolution, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the filigreed finish. Really a lovely bottle at its apogee, but still with at least another decade of fine drinking ahead of it. 2015-2025+. **91.**

1988 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Auslese Trocken AP #27

The 1988 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Auslese Trocken is drinking splendidly today and offers up admirable complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine mélange of grapefruit, Herrenberg mossiness, a touch of white cherry, lime blossoms, a beautifully complex base of slate and a touch of wild yeasts still evident in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and really beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely filigree and a very long, ripely acidic and complex finish. I have to imagine that this was plenty austere out of the blocks, but it has blossomed beautifully with sufficient bottle age. 2015-2035. **92.**

1983 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Spätlese Halbtrocken- Weingut Zilliken AP #15

Hanno Zilliken is famous for pulling “palate repair wines” out of his cellar to bring one back down from a particularly majestic sweet wine and prepare the senses for another climb into the stratosphere. This bottle was culled from his cellar particularly for that reason, as he served this between the 1990 Rausch Eiswein and the 1976 Rausch Auslese (see below for notes on both of those great wines) during a memorable tasting in the spring of 2014. However, this was no oddity tossed in to adjust the palate for different levels of residual sugar, as this is a beautiful wine in its own right. The bouquet is really lovely and blossoming beautifully at age thirty-one (this must have been rather tightly-knit, to put it mildly, in its first decade in bottle!), offering up a fine mélange of grapefruit, beeswax, salty slate, citrus peel, gentle mossiness and a smoky topnote. With some extended time in the glass, more mature aromatic touches of butter and caramel corn also materialize. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and clean, with racy acids, great focus and grip and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Lovely juice that I might be inclined to still let age a few more years! 2018-2050. **93.**

Kabinett

2012 Kreuznacher Krötenpfuhl Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Dönnhoff (screwcap)

We decanted this wine in the hopes that the reductive nature of its closure could be countered, but we were unsuccessful and the wine was in the throes of reductive shortening on the palate and vegetative development on the nose. The bouquet is compromised, but offers up notes of gentle apple and mineral, a touch of asparagus and petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, focused and bouncy, with a compacted mid-palate and a short, clipped finish. What a pity. 2014-2016. **85.**

2012 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #6

This is way younger than any bottle of Kabinett from the Prüm family that I would choose to open out of my own cellar, but given that it was available by the glass at the airport in Charlotte, North Carolina, where I had a layover, I was more than happy to order a couple of glasses. The wine is still quite young, but pure and promising, offering up a fine nose of apple, petrol, a touch of fresh pineapple, slate and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nascently complex, with ripe acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, potentially superb finish. This was not hard to drink in the airport, but in reality, should be tucked away for another five years in the cellar to allow the wine to really blossom. A lovely example. 2021-2050+. **92.**

2009 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Egon Müller AP #14

The 2009 AP #14 Kabinett from the Scharzhofberger is starting to drink beautifully at age seven, delivering a refined, youthful bouquet of white cherry, pear, wild yeasts, a fine base of slate, delicate notes of petrol, bee pollen and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and filigreed, with lovely lightness of step, ripe, vibrant acids and superb length and grip on the blossoming and very classy finish. Lovely juice that is just entering its plateau of maturity. 2016-2040+. **94.**

2008 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #27

In a perfect world, no one would be opening seven year-old Kabinett from the Prüm estate, but in our imperfect world, this is really already very tasty, albeit still a decade away from its true apogee. The bouquet is starting to blossom nicely, offering up a pure and emerging blend of white cherries, pears, wild yeasts, slate, apple blossoms and petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, young and beautifully filigreed, with youthful complexity, fine intensity of flavor, bright, seamless acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused finish. Old vines, high yields and a steady hand at the wheel- now, just add time in the bottle! 2022-2055+. **93+.**

2007 Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Keller AP #10

This wine had no vineyard or village designation on it at the time, but today, this would be labeled as “Limestone Riesling”. It is a blend of fruit from the Hubacker, Kirchspiel and Abtserde vineyards. The wine was really lovely in 2007 and starting to drink with grace, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of apple, tangerine, grapefruit, salty minerality, lavender and a touch of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full. crisp and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, classy finish. This is not as filigreed as recent vintages of Kabinett made by Klaus-Peter Keller, but it is a very, very tasty bottle that still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2015-2030. **93.**

2007 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Will Schaefer

Somehow, I did not manage to jot down the AP number for this 2007 Domprobst Kabinett, which I should have, as the bottle was readily available and fully labeled. I must have been too preoccupied with the beautiful wine in the glass! The bouquet offers up a pure and absolutely wide open and vibrant blend of grapefruit, pear, green fruit tones, slate, a touch of the saltiness to come, and a floral topnote of crushed violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with a great core, stunning length and grip and impeccable balance on the complex and blossoming finish. This is magical Kabinett in the making, and while it is very, very easy to drink today, I would be inclined to try and give it just a couple more years in the

cellar to more completely develop its secondary layers of complexity. Great juice. 2018-2040. **94+**.



Christophe and Willi Schaefer in their tasting room in Graach.

2004 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Müller-Burggraef

I do not get to often taste the wines from the other side of the Thanisch family, as readers may recall that this famous estate was split in two in 1988. This is a very nice wine, though not in the same league as the examples made by Sofia Thanisch these days. The pretty nose delivers a blend of green apple, salty soil tones, lime, and a nice touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and moderately complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, fine focus and a long, wide open finish. This is not bad, but it could have been even better, given the vineyard from which it hails. 2015-2025+. **89.**

2002 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The 2002 Zeltinger Schlossberg Kabinett from Johannes Selbach is a beautifully filigreed and delicate example of its Prädikat. The refined nose delivers a blend of pineapple, a touch of sweet corn, salty slate minerality, vanilla bean and a nice touch of mossiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and vibrant, with a lovely core of mature fruit, fine soil signature and a long, bouncy and *à point* finish. This is now at its absolute apogee and offers up a fine synthesis of vibrancy of structure and nicely mature Riesling aromatics and flavors. Lovely juice. 2015-2030+. **93.**

2001 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Christoffel AP #5

This is a really lovely bottle of Kabinett that has now blossomed completely and is drinking with style and filigreed grace. The complex nose jumps from the glass in a beautiful blend of apple, bee pollen, strawberries, wild yeasts, slate, just a touch of petrol and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and zesty, with beautiful balance and focus, lovely pull between delicate fruit, floral tones and super slate undertow and a very long, filigreed finish. An utterly classic bottle of middle Mosel Kabinett. 2015-2035. **95.**

2001 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #10

The 2001 Himmelreich Kabinett from the Schaefer family is absolutely stunning, with the depth of the vintage beautifully coupled to the inherent refinement and elegance of the Himmelreich vineyard. The bouquet soars from the glass in a complex blend of apple, orange, bee pollen, a fine base of slate minerality, a touch of petrol, white flowers and plenty of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and dancing, with superb intensity of flavor, racy acids and fine length and grip on the complex and filigreed finish. A glorious Kabinett! 2015-2035+. **95.**

1996 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Kabinett AP #7

This was the first time I had drunk a bottle of the 1996 Abtsberg Kabinett and the wine is simply outstanding and one of the best mature examples of the Prädikat that I have drunk in several years. The bouquet is deep, pure and marvelously complex, wafting from the glass in a blaze of lime, lavender, wild yeasts, salty slate tones, moss and a myriad of other, discreet, exotic botanicals that would make the monks of Chartreuse proud. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and superbly filigreed, with a lovely core, laser-like focus, racy acids and outstanding length and grip on the energetic finish. Gorgeous juice. 2015-2040. **96.**

1995 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch

The 1995 Kabinett from the Doctor is a great bottle of wine. At twenty years of age, the wine has now reached its plateau of peak drinkability, wafting from the glass in a complex and nicely resolved aromatic blend of yellow fruit, salty soil tones, *mirabelle*, beeswax, a touch of orange oil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and focused, with an excellent core, truly marvelous complexity, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the vibrant and utterly classic finish. One has to be patient to let all of the inherent nuances of the Doctor vineyard emerge, but twenty years down the road, this kind of excitement is pretty standard for this great vineyard from the Thanisch family! 2015-2040. **95.**

1994 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Egon Müller

The 1994 Scharzhofberger Kabinett is really at a superb moment in its evolution for current drinking, for at age twenty, this is just singing on both the nose and palate. The beautiful bouquet offers up scents of pear, gentle petrol notes, fresh mint, white grape, a complex base of slate, bee pollen and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a marvelous core, bright acids and laser-like focus on the very long, complex and utterly refined finish. I could drink this wine every day! 2014-2050+. **95.**

1991 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch

The 1991 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett from Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch is a great wine that is now into its peak period of drinkability and just exudes complexity on both the nose and perfectly balanced palate. The bouquet is a beautiful blend of pear, beeswax, laurel, just a touch of petrol, salty soil tones, gentle mossiness and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a great core, racy acids and a

very long, very complex and absolutely refined finish. A marvelous Kabinett and a great, great example of the magical quality of this fine *terroir*. 2014-2035+. **95.**

1990 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett AP #17

I had not tasted a bottle of the 1990 Herrenberg Kabinett in a decade, and I was amazed to see that the wine remains as fresh and vibrant on both the nose and palate as it had ten years ago! The bouquet remains pure, bright and fully in its plateau of peak maturity, as it offers up scents of lime, Herrenberg botanicals, moss, citrus peel, plenty of smokiness and a marvelous base of salty slate minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, well-integrated acids and lovely focus on the long, poised and now quite dry finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Kabinett at its apogee. 2015-2035. **94.**

1990 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Zilliken AP #8

Going through my notes for this article, I am amazed at how many lovely, mature Kabinetten I have tasted in the last year or so. The 1990 Rausch Kabinett from Hanno Zilliken is a lovely example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in an aromatic constellation of grapefruit, tart pineapple, slate, sea salts, plenty of Rausch smokiness, a touch of beeswax, gentle mossiness and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and complex, with fine acids and focus, good intensity of flavor and a very long, bright and now completely dry finish. A classy example. 2015-2035. **93.**

1986 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett AP #18

This bottle of wine was generously shared with me by Klaus-Peter Keller after working through his magical lineup of 2015ers at the winery this past March. He is a huge fan of the wines from Maximin Grünhäuser and this was a recent addition to his cellar. The wine is now at a beautiful apogee of maturity at age thirty and is drinking with marvelous complexity and bounce. The bouquet is pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of yellow fruit, Herrenberg mossiness, salty soil tones, laurel, slate, petrol and a lovely topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, crisp and focused, with superb complexity, impeccable balance and impressive cut and lift on the long and filigreed finish. Perfectly aged Kabinett is such a refined pleasure! 2016-2035. **94.**

1985 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Zilliken AP #10

The 1985 Rausch Kabinett AP #10 from Weingut Zilliken has reached a beautiful point in its evolution and is drinking with grace and complexity. The bouquet delivers a very refined blend of green fruit, cress, plenty of smokiness, salty soil tones, fresh mint and a bit of the botanical complexity that one finds in many examples of the Herrenberg vineyard at a similar age. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and dancing, with lovely filigree and complexity, bright acids and a very long, elegant and *à point* finish. 2016-2030+. **92.**

1983 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Egon Müller

This particular bottle of the 1983 Scharzhofberger Kabinett from Egon Müller is a beautiful example of the vintage at its absolute apogee. The bouquet is pure, complex and nicely tertiary, offering up scents of pear, yellow plums, sea salts, beeswax, cress and a dollop of fresh mint in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fairly full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely filigree and a very long, pure and vibrant finish. I had tasted a bottle of this wine in New York six months earlier, which seemed to have a bit more drive in the lower register, which makes me wonder if this more high-toned and filigreed example was another AP number. However, as I was sharing this with Egon at his home and the

wine did not have a label, I did not ask about AP numbers on the bottle. Lovely juice. 2015-2035+. **93.**

1975 Riesling Rotlack Kabinett- Schloss Johannisberg

The 1975 Riesling Rotlack Kabinett from Schloss Johannisberg is a beautiful example of this outstanding vintage, offering up great purity and precision on the palate and a complex and fully mature aromatic signature. The bouquet is pure and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, apple, woody soil tones, dried flowers, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, long and beautifully balanced, with fine complexity, excellent cut and grip and a long, filigreed finish. This is a beautiful example of just how long a top flight Kabinett from a top estate can last in a great vintage! 2016-2035. **93.**



Spätlesen

2012 Trabener Gaispfad Riesling Spätlese Feinherb- Weingut Weiser-Künstler AP #5

The 2012 Trabener Gaispfad Spätlese Feinherb from Weiser-Künstler is a lovely young wine, offering up an almost spicy nose of quince, pink grapefruit, lemongrass, a touch of cardamom, dried flowers and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp, complex and beautifully balanced, with fine focus and grip, bright acids and a long, youthful and zesty finish. This is a lovely wine that should blossom nicely over the next few years and drink well for at least the next fifteen. 2015-2030+. **90+.**

2007 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Zilliken AP #7

The 2007 Rausch Spätlese from Hanno Zilliken is a beautiful bottle that is just starting to truly blossom and drink with the generosity of oncoming maturity. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of pineapple, pear, gentle mossiness, petrol, a fine base of slate and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and really shows marvelous depth at the core, with crisp acids, laser-like focus and a very long, filigreed and dancing finish. A marvelous wine that is just entering its plateau of peak maturity and should cruise along at this fine level for decades to come. 2016-2035+. **94.**

2006 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Egon Müller (Auction Bottling)

The 2006 Auction bottling of Spätlese from the Scharzhofberg was showing very nicely the last time I tasted it, but it seemed more advance and more gentle in acidity than I had anticipated. The bouquet is lovely, with perhaps a very gentle touch of botrytis evident in its blend of yellow fruit, pear, mint, petro, slate, bee pollen and a floral topnote redolent of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and wide open, with nascent complexity and rather gentle, framing acids on the long finish. The balance here is lovely and the wine will continue to age gracefully for several more years, but it does not have the customary cut and grip of most of Egon Müller's Spätlesen. But, this is the nature of the 2006 vintage. 2015-2030. **90.**

2003 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Egon Müller AP #14

The 2003 Scharzhofberger Spätlese AP #14 is really a lovely example of the vintage, and much to my surprise, shows more filigree and bounce than the 2006 Auction Spätlese served ahead of it. The bouquet is really pretty, offering up scents of pear, fresh mint, lime blossoms, bee pollen, slate, just a touch of beeswax and a topnote of candied violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and filigreed, with a lovely core, nice brightness and inner structural tension and a long, refined and complex finish. Just a lovely 2003er. 2015-2040. **93.**

2002 Schlossböckelheimer Felsenberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff

I loved when Helmut Dönnhoff had holdings in both the Kupfergrube and the Felsenberg in the village of Schlossböckelheim, but when the possibility came up to swap his parcel in the Kupfergrube for more Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle, I fully understood his decision to make the exchange. Happily, the fine piece of the Felsenberg remains. These days, much of the filet section of the Dönnhoff holdings in the Felsenberg (located higher up in the vineyard around the old watchtower that overlooks the hillside) are reserved for the Grosses Gewächs bottling from this vineyard, but back in 2002, these older vines often found their highest expression as Spätlese. The 2002 Felsenberg Spätlese has now reached a glorious point in its evolution and is drinking with great style and generosity, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, peach, beautiful minerality, a touch of honeycomb, fine spice tones, still a whisper of wild yeasts and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and very complex, with a lovely core, bright, zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, wide open and perfectly balanced finish. A beautiful wine at its apogee, but still with decades ahead of it. 2016-2035+. **94.**

2001 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Christoffel AP #7

The 2001 Christoffel Ürziger Würzgarten Spätlese is a beautiful example of both this vintage and the gossamer-strung, dancing style of this estate in its prime. I had tasted a bottle of this six months ago that was easy-going and a bit simple, and I was so happy to have another bottle and see that the first bottle was simply unrepresentative. The bouquet is vibrant and pure, offering up scents of strawberry, pear, bee pollen, salty slate, just a whisper of fresh apricot and

violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and glossy on the attack, with a beautifully filigreed and seamless palate impression, bright acids and a very long, very complex and dancing finish/ A gorgeous Spätlese at its apogee today, but with years and years of life still ahead of it. 2016-2035. **94.**

2001 Schlossböckelheimer Kupfergrube Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff AP #7

The 2001 Kupfergrube Spätlese from Helmut Dönnhoff is a gorgeous young wine in the making, but though it is quite approachable today, it is still a bit on the primary side and really deserves a bit more bottle age before starting to open bottles in earnest. The deep, pure and very promising nose offers up scents of honeycomb, apple, tangerine, superb minerality, a touch of peach stone and a nice topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and rock solid at the core, with bright, zesty acids, laser-like focus and excellent length and grip on the poised and filigreed finish. This will be likely to give the great 1998 version a run for its money in the fullness of time! 2018-2040+. **94.**

1999 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Zilliken AP #9

The 1999 Rausch Spätlese AP #9 from Weingut Zilliken is really a beautiful wine that is at a great place for current drinking. The bouquet is pure and complex, offering up scents of mint, grapefruit, wild yeasts, a touch of mossiness, slate and wild flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and absolutely *à point*, with sound framing acids, lovely focus and backend bounce and a very long, complex and filigreed finish. Lovely juice. 2015-2025+. **93.**



Helmut Dönnhoff outside his winery on an overcast March afternoon- plenty of sunshine in the glasses however!

1998 Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff AP #11

The 1998 vintage is very, very successful for Helmut Dönnhoff, and the Norheimer Kirschheck Spätlese has blossomed beautifully and is now drinking at its apogee. This is always one of the most delicately styled wines from the estate, which works beautifully in this vintage, as the wine delivers a fine bouquet of apple pie spices, pineapple, slate, bee pollen and still a very nice touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and refined, with lovely complexity, sound acids and a long, dancing and focused finish. Really a beautiful, delicately-styled bottle of Spätlese at its peak. 2014-2025+. **92.**

1998 Schlossböckelheimer Kupfergrube Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff AP #12

I fully understand the reasons that the Dönnhoff family traded off their parcel in the Kupfergrube for more vines in Hermannshöhle, as this is one of their signature vineyards, but I do miss having the Kupfergrube bottling in the winery's lineup each year. The 1998 Kupfergrube Spätlese is a beautiful, beautiful example of the vintage, delivering a deep and pure bouquet that shows a touch of exotica in its blend of blood orange, grapefruit, menthol, a touch of honeycomb, orange peel, a beautifully deep base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bottomless, with great complexity and grip, bright acids and laser-like focus on the long and vibrant finish. This is beautiful wine! 2015-2035+. **94+.**

1998 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #9

The 1998 Graacher Himmelreich Spätlese from Weingut Willi Schaefer is a really lovely wine that is now *à point* and drinking with great style and delicacy. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of orange blossoms, lime, tangerine, salty minerality, bee pollen and hints of the beeswax that will come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and filigreed, with lovely depth at the core, superb complexity and a very long, vibrant and utterly refined finish. This has now reached its apogee, but will continue to delight for many years to come. 2015-2035+. **93.**

1996 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #7 (magnum)

I reported on the fine AP #8 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese a year ago, which still was fairly closed, but oh so promising. The AP #7 Spätlese seemed a tad more open than that wine, but this was served in magnum and perhaps it was just a bit more generous, due to the size of the format! The bouquet is pure and starting to really show some of its secondary layers of complexity in its constellation of pear, apple, petrol, wild yeasts, limepeel, white flowers and a beautiful base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and racy, with a lovely core, impressive complexity and bounce, exquisite focus and a very long, filigreed and utterly classical finish. A beautiful, beautiful wine that is just entering its plateau at age twenty, where it should cruise along with great style for another thirty to forty years! 2016-2050+. **95.**

1991 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Zilliken AP #1 (Auction Bottling)

The 1991 vintage at Weingut Zilliken produced an absolutely stunning Auction Spätlese, with the great purity and electric zip of this wine brought about by absolutely zero botrytis. The bouquet is stellar, soaring from the glass in a pristine constellation of lemon, salty slate minerality, loads of smokiness, a discreet touch of moss and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and very vibrant, with great complexity and focus, superb intensity of flavor and a very long, light on its feet and filigreed finish. This is gorgeous wine at its apogee, but clearly with at least a couple of decades of life still ahead of it. 2014-2035+. **95.**

1971 Rudesheimer Berg Rottland Riesling Spätlese- Schloss Grönstein

The 1971 Rudesheimer Berg Rottland Spätlese from Schloss Grönstein is drinking absolutely beautifully at age forty-five and still has plenty of life in it. The bouquet is deep, pure and very lovely in its tertiary mélange of peach, new leather, fresh apricot, heather, a bit of caramelized banana and delicate spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, complex and beautifully balanced, with sound framing acidity, lovely focus and a long, extant and suave finish. Very impressive. 2016-2025+. **92.**

1964 Schloss Johannisberg “Grünlack” Riesling Spätlese

The 1964 Schloss Johannisberg Spätlese is really a beautiful bottle of wine that has aged long and gracefully and still has plenty of life in it. The bouquet is superb, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of peach, fresh almond, bee pollen, a marvelous base of soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and impressively fresh, with fine framing acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and classy finish. What a fine old bottle of Spätlese! 2016-2030+. **93.**

Auslesen

2012 Münsterer Pittersburg Riesling Auslese- Weingut Kruger-Rumpf AP #35

The 2012 Münsterer Pittersburg Auslese from Kruger-Rumpf is excellent. The bouquet is deep, pure and shows off very clean botrytis in its youthful aromatic constellation of peach, white cherries, salty soil tones, bee pollen and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and creamy with botrytis, with a fine core, lovely, racy acids and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is really a pretty bottle of young Auslese. 2016-2040. **93.**

1997 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese AP #9

A couple of years ago, I reported on the 1997 Abtsberg Auslese Fuder #57, but I had not tasted any of the “regular” Auslesen from ’97 until this lovely bottle of the AP #9 Abtsberg. The wine is now drinking beautifully, as it closes in on its twentieth birthday, wafting from the glass in a mature and complex blend of yellow plum, peach, salty soil tones, gentle mossiness, orange oil and lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and impressively complex, with just a touch of creaminess from botrytis, ripe acids and excellent length and grip on the suave and vibrant finish. Lovely juice. 2015-2040. **94.**

1997 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese- Weingut Zilliken AP #9

The AP #9 Auslese from the Rausch vineyard was the “regular” bottling in this vintage, but there is nothing “regular” about this stunning wine today! The bouquet is pure, complex and utterly refined, offering up a kaleidoscope of pineapple, mandarin orange, herbal complications, plenty of smokiness and marvelous slate undertow. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seems to sparkle with green fruit tones (which I could not find on the nose!), with a marvelous core, zesty acids, great backend mineral drive and laser-like focus on the very, very long, complex and simply stunning finish. This has now reached its apogee, but will cruise along at a very high level for thirty or forty more years! A great, great wine. 2015-2060. **95.**

1995 Wiltinger Braune Kupp Riesling Auslese- Le Gallais

Egon Müller has made a beautiful Auslese from the Braune Kupp in 1995, and as the wine closes in on its twentieth birthday, it is drinking with great style and complexity. The vibrant nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, lilacs, fresh mint leaves, bee pollen, slate

and an exotic topnote of water cress. On the palate the wine is pure, elegant and full-bodied, with a lovely core, superb complexity, bright acids and impeccable balance on the long, focused and zesty finish. Elegance to the highest degree. 2014-2040+. **93.**

1994 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #1

The J. J. Prüm 1994 Auslese AP #1 from the Sonnenuhr vineyard is still a puppy and is several years away from fully blossoming. Today, the nose remains quite primary, albeit promising, as it offers up scents of apple, pear, vanilla bean, slate, petrol and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tightly-knit and very pure, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral signature, good acids and a long, pure and nascently complex finish. It is still very early days for this wine and I would not touch another bottle until it has had at least another seven or eight years of bottle age. My score is probably on the conservative side, but this wine is pretty shut down today! 2023-2065+. **92+.**

1990 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese- Weingut Egon Müller AP #34

The quarter century mark out from the vintage really seems to be a perfect moment to drink one of Egon Müller's Auslesen from the Scharzhofberg, and the 1990 is at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability today. The bouquet is pure and beautiful, delivering a complex blend of white cherries, cress, slate, bee pollen, just a touch of blossoming honeycomb, violets and gentle mintiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, bright, zesty acids and great freshness (particularly for a 1990 Auslesen at age twenty-six) and complexity on the very long and refined finish. A beautiful, beautiful wine. 2016-2040. **95.**

1990 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #2

The 1990 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese AP #2 from Dr. Prüm is a superb example of the vintage that is just starting to reach its plateau of maturity and hit on all cylinders. The bouquet is pure and wide open today, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of pear, white cherries,. Vanilla bean, a superbly complex base of slate, bee pollen, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and racy, with lovely intensity of flavor, excellent focus and grip, lovely balance and a long, filigreed and refined finish. This is a lovely bottle that may yet improve with further bottle age. 2016-2050. **94.**

1989 Wiltinger Braune Kupp Riesling Auslese- Le Gallais

The Le Gallais 1989 Wiltinger Braune Kupp Auslese is another absolutely refined bottle of fully mature Riesling, with the wine having reached its zenith of peak drinkability, while still retaining a lovely girdle of acidity to keep the wine vibrant and zesty on the palate. The bouquet offers up a beautiful constellation of yellow plum, lime blossoms, a touch of sea salts, honeycomb, gentle cress notes and that signature topnote of the Braune Kupp- fresh mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and *à point*, with lovely depth at the core, fine framing acids, impressive complexity, lovely focus and a very long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. 2015-2035. **94.**

1989 Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg Riesling Auslese #28- Karthäuserhof

The 1989 Karthäuserhofberg Auslese #28 is a gorgeous example of the vintage and a very classic interpretation of this fine estate in the days of Christophe Tyrell. The bouquet is pure, complex and now nicely mature, offering up a nice touch of fresh almond-like nuttiness to go along with scents of white cherry, pear, lilacs, salty slate minerality and a touch of orange zest

in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with beautiful focus and balance, sound acids and excellent length and grip on the complex, filigreed and classical finish. A really lovely bottle at its apogee. 2015-2040. **94.**

1989 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Auslese Fuder 137

The 1989 Fuder 137 Auslese from the Herrenberg vineyard is a really lovely wine that I have never crossed paths with previously, as the only other numbered '89 Auslese from the Herrenberg I have tried was the Fuder 93. The Fuder 137 is lovely and quite exotically high-toned on the nose, offering up scents of gooseberry, green apple, slate, wild yeasts, sea salts, lilacs and citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and still nicely racy in personality, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. 2016-2050. **93+.**

1988 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese Fuder 67

The 1988 Fuder 67 Abtsberg Auslese is another great example of this classic vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and beautifully resolved today, delivering a complex and vibrant bouquet of white cherries, lime peel, salty soil tones, a touch of mossiness, petrol, slate and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and intensely flavored, with a tightly-knit, racy structure, laser-like focus, a great core and superb mineral drive on the very long, very pure and complex finish. A brilliant wine. 2016-2050. **96.**

1988 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Auslese Fuder 153

I have loved the Fuder 153 bottling of '88 Herrenberg Auslese for many years and was interested to find out during a visit to the estate a couple of years back that this was made from extremely young vines, which were in their "third leaf", which is often the best vintage that the vines will produce for the first twenty years that they are in the ground. At the Rieslingfeier this year, as Dr. von Schubert was one of the invited winegrowers in attendance, I pulled a bottle of this from my cellar to bring for the festivities, only to find that Dr. von Schubert had done the same! It is a great wine that is now fully at its peak, offering up a deep and complex nose of lime, pear, slate, mossy overtones, wild yeasts and Herrenberg botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, focused and marvelously complex, with lovely filigree and bounce, bright acids and impressive cut and grip on the very long, seamless finish. 2016-2050. **95.**

1979 Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg Riesling Auslese- Karthäuserhof

The 1979 Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg Auslese is drinking at its apogee and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The '79 vintage predates my start in the wine trade, so I do not know how this year generally was in the Ruwer, but I suspect this was more a middle tier vintage back in the day. In any case, this particular Auslese is stellar, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of dried peach, petrol, plenty of Karthäuserhofberg smokiness, salty soil tones, beeswax and peach pit. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and utterly refined in profile, with a lovely core, superb cut and grip and a very long, complex and utterly seamless balance. This wine is at its peak, but will probably cruise along for at least another twenty years at this fine level. A marvelous wine. 2016-2035+. **94.**

1976 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese- Weingut Zilliken

This bottle came up from the Zilliken family cellar without a label, so I do not know its AP number. However, I do know a great wine when I taste one, and this most emphatically is that, as it soars from the glass in a complex and fully mature mix of fresh apricot, sweet corn,

salty soil tones, honeycomb, peach pit, hints of leather and that telltale topnote of the Rausch-smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and shows off marvelous depth at the core, with crisp, dancing acids, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. I imagine that this wine has been fully mature for twenty year already, but it has decades and decades of life still ahead of it. Great juice. 2014-2050. **95.**

1975 Ockfener Bockstein Riesling Auslese- Weingut Forstmeister Geltz Erben-Welsch

This is a bottling of 1975 Auslese from the Bockstein that was made by one of the cousins of Hanno Zilliken's father, back when the estate was split in more pieces. Eventually, Hanno was able to buy back this parcel in the Bockstein vineyard. The wine is lovely and now fully mature, offering up a deep and complex nose of apricot, orange peel, new leather, cherries, tea leaves and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, resolved and still shows that lovely, zesty acidity of 1975, with fine complexity, balance and grip on the long and quite classy finish. This is not as elegant as the wines made by Hanno Zilliken, but it is still a lovely example of a very fine *terroir*. 2016-2035. **92.**



1971 Wallufer Walkenberg Riesling Auslese- Weingut J. B. Becker

The 1971 Wallufer Walkenberg Auslese from Weingut J. B. Becker is a lovely example of the vintage, with its tertiary personality now having dried down to Spätlese level sweetness, but with the wine having developed beautifully with its forty-plus years in the bottle and now drinking with style and grace. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of apricot, new

leather, orange peel and a fine base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, bright and long, with fine focus and balance, good, but not great complexity and a long, seamless and well-balanced finish. This is not the most complex old Auslese I have tasted, but it hits all its notes perfectly and is really a pleasure to drink today. 2016-2035. **90.**

1971 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Willi Schaefer

I assume that Willi Schaefer was working alongside of his father, Willibrord, in 1971, as he did not take over full-time responsibility for the direction of this superb family estate in Graach until the 1973 vintage. Consequently, I would guess that this beautiful 1971 Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr was a father-son collaboration in the cellars. The wine is absolutely beautiful and at its peak of maturity at age forty-four, offering up a pure and complex nose of fresh apricot, almond, tangerine, a touch of new leather, salty soil tones and a bit of yellow plum. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and complex, with an utterly suave attack, a lovely core, great focus and balance and a very long, pure and elegant finish. An absolutely beautiful bottle of mature Auslese. 2015-2035+. **95.**

1966 Rüdesheimer Schenlachberg Gewürztraminer Feine Auslese- Espenscheid Heuss

The 1966 Rüdesheimer Schenlachberg Gewürztraminer Feine Auslese from Espenscheid Heuss is still alive and kicking, but this grape does not last as long as Riesling and the wine is probably best drunk up in the next decade or so. The bouquet is lovely, though not as complex as a Riesling of comparable age, as it offers up scents of fresh apricot, peach, leather and a nutty topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fresh and still solid at the core, with a bit of a four-square personality, but good length and grip on the still lively finish. A very interesting bottle and not bad at all. 2016-2030. **87.**

1966 Erbacher Marcobrunn Riesling Auslese- Freiherr Langwerth von Simmern

The 1966 Erbacher Marcobrunn Auslese from Freiherr Langwerth von Simmern is a marvelous old Riesling, with the depth and complexity that only a long time in the cellar can bring to a wine. At age fifty, this Auslese is still drinking beautifully and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The bouquet is complex, tertiary and still quite vibrant, wafting from the glass in a blend of apricot, orange peel, salty soil tones, smoke and a touch of new leather. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and now quite dry, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and balance, still very lively acids and very good grip on the long and filigreed finish. This is a classic! 2016-2035+. **95.**

1959 Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg Riesling “Feinste” Auslese- Karthäuserhof

This is the oldest and greatest wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste from this iconic Ruwer estate. The wine at age fifty-seven is still vibrant and flat out stunning, soaring from the glass in a refined and very complex blend of white cherries, pear, bee pollen, slate, spring flowers and a lovely topnote of sea salts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and still completely vibrant, with a burst of freshness on the attack, a lovely core, great backend mineral drive and a very long, very complex and filigreed finish. It is beautiful to see how slowly Ruwer Riesling ages! 2016-2035+. **96.**

Starred Auslesen, Goldkapsel and Lange Goldkapsel

2003 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel- Weingut Zilliken AP #3

When people with children born in 2003 ask me what they should still be on the lookout for to add to their cellars for their children, I always say 2003 German wines, as this vintage was

probably stronger in Germany than anywhere else in Europe. The Long Gold Kap Auslese from the Saarburger Rausch is a stunning bottle, soaring from the glass in a blaze of pineapple, fresh apricot, honeycomb, lavender, beautiful minerality, citrus blossoms and a vibrant topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and marvelously deep at the core, with superb elegance and complexity, racy acids and outstanding grip on the very, very long and filigreed finish. Stunning juice! 2014-2050+. **96.**

1998 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese *- Weingut Joh. Jos. Christoffel AP #9

The One star Ürziger Würzgarten Auslese from Weingut Christoffel is a quintessentially filigreed and hauntingly delicate example of Auslese, with a gentle glaze of botrytis simply adding a slightly tropical sheen to an otherwise classic example of this great *terroir*. The bouquet is deep, very pure and vibrant, soaring from the glass in a beautifully complex blend of wild strawberries, dusty rose, candied lime, a lovely underpinning of slate, bee pollen and a hint of fresh pineapple in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, suave and filigreed, with great focus and complexity, zesty acids, perfect balance and a very pure, ethereal and stunningly long finish. This is simply a great, great bottle of Auslese with all of the understated wonder of found in the middle Mosel. 2016-2040+. **97.**

1998 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese **- Weingut Joh. Jos. Christoffel AP #15**

This was a half bottle of the four star Auslese from the Würzgarten that Hans-Leo Christoffel offered at auction back in the day and the wine is utterly magnificent. The bouquet is pure, complex and vivid, offering up scents of pineapple, strawberry, honeycomb, incipient notes of sweet corn, slate that is blossoming into saltiness and violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine medium-full, dancing and filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, bright acids and laser-like focus on the very long and utterly ethereal finish. What a quintessentially beautiful and airy Würzgarten Auslese! 2014-2035+. **95.**

1998 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Dönnhoff AP #20

The 1998 Brücke Auslese from Helmut Dönnhoff is not as ready to drink as the two beautiful Spätlesen from this vintage that I reviewed above, but it is still wide open on both the nose and palate and pretty much irresistible today. The nose is deep, pure and elegant in its constellation of honey, yellow plum, tangerine, sweet grapefruit, slate, a touch of peach pit and incipient notes of new leather. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and loaded with honeyed complexity, with a marvelous core, outstanding focus and grip and a very, very long, perfectly balanced and vibrant finish. This is a brilliant wine. 2014-2050+. **95.**

1997 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Zilliken AP #4

The 1997 Weingut Zilliken's Saarburger Rausch Goldkapsel Auslese is a beautiful wine that has now reached its zenith and is drinking with both generosity and vibrant energy. The outstanding bouquet offers up scents of pineapple, a touch of sweet corn, salty soil tones, lime peel, gentle smokiness, developing notes of honey and a touch of the Rausch's botanical complexity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and racy, with a marvelous core, impeccable balance and grip, laser-like focus and a very long complex and utterly classy finish. What a great vintage for Hanno Zilliken! 2016-2050+. **96.**

1983 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #9

I have had several different bottlings of the '83 Goldkapsel Auslese from Dr. Prüm over the years, with some being superior to others. The AP #9 version is lovely, offering up a complex and filigreed bouquet of pear, apple, slate, a touch of youthful petrol, white flowers and an

esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, elegant and laid back in personality, with a fine core, lovely cut and grip and a long, vibrant finish. I have had other renditions with more overt botrytis on both the nose and palate, but the AP #9 seems a bit less glazed in personality and perhaps more pure. Lovely juice. 2016-2040+. **93+**.

1983 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Zilliken AP #14

I last tasted the AP #14 Rausch Goldkapsel Auslese from Hanno Zilliken back in 2008 and I was very impressed to see that the wine seems to not have moved one inch in terms of evolution since that time. This remains a truly lovely example of the vintage at its absolute peak of maturity, as the wine delivers a complex and refined bouquet of lemon, salty soil tones, a touch of tangerine, honeycomb and a lovely, gently savory element of sweet corn. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and pure, with lovely intensity and complexity, dancing acidity and a very long, elegant and filigreed finish. Just a beautiful wine. 2015-2035+. **94.**

1976 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Egon Müller (Auction Btlg.)

The 1976 Auction Auslese Goldkapsel from the Scharzhofberg is an utterly classic, brilliant Weingut Egon Müller wine at its absolute zenith. The bouquet is deep, pure and glazed, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apricot, tangerine, laurel, salty soil tones, honey and orange zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off marvelous depth at the core, with fairly gentle acidity today, but just perfect balance that will keep the wine cruising along for decades to come. The finish is focused, seamless and very, very long. Great juice. 2016-2035+. **95.**

Dessert Wines

2006 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Schloss Lieser

As one would expect with a 2006 middle Mosel TBA, the Helden '06 version from Schloss Lieser is just loaded with botrytis, but the wine is also beautifully light on its feet. The wine tastes fully mature today, as it offers up a deep and superbly glazed bouquet of peach, honey, orange, salty soil tones and hints of new leather to come. On the palate the wine is long, fullish, pure and creamy at the core, with sound framing acids to provide nice backend lift, if not a ton of cut. The finish is long, complex and very well-balanced, with the wine offering lovely persistence on the backend. A lovely example that is now into its plateau of peak maturity, but it suffered for being paired up with the surreal 2005 version. 2016-2035. **92.**

2005 Scharzhofberger Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Egon Müller

Egon Müller's 2005 Scharzhofberger Riesling Beerenauslese is just starting to stir at age ten and offers up a beautiful glass of wine today, but it will be even more magnificent with another decade in the bottle. The bouquet is pure, complex and stunning, soaring from the glass in a blaze of pineapple, honeycomb, tangerine, a lovely base of slate, citrus blossoms and just the first hints of the leather to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, complex, full-bodied and very, very racy in personality, with a great core of fruit, snappy acids, laser-like focus and wonderful length and grip on the electric and utterly seamless finish. A brilliant wine from one of the most magical recent vintages in the Saar. 2015-2075+. **96+.**

2005 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Schloss Lieser

The 2005 Schloss Lieser Trockenbeerenauslese from the Helden vineyard is absolutely monumental in quality, with more depth, vibrancy and racy structural sophistication than the very pretty, but much more laid back 2006 version that was paired alongside of it. The bouquet

on the 2005 is electric, soaring from the glass in a blend of apricot, mango, the first really layering of honey tones, orange oil, a beautiful base of soil that is just starting to transition to saltiness and a bit of new leather blossoming in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and utterly refined in profile, with a bottomless core, racy acids and lovely bounce and grip on the very long and classy finish. This is an absolutely stellar dessert wine. 2016-2040+. **97.**

2005 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Zilliken AP #1

Tasting this wine recently brought me back to my very first visit to Hanno and Ruth Zilliken's lovely estate to taste their range of 2005ers. This was in the spring of 2006 and my friend, Florian Miquel Hermann had told me that I would really like Hanno's wines, which proved to be a bit of an understatement. 2005 was a great, great vintage in the Saar and Hanno did not waste this opportunity, as his collection from top to bottom is absolutely magical. The Rausch TBA AP #1 is the summit of this amazing range of wines, and I had not tasted a bottle in a full decade. The wine has blossomed slowly with the passage of time and now offers up a brilliant constellation of apricot, tangerine, a touch of caramelized banana, new leather, incipient notes of tea leaves and orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and very, very racy, with bottomless depth, laser-like focus and a truly endless, electric and life-altering finish. Sheer brilliance. 2015-2065+. **100.**



2004 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Eiswein- Weingut Dönnhoff (375 ml.)

The 2004 Oberhäuser Brücke Eiswein from Helmut Dönnhoff is starting to drink beautifully at age twelve, offering up lovely purity and vibrancy on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of tangerine, apple pie, citrus oil, slate and honey. On the

palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and electric in structure, with a great core, impeccable focus and grip and a very long, racy and complex finish. Just a really refined and classy example of Eiswein. 2016-2050. **95.**

1994 Scharzhofberger Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Egon Müller

This bottle of the 1994 Scharzhofberger Trockenbeerenauslese from Weingut Egon Müller was opened after what Herr Müller deemed a slightly sub-standard bottle of the 1989 (please see below), and it is a magnificent wine. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a blazing blend of white cherries, fresh apricot, a touch of heather, gently salty soil tones, barley sugar and orange oil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely electric in structure, with bottomless depth at the core, impeccable focus and grip, marvelous complexity and a very, very long, racy finish. Magical juice that just towered over the bottle of 1989 that preceded it! 2016-2050+. **98.**

1990 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Eiswein- Weingut Zilliken AP #1 (Auction Bottling)

Hanno Zilliken has made dozens of the greatest Rieslings I have ever had the pleasure to taste, and I have drunk so deeply at the Zilliken well over the years that it is hard to find wines that I have not already had the fine luck to find in my glass. So much of my good fortune is a direct result of the extreme generosity of the Zilliken family. However, back in March of 2014, this was my first taste of the magical 1990 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Eiswein that was sold at auction. Not surprisingly, the wine is stellar. The superb bouquet delivers a fine, fully mature constellation of apricot, pineapple, a touch of yellow plum, honey, salty soil tones, just a whisper of new leather and plenty of Rausch smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and racy, with great precision and purity, exceptional complexity and a very, very long, poised and utterly electric finish. This is a gorgeous bottle of seamless, timeless Eiswein. (I should mention that I had the great pleasure to drink this wine again with Hanno Zilliken and his family this past March!) 2014-2050+. **95.**

1989 Scharzhofberger Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Egon Müller

Egon Müller felt that this particular bottle of 1989 TBA from the Scharzhofberg was a good, but not a great bottle, and he mentioned that he has had better examples in the recent past. However, it was still way too good not to drink, as it offers up a complex and tertiary bouquet of orange, fresh apricot, new leather, a touch of slate and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, round and creamy on the attack, with a good core, fairly soft acids and a long, complex, but without the customarily magnificent finish that is always the defining element of a TBA from this great estate. A slightly compromised bottle, but still a very tasty wine. 2016-2030. **91.**

1977 Scharzhofberger Riesling Beerenauslese Eiswein- Weingut Egon Müller (375 ml.)

This is one of the most unique late harvest Rieslings I have ever had the pleasure to taste. As Egon Müller commented (with a smile upon his face) as he served this wine blind to us, “it is not from a vintage you might think of immediately.” He noted that the wine was de-acidified down from fully twenty grams per liter, which would have made it impossible to drink. The color today, at nearly age forty is a vibrant amber and the wine offers up a fine bouquet of apricot, new leather, sultana raisins, barley sugar, heather, just a whisper of slate and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and still plenty racy, with lovely focus and

balance, a long finish and fine grip. Very tasty and probably the only 1977er I have ever tasted! 2015-2030+. **90.**

1971 Erbacher Siegelsberg Riesling Beerenauslese- Schloss Rheinhartshausen

The 1971 Erbacher Siegelsberg Riesling Beerenauslese from Schloss Rheinhartshausen is still outstanding on the nose, but has lost a bit of vivacity on the palate and is starting to just poke its nose over the far side of its plateau. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very classic blend of cherries, orange peel, new leather, a nice dollop of soil and tea leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just starting to get a touch long in the tooth, with a bit of burnt butter flavors on the backend. The core is still deep and the wine still has good acidity on the fairly long and complex finish. I would opt for drinking this up over the next several years, as it is still quite tasty, but the writing is on the wall. 2016-2025+. **90.**

1971 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1971 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Trockenbeerenauslese from Dr. Manfred Prüm is a magnificent wine, and truly a remarkable achievement, when one recalls that he had only taken over for his father after his sudden passing in the spring of 1969 and the '69 vintage was his very first attempt at winemaking on his own! The '71 TBA is utterly magical, soaring from the glass today in a sublime and mature constellation of honey, fresh apricot, orange, new leather, a touch of laurel and a beautifully complex base of salty, slatey soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very vibrant, with bottomless depth at the core, great complexity, bright acids and magical length and grip on the seamless and electric finish. This is a timeless monument to the Sonnenuhr and it should continue to drink brilliantly for at least another forty years! 2016-2060. **99.**

1959 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

As insane as it may seem, I tasted the 1959 TBA from Dr. Manfred Prüm right alongside of his 1971! I do not know if I ever will have two such breathtakingly beautiful and rare wines side by side again in my lifetime. It was interesting, as this was at the Rieslingfeier and as I raved about the quality of both wines, I was told by the owner of the bottles that many previous tasters at the event had not cared for the 1959! In any case, to my palate this is one of the most brilliant bottles of old German Riesling that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. This was made under the watch of Sebastian Prüm, Dr. Manfred Prüm's father. The bouquet is deep, tertiary and almost exotic in its blend of cherries, pomegranate, *crème brûlée*, lavender, citrus peel, lovely hints of soil down deep and a topnote of new leather. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and amazingly filigreed for a wine so loaded with botrytis, with vibrant acids, laser-like focus, seamless balance and a very refined, endless and complex finish. Perfection. 2016-2050+. **100.**

RECENTLY TASTED TUSCAN WINES SUMMER 2016



Vineyards in the Chianti Classico region at Bibbiano.

I know that many subscribers are hankering for expanded coverage of wines from the Piemonte and this is now at the top of my “to do” list, but a trip to the region is not likely to occur before the start of next year. I had originally intended to add a trip here for the second half of 2016, but a freak knee injury in the spring and subsequent surgery at the end of June is going to make that timetable impossible to meet. I will get rolling on full-time Piemonte coverage as soon as possible, but in the interim, I will be publishing more notes on other Italian wine regions in the next couple of issues, as I have plenty of notes. This current article on Tuscany is a compilation of a couple of fine vertical tastings I attended this spring of two traditionally-minded estates, Bibbiano in Chianti Classico and Le Ragnaie in Brunello di Montalcino, as well as many miscellaneous Tuscan wines that I have tasted in the last couple of years. Happily, samples from one of my favorite, old school producers in Chianti, Castell’in Villa, also were shipped to me in time for inclusion in this article. The fine Chianti estate of Castell’in Villa was a prominent staple of my old merchant days, but as their former New York importer, Neal Rosenthal is well-known for his prickly manner with journalists, I had not tasted a bottle from Castell’in Villa in many years. Happily, the estate has just switched importers in New York and I was pleased to see a nice slice of their current lineup arrive at my doorstep in time for this article, with an invitation for a proper vertical tasting of the estate’s long-lived and traditional Chianti bottlings in the not too distant future. *Viva la difference!* Tuscany is not a region that I drink these days with any great frequency, though I once cellared and drank wines from the Chianti and Brunello regions with regularity. However, the modern veneer of international wine style settled its cloud over Tuscany many years ago and I went off in search of bluer skies elsewhere in the world of wine, and had generally lost track of how things were going in the region in general over the last decade or so. I am sure that there are still many like-minded traditionalists like Bibbiano, Castell’in Villa and Le Ragnaie scattered around the two areas these days, but other than Monte

Vertine and Soldera, I am not really sure who these “classical” players are today. But, from time to time I get served samples of a pretty wide array of Tuscan producers’ newer releases, and prior to this article, the tasting notes have just sat in my files without a home, so it seemed like a good idea to synthesize those notes with my producer profiles on Bibbiano and Le Ragnaie.

Bibbiano Chianti Classico

Bibbiano is a fine, classically-styled Chianti estate jointly run by two brothers, Tomasso and Federico Marrochesi Marzi. Tomasso arrived at the family estate in the year 2000, after pursuing a career in international management for many years. His brother Federico joined him at Bibbiano in 2005. The family can trace back their history as wine producers in the region for many generations and they have owned Bibbiano since 1865. The winery is a throwback to an earlier time in Chianti, as the Marzi brothers prefer to use the traditional grapes of the region in their wines, so there is no cabernet sauvignon to be found planted in their vineyards or blended into their various cuvées. Their sangiovese vines include also some of the sangiovese grosso variety that is principally farmed in Brunello di Montalcino, and the family are proponents of the indigenous grape of cordino, which has fallen quite out of fashion in Chianti in recent times, but which was once a mainstay in the vineyards of the region. In addition to their twenty-five hectares of vineyards planted today, the Marzi family also cultivates ten hectares of olive groves on their estate that include over three thousand olive trees. The property suffered greatly during the second world war and when it ended, the family set about slowly rebuilding the winery and replanting the devastated vineyards and olive orchards. This process took fully two decades to accomplish, as Pier Tomasso Marzi and his son-in-law, Alfredo Marrochesi began this arduous task in 1950 and did not complete their work until 1970. Fully twenty of their twenty-five hectares of vines had to be planted during this twenty year period. During the renovations and modernization of the winery, as well as the replanting of the vineyards, the Marzi family was joined by one of the most famous oenologists of this era, Giulio Gambelli, who is best-known for his long tenure working with Gianfranco Soldera in Brunello. But Signor Gambelli’s first winemaking project was at Bibbiano, as he assisted Pier Tomasso Marzi with the vinification of the first vintage commercially produced here in 1942 and he remained associated with Bibbiano up until his passing in 2012.

The style of the wines produced at Bibbiano (with one notable experimental exception), are quite classic in profile and harken back to the golden age of Chianti in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, before the influx of international grape varieties and winemaking styles. The wines rely primarily on Sangiovese in their blends, with Cordino always included in the *cépages*. The grapes are blended together before fermentation and co-fermented in cement tanks, with the regular Chianti Classico bottling spending part of its *elevage* in cement as well. In addition to their blended Chianti bottlings, they have also begun to produce two single vineyard Chiantis: their Montornello bottling was first produced in the superb 1982 vintage, and this was followed by their Vigna del Capannino in the 1988 vintage. The Montornello bottling is produced entirely from Sangiovese and is aged in a range of *barriques* prior to bottling, with most of the casks older. In contrast, the Vigna del Capannino is produced entirely from Sangiovese Grosso, and is raised in a combination of French *tonneaux* and Slavonian oak *botti*, with forty percent of the wood new in each vintage. This is more the “Brunello-styled” bottling of the two single vineyard Chiantis produced here at Bibbiano. All of the Bibbiano vineyards have been farmed organically since 2009. The one exception to the very traditional style of the

Bibbiano wines is their bottling called Bibbianaccio, which is made in an overtly modern style. As Tomasso Marzi commented, “we were just curious to see what we could do with this style of wine, and it is experiments like this that keep our job interesting and maybe reinforces our decision to keep most of our wines very traditional in style.” The Bibbianaccio is quite different from the blends of the Chianti bottlings, as it is comprised of only fifty percent Sangiovese, fully forty-four percent Colorino and three percent each of the white grapes, Trebbiano and Malvasia. The wine has its malolactic fermentation done in new French *barriques*, and then spends the next year aged in new *tonneaux*, followed by a further year of aging in *botti* before bottling. It is a ripe wine at 14.5 percent and overtly modern in style, but it is far from emblematic of the traditional house style of all the other Bibbiano cuvées.



Tomasso Marzi in his vineyards at Bibbiano.

Based on the fine vertical tasting that Tomasso Marzi put together for us here in New York, Bibbiano is one of the great producers of Chianti for long-term cellaring. Their regular bottling of Chianti Classico, based on the lovely 2014 that I tasted, certainly seems capable of at least fifteen years of potential longevity (and keep in mind that this is far from a top flight vintage) and the two single vineyard bottlings of Montornello and Vigna del Capannino are as

good as any examples of Chianti I have had the pleasure to taste and are capable of lasting thirty years or more out from the vintage. Bibbiano is an outstanding, classically-styled Chianti estate that I was absolutely delighted to be introduced to, as I had feared that the vast majority of Chianti producers had wandered off in the wrong direction, following the terrible example set by Antinori in the decade of the 1990s and classically-styled, properly structured Chiantis such as Bibbiano produces today were only part of our collective memories of how good Chianti used to be back in the good old days. How happy I was to be wrong on this count!

2014 Chianti Classico- Bibbiano

The rainy 2014 vintage was not a strong one in Tuscany, but Bibbiano's *normale* bottling has turned out really very nicely. The blend is primarily sangiovese, with a bit of cordino included. The bouquet is quite stylish, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, fresh herb tones, a touch of sangiovese nutskin and an impressive base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, long and modestly tannic, with good depth at the core, lovely structure and a long, nascently complex and still quite youthful finish. Like all of the Bibbiano wines, this is really built for the cellar and will be an even better drink with a year or two of bottle age. A very impressive 2014. 2016-2030+. **88+**.

2013 Chianti Classico "Montornello" Riserva- Bibbiano

The 2013 single vineyard Riserva bottling of Montornello is an outstanding wine in the making, but it is still young and structured and will need some bottle age to fully blossom. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of red and black cherries, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, a touch of espresso and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, ripe tannins and a very long, poised and well-balanced finish. This will be an outstanding bottle of Chianti once it has had a chance to open up with some time in the cellar. 2020-2045+. **93+**.

2011 Chianti Classico "Vigna del Capannino" Grand Selezione- Bibbiano

The 2011 vintage of Vigna del Capannino is another excellent wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, youthfully complex and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, orange peel, a fine base of soil, a touch of cigar wrapper, lovely spice tones and a gentle base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a superb core of fruit, beautiful balance and a long, ripely tannic and focused finish. This is still very early days for this wine, but it will be a superb drink once it has blossomed. 2021-2050. **93**.

2011 Bibbianaccio- Bibbiano

The 2011 Bibbianaccio is a ripe and modern wine, and probably well done in its style, but given the fireworks of traditionalism that the vertical of Vigna del Capannino and Montornello provided prior to this wine being served, it is hard to generate a lot of enthusiasm for the Bibbianaccio. The nose is a modern and new oaky blend of black cherries, smoky new wood and balsam boughs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite simple, with a plump core of fruit, a touch of backend heat and some wood tannins poking out on the reasonably long, but chunky finish. This is okay, but no better. 2019-2035. **84**.

2007 Chianti Classico "Vigna del Capannino" Grand Selezione- Bibbiano

The 2007 vintage of Vigna del Capannino is lovely and shows no signs of *sur maturité* on either the nose and palate from this torrid summer. The nose is a fine and youthfully reticent blend of black cherries, plums, cigar wrapper, a touch of tariness, complex soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, chewy tannins and a long, classically balanced and youthful finish. This is still a young

wine and shows no more signs of blossoming that the 2011 version that preceded it in our lineup. It will be excellent in the fullness of time, but give it at least another five years in the cellar to start to stir. 2021-2050. **93+**.

2003 Chianti Classico “Vigna del Capannino” Grand Selezione- Bibbiano

The atypically hot growing season of 2003 has given the Vigna del Capannino a strong vintage character. The bouquet is far more black fruity in profile than either the 2011 or 2007 versions, offering up a blend of cassis, saddle leather, hung game, cigar ash and damp soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and decidedly low acid in this lineup, with a plush core, some moderate tannins and pretty good backend energy on the long finish. This has to be considered quite successful for 2003, but it is far more about the vintage than about the vineyard in '03. 2016-2025+? **89**.

2000 Chianti Classico “Montornello” Riserva- Bibbiano

The 2000 vintage of Montornello is an absolute classic in the making and one of the finest bottles of Chianti I have tasted in many years. The bouquet is deep, pure and utterly classic in its aromatic profile of cherries, red plums, fresh oregano, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of orange peel and a gentle framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and seamlessly balanced, with bright acids, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the blossoming and very classy finish. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2040. **94**.

1999 Chianti Classico “Vigna del Capannino” Grand Selezione- Bibbiano

The 1999 vintage of Vigna del Capannino is now fully mature and is drinking at its apogee. The bouquet is superb, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil, sweet herb tones, gentle balsamic overtones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a lovely core, melted tannins, bright acids and a long, refined and complex finish. This is high class Chianti! 2016-2035. **94**.

1998 Chianti Classico “Montornello” Riserva- Bibbiano

The 1998 Montornello Riserva is now fully mature and drinking beautifully at age eighteen. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a resolved and complex mix of red plums, cherries, complex soil tones, a touch of raw cocoa, gentle tariness and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a lovely core, fine focus and balance and a long, classy finish that still shows just a touch of remaining tannin to melt away in the years to come. As Tomasso Marzi noted, “this was made in its entirety by Giulio Gambelli.” A beautiful bottle nearing its apogee, but with years of life still ahead. 2016-2030+. **93**.

1995 Chianti Classico “Montornello” Riserva- Bibbiano

The 1995 Montornello Riserva is a very tasty and fully resolved wine, but it does not seem to have quite the same potential for longevity as the Vigna de Capannino bottling (despite our bottle of '95 Capannino not being perfect). The bouquet has moved to a more tertiary blend of black cherries, cassis, a touch of dried eucalyptus, dark soil tones and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, but just starting to get a bit autumnal in personality. The finish is still long and the structure remains sound, but it is probably time to be drinking up this tasty wine. 2016-2025. **89**.

1995 Chianti Classico “Vigna del Capannino” Grand Selezione- Bibbiano

The 1995 vintage of Vigna del Capannino is drinking quite nicely, but I should note that Tomasso Marzi thought that this particular bottle was not completely on form. The bouquet is deep and mature, delivering scents of cherries, cigar smoke, lovely spice tones, soil and a touch

of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still shows a bit of backend tannin, with a good core and a fairly long, mature finish. This was tasty, but I will defer to Tomasso's experience and infer that the bottle was not quite sound. I would love to taste a pristine example! 2016-2030+. 90+?

Le Ragnaie Brunello di Montalcino

Le Ragnaie is a twenty-eight hectare estate that is planted to both Brunello di Montalcino vineyards and olive groves. The owners are the husband and wife team of Jennifer and Ricardo Campinoti. Of the twenty-eight hectares of land that comprised the estate, about ten hectares are planted in the Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, with parcels spread over several sub-regions of Brunello, with most of the vines planted at some of the higher elevations in the region, ranging from three hundred and ninety meters above sea level up to the limit of six hundred meters above sea level (above six hundred meters, the Italian authorities do not permit wines to be labeled as Brunello di Montalcino, though in fact, the inferior vineyard areas are actually at the lower altitudes in this era of global warming). The one exception to this higher elevation vineyard portfolio is the one hectare of vines that the Campinoti family owns in the vineyard of La Cava, which sits at only two hundred meters above sea level, though at least La Cava has an east-northeasterly exposition, which helps mitigate some of the higher temperatures found at the lower elevation during the heat of summer. All of Le Ragnaie's vineyards have been certified organic since 2009, with the first conversion over to this farming method starting in '05. The estate has begun to produce a single vineyard bottling of Brunello from the vineyard of Fornace since 2007, in addition to their blended Brunello *normale* and an old vine bottling which they call Vegna Vecchia. The Fornace vineyard lies in the southeastern corner of the Brunello DOCG limits, just outside of the village of Castelnuovo dell'Abate, sitting at an elevation of three hundred and ninety meters, with an orientation towards the east-northeast. The vineyard was planted in 1980.

Ricardo Campinoti has been moving back to a more traditional style of Brunello di Montalcino in the last decade, trading in his *barriques* for larger, Slavonian oak *Botti* for the *elevage* of his three Brunello bottlings, so that 2005 was the last vintage at Le Ragnaie that included any new oak casks for aging for the finished wines. The older *barriques* are still used for a percentage of the *elevage* (probably more for the Rosso di Montalcino than Brunello these days), but the lion's share of the barrel-aging of the three Brunello bottlings today takes place in *Botti*. Since 1998, Brunello regulations have shortened the mandatory amount of time that the wines must remain aging in wood from three years to two (reflecting the large percentage of new oak *barriques* that are used for most Brunello these days), but Ricardo prefers to let most vintages of his Brunello cuvées spend fully three years in their *Botti*, as their larger volumes allow less micro-oxygenation and the wines evolve at a more graceful and relaxed pace. All of the Le Ragnaie wines are fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement tanks, with maceration times for the Brunello bottlings ranging from twenty-five to forty days. When possible, the wines are also bottled unfiltered. The proprietors at Le Ragnaie are most assuredly *terroirists*, despite their only producing one single vineyard bottling of Brunello at the present time, and both Ricardo and Jennifer Campinoti have lobbied for the *Consortia* to start to take a more active interest in promoting the various sub-regions of the DOCG. As Ricardo mentioned during our vertical tasting in New York, "with such wide swings in the styles of Brunello from different parts of the region, we need to adopt a system more like Burgundy and promote our best *terroirs*,

instead of pretending that the low altitude, flat vineyards can produce the same quality as the very best, higher elevation vineyards.”

2013 Chianti “Colli Senesi”- Le Ragnaie

This Chianti bottling from Le Ragnaie hails from a parcel of vines that lie just above the upper elevation limit for the DOCG of Brunello, which is six hundred meters above sea level. Consequently, at the present time, this is only entitled to Chianti labeling, but the regulations are in the process of changing and this will be Brunello in the years to come. Ricardo Campinoti raises this wine in ten year-old *Botti*. Needless to say, this is an outstanding value while it is still labeled as Chianti! The bouquet of the 2013 offers up an excellent blend of cherries, coffee, lovely soil tones, just a touch of orange zest and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and complex, with a fine core, a bit of ripe tannin and fine length and grip on the long and tangy finish. 2016-2030+. **90.**

2011 Brunello di Montalcino- Le Ragnaie

The Le Ragnaie Brunello *normale* hails from six hectares of vineyards, situated just south of the village of Montalcino, planted in a rocky blend of limestone and sandstone and placed between 540 and 600 meters in elevation. These are not particularly old vines, having only been planted in 1997. Like all of the 2011s, this is pretty high in alcohol, coming in at fifteen percent, for the month of August featured African winds that drove up ripeness in all the vineyards in Brunello. The wine is quite ripe in personality, but also stylish, as it offers up scents of baked cherries, nutty overtones, a fine base of soil, gentle herb tones, coffee and a topnote of spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with a wide open personality, a good core of fruit, just a modicum of backend tannins and good length on the velvety and slightly heady finish. A good effort in a very ripe year. 2016-2026+? **88.**

2011 Brunello di Montalcino “Vegna Vecchia”- Le Ragnaie

The old vine bottling from Le Ragnaie is produced from a eighty *ares* subplot in Montalcino that was planted in 1968. This parcel sits at an elevation of just under six hundred meters on the same base of limestone and sandstone as the *normale*. The 2011 V.V. also shows the ripeness of the vintage, but it is more precise aromatically than the *normale*, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, coffee, damp earth, cigar some and brown spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plump at the core, with a slightly gritty aspect to its moderate tannins, good complexity and no signs of overt heat on the long and perfectly respectable finish. I have to imagine in a classic vintage, this is a dynamite bottle, and even in the torrid year of 2011, this is a very successful effort. 2017-2030. **90.**

2011 Brunello di Montalcino “Fornace”- Le Ragnaie

The single vineyard bottling of Fornace hails from a slightly lower elevation vineyard, three hundred and ninety meters above sea level, located in the sheltered subzone of Castelnovo dell’Abate, which is located in the far southeastern corner of the DOCG. The lower elevation of Fornace is mitigated to some degree by its exposition to the east-northeast, so that this receives mostly morning sun. The vines in Fornace were planted in 1980. The 2011 Fornace is a very good effort, without the precision one would expect in a more classically styled vintage, but with fine complexity and the ripeness of the years nicely managed. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, coffee grounds, coriander, orange peel, dried herbs and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a nice touch of reserve to its profile (very rare in 2011) and good length and grip on the modestly tannic finish. The ripeness of the

vintage here is felt mostly in the focus not being precise, but the wine has complexity and presence. 2019-2030+. **89+**.

2010 Brunello di Montalcino- Le Ragnaie

2010 is a bit more classically-styled year than 2011, but this is still plenty ripe at 14.5 percent octane. However, the wine is fresh and precise on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, Tuscan herbs, a superb base of soil, coffee and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and vibrant, with a fine core, ripe, nicely integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex finish that still shows a whisper of heat on the backend. Good juice in the making, but I would love to see the octane a half degree lower. 2022-2050+. **90+**.

2010 Brunello di Montalcino “Vegna Vecchia”- Le Ragnaie

The 2010 Vegna Vecchia from Le Ragnaie is an excellent young example of Brunello di Montalcino. The pure and classic bouquet offers up a vibrant blend of black cherries, cassis, a superb base of soil, a touch of road tar, fresh oregano and a lovely topnote of allspice. There is a lovely “cool fruit” profile on the nose here that is very promising. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a fine core, ripe, seamless tannins and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. I do not get any sense of backend warmth here and this is going to age long and gracefully. Fine juice. 2023-2060. **92+**.

2010 Brunello di Montalcino “Fornace”- Le Ragnaie

The 2010 Fornace is another fine bottle in the making, with the nose and palate a touch riper and more generous in profile than the V.V. bottling, but with the same lovely balance and potential for long-term aging. The excellent bouquet offers up scents of cherries, red plums, orange peel, coffee, fresh herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively soil-driven, with a sappy core of fruit, moderate tannins and lovely complexity on the long, poised and classic finish. A lovely bottle of young Brunello. 2020-2050. **92+**.

2009 Brunello di Montalcino- Le Ragnaie

To my palate, alcohol level plays such a key role in contemporary Brunello di Montalcino, but it is always a difficult balance to attain, as one has to get the acids and tannins ripe in the sangiovese grosso, without letting the fruit tones get overripe and the wine too heady on the palate. The 2009 Le Ragnaie *normale* is perfectly balanced in this regard, coming in at an even fourteen percent and offering up a truly lovely bouquet of cherries, orange peel, impressive soil signature, Tuscan herb tones, woodsmoke, coffee and a dollop of clove in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with ripe, firm tannins, lovely balance and a long, primary and very promising finish. This is excellent. 2021-2055. **92**.

2008 Brunello di Montalcino- Le Ragnaie

The 2008 vintage of Brunello *normale* from Le Ragnaie is a fine example as well, but it is a half point riper than the fine 2009 version, and this translates into a touch less complexity. The nose wafts from the glass in a ripe and classy blend of black cherries, coffee grounds, gamebird, a good touch of soil, herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and just a touch tarry in personality, with a good core, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the presently shut down finish. This will be a good bottle with a bit more bottle age, but it is currently in a period of hibernation. 2022-2050. **90**.

2008 Brunello di Montalcino “Fornace”- Le Ragnaie

I am not sure of the reason, but the 2008 Fornace is fully a point lower in alcohol than the 2008 *normale*, coming in at 13.5 percent octane. The wine offers up lovely vibrancy on the nose,

with scents of red and black cherries, coffee, a complex base of soil, fresh oregano, just a whisper of road tar and cedar emerging with a bit of swirling. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, fine balance and a long, nascently complex and really promising finish. Like the '08 *normale* bottling, the Fornace is currently quite hunkered down and in need of further bottle age, but this is going to be an outstanding bottle of Brunello in the fullness of time. 2024-2060. **92+**.

2007 Brunello di Montalcino- Le Ragnaie

The 2007 Le Ragnaie Brunello *normale* spent fully three years *elevage* in *botti* prior to bottling, as this was the first year that *barriques* were abandoned completely at the estate. This is a ripe vintage in Brunello, with the wine hitting 14.5 percent octane and offering up a complex bouquet of red and black cherries, walnuts, orange peel, herb tones and a bit of spicy new oak (as many of the *botti* used in this vintage were new). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a good core, chewy tannins and a long, youthful and really quite well-balanced finish. I suspect that there will always be just a whisper of rigidity to this wine, due to the new *botti* giving a touch of their wood tannins to the wine, but this is nicely balanced, handles its ripeness very well and should age quite gracefully. 2024-2050. **91**.

2007 Brunello di Montalcino “Vegna Vecchia”- Le Ragnaie (magnum)

The 2007 Le Ragnaie Brunello V.V. is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a ripe and generous bouquet of dark berries, baked black cherries, damp soil, tarry tones, herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced for the vintage, with a plump core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, complex and ever so slightly heavy-handed finish. This is a well-made 2007, but it does have the vintage's fingerprints all over its stylistic profile and probably will not be particularly long-lived. 2020-2037+. **91**.

2007 Brunello di Montalcino “Fornace”- Le Ragnaie

The 2007 Fornace is really lovely and shows more breed and class than the '07 V.V. bottling. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex constellation of black cherries, plums, Tuscan herb tones, chocolate, charred wood, a fine base of soil and just a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely focused, with suave tannins, a good core, fine grip and a long, ever so slightly warm finish. This is a very good example of a warmer vintage Brunello. 2020-2045. **92**.

2006 Brunello di Montalcino- Le Ragnaie

The 2006 vintage was the last where Ricardo Campinoti did not produce any single vineyard bottlings, and this has probably given a bit more complexity to his Brunello *normale* in this year. The wine is really excellent, as this is a more classic vintage and the measured ripeness of 13.5 percent translates into marvelous aromatic complexity on the nose, with scents of cherries, red plums, coffee, excellent soil tones, orange peel, Tuscan herbs, cedar and a touch of lavender wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very classy, with a lovely core, melting tannins and excellent balance and grip on the complex and utterly classic finish. This is a fine, fine bottle of Brunello that is just reaching its plateau of peak drinkability. 2016-2035. **92**.

2005 Brunello di Montalcino- Le Ragnaie

The 2005 vintage at Le Ragnaie was a transition year for the estate, as this was the last year where a bit of *barrique* was used for the raising of the Brunello and the vineyards were in their first year of conversion over to organic farming methods. The wine is quite tasty, but seems quite a bit more aromatically evolved than the 2006, probably from the greater oxygen exchange during its *elevage* in *barriques*. The nose offers up a mature blend of black cherries, chocolate,

woodsmoke, dried herbs and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely round on the attack, with a good core, melting tannins and good, solid length on the focused finish. There is less soil signature here than in any of the vintages raised in *botti*, and though the wine is tasty, it is not as complex as any of the other vintages in this fine range and is maturing quite rapidly for Brunello. 2016-2025. **88.**



Other Tuscan Producers- Chianti

2011 Chianti Classico- Castell'in Villa

The Chianti *normale* from Castell'in Villa is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised for fully two years in old, Slavonian oak *botti* prior to bottling. The 2011 version is fairly ripe for this bottling, coming in at 14.5 percent and reflecting this torrid growing season in Tuscany, but also pure and classical in profile. The bouquet is open and generous, offering up scents of cherries, coffee, Tuscan herbs, a touch of gamebird, a bit of bonfire and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, modest, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a bit atypically ripe for the Castell'in Villa house style, but this is the vintage, and the estate has produced a really fine example from 2011. 2016-2025. **89.**

2009 Chianti Classico "Riserva"- Castell'in Villa

The 2009 Chianti Classico "Riserva" from Castell'in Villa is also raised entirely in older, Slavonian oak *botti*, with the wine spending between two and three years in these large casks

prior to bottling. The wine offers up a superb and quite complex bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of meatiness, hazelnut, fresh oregano, a classy base of soil, a hint of orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with ripe tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is also from a riper vintage, but the team at Castell'in Villa have beautifully synthesized the ripe fruit of 2009 to the classic chassis for aging of this iconic Chianti bottling. The wine is eminently approachable today, but is probably three or four years away from its true apogee. 2016-2040. **92.**

2009 Chianti Rufina- Selvapiana

The 2009 Chianti Rufina from Selvapiana is a good, honest bottle in the making and superior to more recent vintages that I have tried from this estate. The bouquet is deep, pure and quite classic in profile, offering up scents of cherries, orange peel, coffee, oregano and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish and classy, with a good, respectable core, just a bit of tannin and good length and grip on the tangy and fairly complex finish. Good juice that harkens back to the fine decade of the 1980s, when the Chianti region seemed to be awash is lovely examples such as this. 2014-2025. **89.**

2008 Chianti Classico "Riserva"- Castell'in Villa

The 2008 Riserva from Castell'in Villa is from a more classic growing season than the 2009, which translates into a wine that is fully a point lower in alcohol at 13.5 percent. The wine is outstanding on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a nicely reserved constellation of black cherries, a touch of plum, superb soil tones, incipient notes of gamebird, woodsmoke, a dollop of fresh herb tones, a bit of nutskin and lovely spice shadings in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still fairly tightly-knit, with outstanding focus and grip, a lovely core, fine soil signature and a long, moderately tannic and vibrant finish. This is still early days for this nicely structured Chianti Riserva, but this wine is going to be absolutely stellar once it has had a chance to blossom! 2020-2060. **94.**

2008 Chianti Classico "Poggio delle Rose" Riserva- Castell'in Villa

The single vineyard bottling of Poggio delle Rose Riserva from Castell'in Villa sees a bit of time in *barriques* prior to being racked into older *botti* to finish up its *elevage*, and the 2008 shows a touch of cedary influence on the nose from its period in smaller casks. The bouquet is deep, complex and classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, a touch of orange peel, lovely spiced meat tones, a good base of soil, incipient notes of nutskin and a deft touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly elegant in profile, with a more open personality than the '08 Riserva. The core is deep and sappy, the tannins are ripe and there is good length and grip on the riper, but complex finish. This is accessible today, but also has the balance to age long and gracefully. Good juice, but this is just a touch riper in profile than the 2008 Riserva and probably will not be quite as refined at its apogee, nor as long-lived as a result. 2016-2035+. **92+.**

1999 Chianti "Bucerchiale"- Selvapiana

The single vineyard bottling of Bucerchiale from Selvapiana is a lovely bottle of Chianti. The wine's entire *elevage* is done in *barriques*, but only five percent of these are new. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite classic in its constellation of cherries, red plums, cigar smoke, a bit of tariness and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with good focus and grip, still a touch of tannin on the backend and lovely length and grip on the finish. I last tasted this a few years ago and it was still in need of another

year or two to allow the remaining tannin to more fully fall away, so it should now be drinking very well. 2015-2030. **90.**

1995 Chianti Classico “Riserva”- Monsanto

I had very high hopes for this wine, but it seems to have been a bit over-oaked out of the blocks and at nearly twenty years of age, the wood is just starting to get the upper hand over the remaining fruit. The bouquet is really very lovely, offering up a fine and mature blend of cherries, coffee, woodsmoke, Tuscan herb tones, a fine base of soil and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with now only moderate depth at the core. The focus is good and the finish is long, but there is now a bit of wood tannin standing there all alone in the shadows and clamping down on what should be a more complex finish. I do not know what the oak regimen was for this bottling back in 1995, but it seems to have been just a touch too generous, though I do not doubt that age ten or so, it might have been less noticeable. Drink up. 2014-2020+. **85.**

1981 Chianti Rufina “Riserva”- Selvapiana

These two old vintages of Selvapiana were tasted at a Rare Wine Company event back in the winter of 2012, but I include the notes here just to show how well old school Chianti could age back in the day. 1981 was a good, but hardly a top flight vintage, and yet the '81 Selvapiana Riserva was still drinking quite nicely, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, *sous bois*, coffee, bonfires, a touch of game and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and quite tertiary in profile, with solid depth, lovely focus and a long, classy and fully mature finish. A lovely drink for its age. 2012-2020. **88.**

1978 Chianti Rufina “Riserva”- Selvapiana

The 1978 Riserva from Selvapiana was also a very good bottle when tasted in the winter of 2012, offering up a fine nose of cherries, forest floor, acorns, Tuscan soil, woodsmoke and a topnote of dried herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and gently structured today, with a good core, melted tannin and good length, if not a lot of grip on the finish. This is from a superior vintage than 1981, but it is getting to the far side of its plateau. 2012-2020. **87.**

Other Tuscan Producers- Montalcino and IGTs

2011 Rosso di Montalcino- Il Poggione

The 2011 Rosso di Montalcino from Il Poggione is a bit hot and seems very ripe in profile for a Rosso. The bouquet offers up a jammy nose of red and black cherries, gamebirds, orange peel, a good base of soil and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly tannic for Rosso, with a good core of ripe fruit, but some backend, uncovered alcohol on the hot finish. I did not make a note of the octane level here, but it is too high. 2015-2020? **86.**

2009 Tignanello-Marchesi Antinori

The 2009 Tignanello is composed of a blend of eighty percent sangiovese, fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon and five percent cabernet franc. The wine claims fourteen percent alcohol on the back label, but seems a tad riper than that to my palate, as the bouquet delivers a ripe and nicely polished mélange of jammy black fruit, Cuban cigars, menthol, a touch of dried herbs and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, a bit of backend heat and a long, still fairly primary finish. This is a beautifully sculpted wine that is very suave, but the problem is that it does not taste at all like sangiovese (eighty percent of the blend!) and really lacks sparkle and charm. To be fair, this is still a young wine and has some tannins to resolve, so maybe it will gain a bit more

character with bottle age. However, served double blind, there is no way I would guess Tuscany for this wine, let alone primarily sangiovese, and for all of its spit polished veneer, the wine is ultimately soulless. It is better than wasting a hundred dollars on a parking ticket, but not much. 2020-2040. **86.**

2008 Santa Croce di Castell'in Villa

The Santa Croce bottling from Castell'in Villa is their IGT cuvée, being comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of sangiovese and cabernet sauvignon. Like the Poggio delle Rose bottling, this is aged in a combination of Allier oak *barriques* and Slavonian oak *botti*. The 2008 Santa Croce is quite classic in ripeness, tipping the scales at 13.5 percent and offering up a fine, youthful bouquet of cassis, black cherries, a touch of Tuscan herbs, dark soil tones, a touch of road tar, cigar smoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied, focused and tightly-knit, with a fine core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins, good, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the still quite structured and primary finish. This still needs a good eight to ten years to really blossom, but should prove to be excellent when it has had sufficient time in the cellar. 2024-2055+. **92+.**

2007 Brunello di Montalcino- Fuligni

The 2007 vintage of Brunello from Fuligni is overripe and shows both pruniness and heat on the palate. The wine tips the scales at a purported 14.5 percent octane and offers up a *sur maturité* aromatic blend of jammy black cherries and plums, chocolate, herbs, smoke and plenty of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and overripe in profile, with a good core, but with the flavors prune, the finish hot and the overall impression of a stewy wine that has already seen its best days. 2015-2025. **82.**

2007 Brunello di Montalcino- Lisini

The 2007 vintage of Brunello from Lisini is one of the lower octane examples that I have tasted from this vintage, coming in at a reasonable 13.5 percent. The wine is still fairly ripe on the nose, but not overripe, but was a bit reductive and showed some dirty diaper elements when I last tasted it a couple of years ago. The bouquet was a blend of cherries, plums, dirty diaper, herb tones, cigar smoke, soil and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a good core, some dry-edged tannins from its new wood, but good length and grip on the focused finish. This could end up blossoming with another half dozen years of bottle age, in which case my score would seem conservative. But, it could also just as easily stay dry-edged and reductive the whole time as well. A perplexing wine. 2020-2040? **87-90+?**

2007 Brunello di Montalcino- Nardi

The 2007 Nardi Brunello di Montalcino suffers from the same overripe qualities that plague so many Brunellos from this vintage. The wine is again, 14.5 percent alcohol and shows some overt heat on the backend, keeping its score and pleasure quotient down for my palate. The bouquet is quite good, offering up scents of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, coffee and a bit of spicy new oak (though no new *barriques* are used for this bottling). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent in personality, with ripe tannins, good acids, but some alcohol warming up the long finish. This has some of the best acidity of the 2007 Brunellos that I have tasted, but it is still a bit hot on the backend. 2020-2040. **87.**

2007 Brunello di Montalcino- Il Poggione

In contrast to the 2011 Rosso, the 2007 Brunello di Montalcino from Il Poggione is very nicely balanced, despite the fact that this is also a very ripe wine, with the alcohol level on the label fully 14.5 percent. But, at least in its relative youth, the wine is carrying its octane quite well, offering up scents of red plums, cherries, orange peel, nutskin, soil and spicy new wood.

On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively well-balanced for 14.5 percent, with firm, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. This is a touch new oaky in personality, but has good stuffing to carry the wood and should age very nicely. 2020-2050. **92+**.

2007 Brunello di Montalcino “Riserva”- Il Poggione

Interestingly, the 2007 Brunello Riserva from Il Poggione reports the same octane level of 14.5 percent as the *normale*, but the wine seems riper to my palate and has absorbed more wood tannins from its sojourn in cask than the regular bottling and is both hot and dry-edged from oak tannins on the backend. The nose offers up a borderline overripe blend of jammy cherries, fruitcake, coffee, nutskin and loads of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows some overt notes of *sur maturité* to its fruit component, with some dry-edged tannins sticking out on the hot and jammy finish. I do not have a whole lot of hope for this wine, as it may have the stuffing to eventually cover up the wood tannins better, but by then, the overripe aspects of the wine are going to take their toll. 2020-2035+? **86**.

2006 Brunello di Montalcino “Riserva”- Costanti

The 2006 Brunello Riserva from Costanti is only listed at 13.5 percent octane, which is all to the good, but the wine is quite marked by its new wood component at the present time and still needs some time in the cellar to absorb the oak. The bouquet is quite good underneath the wood, offering up a fine blend of cherries, red plums, coffee, a fine base of soil, fresh oregano and the aforementioned, spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, but also currently pinched by its wood treatment. The core is good and the finish is long and ripely tannic, with the wood tannins not particularly obtrusive, so I would be willing to bet that this wine has the stuffing to eventually integrate its wood component completely and drink well. However, one has to ask just how much better this wine could have been, given the exceptional raw materials, if the oak had been handled just a bit more judiciously? 2020-2040. **89+**.

2006 Brunello di Montalcino “Riserva”- Fuligni

The 2006 Fuligni Brunello Riserva is one of the ripest examples of this vintage that I have tasted, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol and consequently, quite blurry and a bit dry-edged as a result. The bouquet is quite fresh for its octane, offering up scents of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, orange peel, a nice base of soil and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely soil-driven on the attack, with a good core, but a less interesting finish, as the wine does not show much focus (due to its ripeness) and is a bit dry-edged from leached out wood tannins on the long finish. This is okay, but not special and rather precariously balanced. 2018-2030? **86+?**

2006 Brunello di Montalcino- Nardi

The 2006 Brunello *normale* from Nardi is just a touch less ripe on the label than the 2007 (fourteen percent), but seems a bit more than a half point lower in octane on the palate. The nose is ripe and stylish, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of chocolate, nutskins, gamebirds, soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nascently complex, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and balance, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the youthful finish. I like the balance here quite a bit better than the '07. 2020-2050. **90**.

2006 Brunello di Montalcino “Manachiara”- Nardi

This single vineyard Brunello from Nardi in 2006 is quite fine and will be lovely when it has had a chance to blossom with bottle age. The bouquet shows nice, ripe fruit (without straying

over the line into *sur maturité*) coupled to fine soil signature, wafting from the glass in a blend of red plums, cherries, lovely soil transparency, a touch of chocolate, fresh oregano and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and focused, with a good core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and lovely length and grip on the tangy and soil-driven finish. This is good juice in the making! 2020-2050. **92.**

2006 Brunello di Montalcino “Vigna Paganelli”- Il Poggione

The single vineyard bottling of Vigna Paganelli from Il Poggione is aged for four years in large *Botti*, but I do not know how old these large casks are and the wine seems to have picked up some dry wood tannins during its *elevage*. This is a cooler year than 2007 and this shows immediately in the wine’s bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, nutskin, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil, fresh oregano and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and has a good core of fruit, with fine focus and grip, but some uncovered oak tannins drying out the backend of the wine. There seems to have been plenty of skin tannins here in the first place and it is too bad that some oak tannins have also leached into the wine, as it may keep it always a bit dry-edged on the finish. This is good, but not ideally balanced to my palate. 2020-2045. **89+?**

1994 Solaia- Marchesi Antinori

I was expecting to like the 1994 Solaia more than I ended up, for though the bouquet is deep, complex and nicely evolved, the wine seemed to lack a bit of complexity on the palate and the backend still showed a bit of oak tannin that had not been absorbed- after more than twenty years in bottle. The bouquet is really refined, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, lead pencil, a touch of pomegranate, Cuban cigars, dark soil, coffee grounds and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and elegantly balanced, with a good core, but nowhere near the complexity in the mouth that the bouquet promises. The finish is long and focused, but with the aforementioned wood tannins still lurking uncovered on the backend. Not a bad wine by any stretch of the imagination, but I was hoping to be floored by its quality. 2015-2025+. **90.**

1985 Brunello di Montalcino- Poggio Antico

This particular bottle of Poggio Antico Brunello I bought at auction a few years ago and it is possible that it was not stored properly prior to my purchase. I had sold this wine in quite some quantity in my merchant days and had loved it out of the blocks, but this particular bottle was not showing very well. The bouquet is deep and quite tarry in profile, offering up scents of cherries, road tar, Tuscan herbs, damp soil and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and resolved, with sound complexity, but a notably heavy-handed profile on the finish. There is no lift or overt freshness here, which caught me by surprise, as the wine was vibrant as could be in its relative youth. I have to assume this was an off bottle. **???**

1983 Brunello di Montalcino- Pertimali (Livio Sassetti)

This is one of the earliest vintages that I have ever tasted from Livio Sassetti, and the wine is not bad, but not as good as I had hoped. This is of course only a middling vintage for Brunello, but I was hoping for just a bit more here. The nose is quite mature, but rather odd for aged Brunello, offering up scents of cherries, dried eucalyptus, orange peel, dried herbs, woodsmoke and nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still shows a bit of backend tannin, with good length and grip, but some backend rigidity that will probably always be with the wine now. Okay. 2015-2030. **88.**

Vin Santo

1997 Vin Santo del Chianti Classico- Castell'in Villa (500 ml.)

The 1997 Vin Santo del Chianti Classico from Castell'in Villa is a lovely wine at its apogee of peak drinkability. The bouquet offers up a complex and mature blend of apricot, cherries, browned butter, a touch of orange peel, hints of new leather and toasted nuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and well-balanced finish. This is drinking beautifully and still has plenty of life ahead of it, but it is at its zenith and this is the perfect moment to be drinking it. 2016-2030. **92.**



Antonio Pulcini's Superb Malvasia del Lazio From the Colle Gaio Vineyard

This, of course, is not Tuscany, but having tasted the beautiful and long-lived white wines from Antonio Pulcini, I thought I would include my recent notes on his wines in this report on Tuscany, rather than holding them back until I do a more general report on Italian wines early next year. These are made in tiny quantities and very rare wines, as Signor Pulcini's examples from the Colle Gaio vineyard, nestled in the volcanic hills up above and east of Rome, are generally only sold out the cellar door to private clients, but recently the Rare Wine Company was able to talk Signor Pulcini out of a few vintages for offer here in the states. The vineyard is planted entirely to Malvasia del Lazio (the indigenous white grape of the Roman hills), which Antonio planted in the early 1980s. He crops ruthlessly low (twenty hectoliters per hectare), ferments the wine slowly in stainless steel at cool temperatures and allows it to age five months on its fine lees in large old oak casks, prior to racking and bottling. After the bottling, the wine is aged for more than a decade in his cold cellars (with the bottles often buried in sand) before Signor Pulcini feels that they are ready for release. These are rare and very special Italian white

wines that fully emphasize just how long-lived and exciting indigenous varietals can be when cropped at low levels, grown in volcanic soils and made in an artisanal fashion. This was my first visit with the wines of Antonio Pulcini, but it will most emphatically not be my last!

1998 Colle Gaio “The Old White” Malvasia de Lazio- Antonio Pulcini

The 1998 Colle Gaio Malvasia de Lazio from Antonio Pulcini is a lovely bottle that is just starting to stretch its wings at age eighteen and is still probably a few years away from its true apogee of peak drinkability. The bouquet is pure and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of tart pear, menthol, a touch of beeswax, salty soil tones and a nice dollop of fresh rosemary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely interplay between ripe fruit and complex soil tones. The acids are bright, the wine is focused and very long on the backend, with fine soil signature and potential for further evolution with bottle age. A completely new universe to me and most impressive! 2016-2035. **93+.**

1997 Colle Gaio “The Old White” Malvasia de Lazio- Antonio Pulcini

The 1997 vintage of Colle Gaio from Signor Pulcini is a touch less ripe than either the '98 or '95, but at 12.5 percent octane, it really shows its beautiful soil component to full effect. The bouquet is starting to reach full maturity, offering up scents of tart pear, lemon peel, hints of the honey to come, rosemary, a nice touch of citrus oil, dried flowers and salty soils. On the palate the wine is deep, full and wide open structurally, with a nice touch of waxiness to the fruit component, a fine core and a long, complex and zesty finish. This seems to me to now be at its peak, but it is in no hurry to slide down the far side of its plateau. 2016-2025. **92.**

1995 Colle Gaio “The Old White” Malvasia de Lazio- Antonio Pulcini

The 1995 vintage of Colle Gaio from Antonio Pulcini is a gorgeous wine that is now at its peak, but which will be quite a bit longer-lived than the 1997. This has a bit more ripeness than the '97, wafting from the glass in a complex and very pristine blend of menthol, pear, a touch of brown butter, gentle notes of beeswax, that signature salty soil tones, candied citrus peel and a touch of almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and juicy, with superb minerality, a fine core, bright, vibrant acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex finish. Structurally, the 1995 is fully blossomed, but there remains an excellent girdle of acidity to carry this wine for many years to come. 2016-2030. **93.**

COMPARING THE 1981 CLARET VINTAGE AT AGE THIRTY-FIVE AND THE 1986 BORDEAUX VINTAGE AT AGE THIRTY



While no one will dispute that the 1986 vintage in Bordeaux was more successful than the 1981 vintage- at least on the Left Bank- as each vintage reaches a milestone anniversary, I thought it might be interesting to compare and contrast the two vintages and discuss which vintage currently gives more drinking pleasure. Certainly, on the surface, it would seem that these two vintages really are not in the same quality league, as the universally praised 1986 vintage (far stronger on the Left Bank than on the Right) was one of the high water marks of Bordeaux's golden decade of the 1980s, whereas the more middleweight 1981 vintage was really the last year to still have to fight through the market hangover brought about by the collapse in Bordeaux pricing of the mid-1970s. The more middleweight 1981 vintage never really had a chance to stand on its own two feet in the minds of claret lovers, as it was quickly eclipsed by the sumptuously ripe 1982s and was quickly forgotten as the rest of the decade of the 1980s produced fine vintage after fine vintage for much of the ensuing eight years. However, tasting through the 1981s today can really be a very, very enjoyable experience, whereas the more highly acclaimed 1986s remain quite stubbornly backward and bound up in their considerable tannic structures. Of course, it is still hard not to conclude that the best '86s will still eclipse the '81s with sufficient bottle age, but for pleasure in the glass today, there is also little doubt that

the 1981 vintage in Bordeaux is far more interesting than the 1986 vintage at the present time. This is especially true of the Right Bank in 1981, which has really produced some lovely and utterly complete wines.

The 1981 Bordeaux vintage was quite old-fashioned in many aspects, and this includes the rain at harvest time that diluted the wines slightly and took what could have been a very, very good year and made it more average in quality. The flowering had been timed perfectly to get the vintage out of the blocks with a bounce to its step, with the yields were quite “normal” for this era and tiny compared to what would follow in the rest of the decade of the 1980s. The growing season was excellent in 1981- right up to the end- and producers were optimistic for a great, great vintage as late as the middle of September. Picking started at the end of September on the Right Bank and followed fairly promptly in the Médoc. The crop was in beautiful shape on the 28th of September, with excellent ripeness and promise, when the picking commenced, but attendant rainy weather arrived with the new month and heavy precipitation fell from October 1st to the 5th and then returned again for another dousing from October 9th to the 15th. With the rains, hopes for a great vintage faded amongst the *Bordelais* and the market. As the picking began in Pomerol and St. Émilion on September 28th, this allowed for a goodly percentage of the grapes to be gathered in before the rains really started to pelt the region (this was particularly true of the smaller estates in Pomerol) and this has given the Right Bank wines a leg up on their counterparts on the other side of the Gironde. Without the precipitation in early October, it is possible that the 1981 vintage would have been one of the greatest years of this superb decade, but it was not to be. As is typical in rainy autumns, the earlier ripening merlot on the Right Bank was favored, with much of the crop being brought in before the rains or in their early stages. Where cabernet sauvignon is predominant on the Left Bank, it was the better drained, gravel mound soils of the very best-placed estates in the Médoc which had the advantage over the deeper soils of properties further away from the riverside, which retained more of the water during the rainy periods.

In contrast, the 1986 vintage in Bordeaux was completely dry at harvest time and it was a lack of rain earlier in the summer that was most concerning and really helped to define the shape of the vintage. Unlike 1981, the crop load of '86 was enormous, as the relatively late flowering was prolific and the yields of this vintage would eclipse those of 1985, which had set the all-time record only the year before! But, the slightly tardy date of the *floraison* would also put the vines a bit behind schedule during the first half of the summer, and ripening further lagging in the drought conditions of late July and August. Hydric stress in '86 was alleviated with rains on September 14th and 15th, which got the ripening process rolling again nicely on both sides of the Gironde. However, a violent thunderstorm hit on September 23rd, causing flooding in the city of Bordeaux and deluging the vineyards in Pomerol, St. Émilion and the Graves, but only dealing a glancing blow to those in the northern Médoc. This would prove to be a big problem where the storm hit hard, as the grapes were not yet fully mature on the Right Bank and Graves- particularly the tannic structures- and the very heavy rain on the 23rd started pressures of rot in the vineyards and a significant percentage of estates on the Right Bank began picking earlier than would have been ideal. On the Left Bank, the cabernet sauvignon was not even remotely close to ready on September 23rd, so producers had to wait and see what the weather would bring, and October turned out to be superb, with hot, sunny days and no more rain, so that the grapes were able to ripen beautifully in these perfect Indian Summer conditions. The tannins

were still plenty substantial, due to the drought conditions of earlier in the growing season, but the cabernet sauvignon was able to ripen up completely in the glorious October weather and top estates brought in their grapes generally between October 9th and 16th.

A couple of things to keep in mind about the 1986 vintage that are generally not mentioned when one hears of how successful this year is on the Left Bank, and these are that the tannin levels of 1986 were the highest ever measured in Bordeaux up until that time (though eclipsed mightily by 2010 in recent times) and the crop size was also the largest ever measured up to that time as well, with average yields fully sixty-six hectoliters per hectare for the *Bordelais* in 1986. The very high yields allowed the estates that had sufficient financial resources at the time to be very selective as far as what they allowed to be used for their *Grand Vin*, and this may well account for the stunning quality of the very finest wines of the vintage on the Left Bank. However, as this was only a few years into a great run of vintages on the Gironde, the level of affluence at estates was not what we are accustomed to today, and not everyone was in a financial position to practice draconian selection in 1986. At age thirty, most of those very top wines have not really budged a whole lot in terms of their tannins and they are not yet delivering on the very considerable promise that they have shown since their early days in cask. Of the very top '86s that I have tasted recently, most continue to show outstanding depth of fruit and superb balances to go along with their firm chassis of tannin, and it is simply a matter of exercising further patience with the vintage. On the Right Bank, recent tastings of the '86s have been far less convincing, as the tannins have a slightly green edge to them that seems likely to always be part and parcel of the wines, and though they are generally not as tannic as their more successful counterparts on the Left Bank, the wines seem likely to always carry a bit of unwanted tannic influence in the aromatic and flavor profiles of the wines. There are still some good '86 Right Bank wines, but they are not in the same league as the best 1981s from these same properties, with a few notable exceptions.

Today, the 1981s are fully mature, as they have been for the last ten years or more, but continue to drink with style and grace and have plenty of life still ahead of them. The vintage is general has produced more middleweight examples of claret, but this is hardly a bad thing. As I observed above, the vintage is most complete on the Right Bank, where much of the merlot at least could be brought in before the rainy weather really got rolling on the Gironde. I really love the 1981 Pomerols in particular that I have tasted in recent times, and these are some of the best-kept secrets for high quality claret from the decade of the 1980s. In addition to the wines listed below, other standout '81 Pomerols that I did not sample for this article include Pétrus (which I have enjoyed immensely on the handful of occasions that I have drunk it over the years), La Conseillante, which is a lovely example of the vintage, with all of the perfumed elegance of this estate at its best and Certan de May, which is truly exemplary and shows just how favored this commune was in 1981. The St. Émilion roster is a bit more hit and miss in '81, but one would expect this in general, as there is more reliance on cabernet franc in this commune and it would have been a bit more influenced by the rains of the first week of October. But, that said, there are some truly stellar 1981s in St. Émilion as well, led by a really magnificent Cheval Blanc. In the Graves, despite the reputation of the '81 vintage not being stellar in the commune, I have had some very tasty wines, including a really superb Domaine de Chevalier, a meaty and classic La Mission and a very, very good La Tour Haut-Brion as well. I have to assume the excellent drainage of these gravel soils helped the 1981s in the commune. For example, while I have not

drunk the wine in a decade, a magnum of Haut-Bailly '81 was really outstanding back in 2005 and I have no doubt that it continues to drink well to this day in larger format. Further north, '81 Palmer was really lovely at our tasting of the vintage a couple of months back, Ducru-Beaucaillou is one of the absolutely most beautiful wines of the vintage and loaded with the potential to age another thirty years, Gruaud Larose is an excellent '81 and Pichon-Lalande is outstanding as well. While I did not taste it in preparation for this article, I have always found the 1981 Lafite-Rothschild to be utterly classic in profile and it is my favorite First Growth on the Left Bank in this vintage.

In the 1986 vintage, the best wines are indeed found in the Médoc, and it really is a great vintage for the top wines from this side of the Gironde. That said, I do not necessarily agree with the specific wines that have been cited over the years as the ultimate expressions of this fine, albeit quite tannic vintage on the Left Bank. When the vintage was first released, the two wines that received the highest consistent praise were Châteaux Mouton-Rothschild and Margaux, and I fully believed that these two were the finest of the vintage for the first decade or so after they were released. However, as time has gone by, I have been less impressed by how both of these wines have evolved, and while both are still good wines, I have sampled several other 1986s that I would rank as superior to these two. The most recent bottle of Margaux was disappointing when tasted double blind, but there are good bottles and there are bad bottles, so maybe there are better examples out there. The Mouton '86 stayed monolithic for so long (and this is a wine that I have tasted with some regularity since the 1990s) that I wondered if it was ever going to evolve at all, but the recent bottle tasted just before putting this report together was finally starting to show some evolution on both the nose and palate. However, the breathtaking depth is no longer apparent here and I prefer the 1985 Mouton over the 1986 by quite some measure today. Another highly-acclaimed 1986 Médoc that has consistently left me less impressed than most commentators is Leoville Las Cases, which like the '86 Mouton seems plenty deep and extracted, but lacking in developmental pizzazz. Maybe more complexity and breed will emerge from this wine with further bottle age (I did not taste it in preparation for this report), but again, on the last occasion that I drank it, the wine was not showing much more than the sappy, monolithic power of concentration.

However, there are plenty of truly stellar wines to be found in the Médoc in '86, and this is a vintage where one can dive a bit deeper down the classification ladder to find great examples of the vintage. Beyond the very fine roster of '86s tasted for this article and listed below, I have also really enjoyed in the recent past Palmer, Leoville-Barton, Leoville-Poyferré, Gruaud Larose, Talbot, Lynch Bages, Lafite-Rothschild, Calon-Ségur and Sociando-Mallet. In the Graves, beyond the notes below, '86 Haut-Brion has been exceptional when I have drunk it, but the 1986 La Mission Haut-Brion has always seemed a bit horsey from the start (at least the bottles which I have drunk) and it is not my favorite vintage for this fine estate. Oddly, I have not tasted the '86s from either Montrose or Cos d'Estournel in a long, long time. On the Right Bank, most of the successful wines are in the good, but not great camp, with the tannins not quite as ripe as in the top examples from the Left Bank and consequently the balances not quite as refined. My favorite '86s of late from this side of the Gironde have been Vieux Château Certan, Figeac and Cheval Blanc. I should also note that Lafleur seemed like one of the strongest Pomerols of 1986 when I last tasted it (now more than a decade ago) and Pétrus was quite bound up in its youthful

structure, so both of these wines today might be amongst the finest of the '86 Right Bank wines, but I have not been back to either for many years to see how they are faring in bottle.

The notes that follow are organized by commune, starting with Pomerol first and working their way over to the other side of the Gironde. I have grouped each communal set of wines by vintage, so all of the notes on the 1981 Pomerols recently tasted are listed together, following by the 1986s from the same commune. The methodology is then repeated for each subsequent commune. This is of course not a comprehensive report, as there were an awful lot of top properties to be found in Bordeaux in this era (more than there are today for classicists such as myself), and thirty or thirty-five years out from the vintage, I do not have access to everything that merits tasting. But, due to the generosity of my claret-loving friends here in New York, as well as my own cellar, I have tasted a pretty good cross sampling of these two vintages in the last several months and there are enough notes here to at least give readers a good feel for how these two, quite different vintages, are evolving in the bottle and which ones are the most interesting to drink today. As is the case with most of the vintages of this superb decade on the Gironde, I like both the 1981 and 1986 vintages quite well, as there are some very good 1981s out there and the best 1986s will no doubt be the stuff of legend in another ten to twenty years. But, based on these recent samplings, I would have to rate 1982, 1985 and 1989 all as superior to the 1986 vintage, given the more consistent excellence that these three vintages demonstrate over 1986.



The beautiful grounds at Vieux Château Certan on a warm and sunny April morning.

1981 Pomerol

1981 Château Latour à Pomerol

I cannot recall ever having tasted the 1981 Château Latour à Pomerol prior to a horizontal tasting of the vintage at the end of April this year, but I have had several other 1981 Pomerols in the past that I have very much enjoyed, including Trotanoy and La Conseillante. It turns out Latour à Pomerol is also an excellent example of this underrated vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and beautifully red fruity in profile, offering up scents of cherries, red plums, nutskin, violets, a touch of cocoa and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and very soil-driven in personality, with fine focus and complexity, melting tannins and a long, vibrant and beautifully pure finish. This is a lovely middleweight with years and years of life still in it. 2016-2035. **91.**

1981 Château l'Evangile

I very much enjoyed the 1981 l'Evangile, which is full, plush and velvety on the palate and offers up very good, if not great complexity on the nose. The wine gives me the impression of being gently steered to a slightly more fuller style than the vintage's raw materials inherently possessed, perhaps with a bit longer *cuvaison* in the cellars, and thus the wine has traded a bit of precision and breed for a bit more mid-palate amplitude. The bouquet is lovely, offering up scents of black plums, mocha, menthol, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush and wide open, with fine balance and very good length and grip on the utterly wide open finish. This is very good, but I have the sense that the team today at l'Evangile might have embraced the style of the vintage a bit more and produced an even more complex '81. 2016-2030. **90.**

1981 Château Trotanoy

I wrote about the superb quality of the '81 Trotanoy in my article on the estate a couple of years ago and this most recent bottle was yet further confirmation that this is a great sleeper vintage at the property. The bouquet is deep, pure and brilliantly refined, offering up a deep and complex constellation of cherries, pomegranate, nutskin, tobacco leaf, coffee, gravel, cigar smoke and a hint of the chipotle pepper that will come with extended aging. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and complex, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature and still a bit of ripe tannin in evidence on the very long, seamless and graceful finish. A great wine. 2016-2040. **94.**

1981 Vieux Château Certan

The 1981 Vieux Château Certan is a really refined and classic example of this underrated, middleweight vintage. The bouquet is pure, complex and wide open at age thirty-five, jumping from the glass in a lovely blend of dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of botanicals in the upper register, gravel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classy in profile, with a fine core, still a touch of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Just a lovely vintage of VCC. 2016-2040. **92.**

1986 Pomerol

1986 Château Trotanoy

1986 is not a particularly strong vintage for Pomerol, but the '86 Trotanoy has really turned out quite well indeed. The wine is again a bit more black fruity than many vintages of Trot, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of dark plums, black cherries, sweet Cuban tobacco, a lovely base of soil, dark chocolate, woodsmoke and a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very refined, with a slight dip in the mid-palate, but

excellent focus and grip, very modest tannins and a fine, persistent finish. Certainly, a great vintage of Trotanoy would have more mid-palate stuffing than the 1986, but this is a characteristic that is not singular to Trotanoy in this vintage, but rather reflective of the rather middling quality of the '86 vintage in Pomerol in general. I would be delighted to drink the '86 Trotanoy on any occasion, as it is an eminently satisfying glass of nearly mature Pomerol. 2013-2030. **90.**

1986 Vieux Château Certan

1986 is not a legendary Pomerol vintage, but I have had some surprisingly excellent examples from some of the top producers in the commune. The 1986 VCC, with its *cépages* of ten percent cabernet sauvignon and thirty percent cabernet franc (to go along with sixty percent merlot), was probably one of the best-suited Pomerols to the '86 vintage and the wine is excellent. This also happens to have been Alexandre Thienpont's first vintage at the helm of this fine estate and it was the first year where he introduced a bit of crop thinning to attain ideal yields. Today the wine is just starting to drink beautifully, offering up a deep and vibrant bouquet of cassis, new leather, woodsmoke, espresso, a touch of mint, cigar ash, a bit of meatiness and a touch of balsam bough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and black fruity at the core, with a bright and focused personality, a fine base of gravelly soil tones and still just a bit of remaining tannin perking up the long and gently tarry finish. Fine juice. 2016-2045. **92.**

1981 St. Émilion

1981 Château Canon

The 1981 vintage of Canon is very, very good, but I was expecting just a touch more from the wine in terms of breed and complexity at age thirty-five. I have the impression that this is a slightly more extracted style of Canon in this vintage, with Monsieur Fournier perhaps trying to compensate for the leaner style of the vintage. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of red and black cherries, menthol, nutskin, a touch of sealing wax and a fine base of chalky soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch "forced" stylistically, with a good core, a velvety attack and a long, complex finish that closes with good grip and length. Today, the team at Canon would have produced a slightly less concentrated '81 and the wine might have been even better with a more delicate touch in the cellar. But, this is still a good wine with plenty of life in it. 2016-2035. **89.**

1981 Château Cheval Blanc

In my days as a wine merchant, I drank an awful lot of bottles of the 1981 Cheval Blanc, as I always found this to be one of the top wines of the vintage and its price back in the day (and I know I am really dating myself here) was often around forty dollars a bottle! It was pretty easy at that price to reach for this wine off of the shelf to take home and elevate a midweek dinner with its beauty and elegance! At age thirty-five, the wine continues to drink with great vibrancy and complexity, wafting from the glass in a constellation of red and black cherries, menthol, a beautifully complex base of gravelly soil tones, cigar ash and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and wide open, with a lovely core, fine balance and grip, melting tannins and a long, refined perfectly poised finish. A beautiful example of the vintage. 2016-2040+. **94.**

1981 Château Figeac

At our 1981 tasting, the bottle of 1981 Château Figeac was very pretty, but seemed to be tiring a bit. The bouquet offers up a sweet and mature blend of dried red berries, menthol, cigar

ash, gravelly soil tones and plenty of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and velvety on the attack, with a hint of oxidative maltiness in the mid-palate, melted tannins and a modest finish. Wine or bottle? Given the far greater dependence on cabernet sauvignon in the blend at Figeac back in this era, I have to imagine that this property did not have the same advantage of Right Bank estates in 1981 that rely far more on merlot in their blends.

1986 St. Émilion

1986 Château l'Arrosée

The 1986 vintage was right in the midst of the golden run that Château l'Arrosée experienced in the decade of the 1980s, and at age thirty, this wine is still a few years away from primetime drinking, but it is showing fine promise. The bouquet is deep, complex and still quite vibrant in its refined mix of black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a lovely topnote of spices, a nice dollop of autumnal forest floor and a gentle framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with a fine core, very good focus and grip and still a bit of chewy tannin on the backend that need more time to melt away. Give this lovely '86 a few more years in the cellar to more fully blossom. It is a strong Right Bank example of the vintage. 2020-2050. **91+**.

1986 Château Cheval Blanc

The 1986 Cheval Blanc is a beautiful wine and one of the sleeper vintages for this fine estate in the decade of the 1980s. The really refined and lovely nose wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of dark berries, menthol, cigar ash, herbal tones, soil, espresso and a deft touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and classy, with a fine core of fruit, modest, ripe tannins and a very long, still modestly austere and perfectly balanced finish. All this lovely wine needs is just a bit more time in the cellar. 2013-2060. **93+**.

1986 Château Figeac

While 1986 is not a top vintage on the Right Bank, it has certainly produced a superb Figeac. The wine offers up a very deep, pure and striking nose of red and black cherries, Cuban tobacco, raw cocoa, new leather, brilliantly transparent soil tones, fresh herbs and a stylish base of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, ripe tannins and outstanding backend grip and energy on the pure and very long finish. This vintage of Figeac is really starting to drink well at age twenty-six, but I might be tempted to give it a few more years to let just a bit more of the tannin fall away and some of Figeac's customary black truffle tones to emerge on the already very complex and perfumed nose. A beautiful vintage of Figeac that is currently a bit below the radar. 2011-2050. **94+**.

1986 Château Magdelaine

I have had a couple of bottles of the 1986 Magdelaine in the last year and it is a very strong Right Bank effort in this Left Bank vintage. Most recently in March, the wine offered up a complex and mature nose of cherries, blood orange, menthol, nutskins, woodsmoke a superb signature of soil and a topnote of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and still just a touch tannic, with a good core, fine focus and grip, bright acids and a long, wide open and impressive finish. Again, this vintage of Magdelaine is not a blockbuster, but it is very well made and now drinking with lovely style and breed. Good juice. 2015-2040. **91+**.

1981 Graves

1981 Domaine de Chevalier

The 1981 Domaine de Chevalier is an utterly beautiful vintage for this great property and further underscores just how magical a decade the 1980s was at this fine estate. The bouquet is pure, complex and vibrant, jumping from the glass in a red fruity blend of cherries, a touch of blood orange, walnuts, beautiful spice tones, cigar wrapper and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and very intensely flavored, with stunning transparency, seamless, melted tannins and a very long, complex and tangy finish. This is a beautiful DDC in all respects. 2016-2035. **93.**

1981 Château La Mission Haut-Brion

The 1981 La Mission is a very strong example of the vintage and the wine is drinking at its apogee at age thirty-five. The bouquet offers up a fine, complex blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, a touch of new leather, a fine base of dark soil tones and a touch of La Mission's medicinal overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in personality for an '81, with broad shoulders, a superb core, fine soil signature and a long, still modestly chewy and tangy finish. This is not the most elegant example of La Mission, but it has depth and stuffing and delivers plenty of enjoyment. Ironically, I like the '81 La Tour Haut-Brion almost as much as the La Mission in this vintage, though in its early years, the '81 La Mission was much more elegant than it is today and was clearly the more interesting bottle. 2016-2040. **92.**

1981 Château La Tour Haut-Brion

The 1981 La Tour Haut-Brion is still a fairly young example of the vintage and really needs some extended aeration time to fully blossom, but blossom it most assuredly does when given enough time in decanter! The wine starts out a touch bretty, which coupled with the signature Graves tones of iodine and singed cigar can be a bit off-putting to the uninitiated, but with a couple of hours in decanter the wine starts to really put its best foot forward and is a superb example of the vintage. The bouquet eventually is deep, pure and complex, as it offers up scents of very sweet cassis, saddle leather, charred wood, singed tobacco, gravelly soil tones, a bit of bell pepper, cigar smoke and incipient notes of black truffles. On the palate the wine is fullish, very soil-driven and complex, with a sweet core of black fruit, melted tannins and outstanding length and grip on the long and classic finish. La Tour Haut-Brion was always famous for using more press wine, and in 1981, this certainly has given the wine impressive structure for the vintage. A lovely wine. 2014-2035+. **91.**

1986 Graves

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+.**

1986 Château Haut-Bailly

The 1986 Haut-Bailly is a really terrific example of the vintage and is starting to really drink beautifully at age twenty-four. The deep, complex and very pure nose offers up a mix of cherries, orange zest, tobacco leaf, lovely minerality, summer truffles and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and strikingly transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, superb intensity of flavor, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. Just a lovely and very refined example of the '86 vintage. 2013-2035+. **93.**

1986 Château La Louvière (served from magnum)

In the decade of the 1980s, Château La Louvière (very quietly) made some really lovely red wines and the 1986 is one of my favorite vintages here from this era. Out of magnum, the '86 La Louvière is drinking splendidly, offering up a fine nose of dark berries, cigar smoke, a touch of sealing wax, tobacco leaf, gamebird, coffee and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, modest tannins and impressive length and grip on the tangy and complex finish. Good juice by any measure. 2014-2040. **91.**

1986 Château Pape Clément

The 1986 Pape Clément was the first vintage of this wine in many years to garner any positive attention from Robert Parker, and the early promise it showed out of the blocks remains in evidence, but the rather tough structure of the '86 vintage must be waited out before this wine really starts to deliver a lot of pleasure on the palate. The first rate nose offers up a really lovely blend of sweet cassis, dark berries, black truffles, Cuban cigars, gravelly soil tones, a touch of new wood and a bit of cigar ash in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off a great core of sweet fruit, with still some firm tannins buttoning up the backend, good acids and very fine length and grip on the focused finish. This still seems right on track for an excellent apogee of drinkability, but it remains too young for primetime drinking at age twenty-five. 2017-2050. **92+.**

1981 Margaux and Southern Médoc

1981 Château Giscours

The 1981 Château Giscours has been drinking with great generosity since the late 1980s, but the wine continues to show no signs of imminent decline and still offer plenty of pleasure. The nose is deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, dark berries, tobacco leaf, a hint of black pepper, cigar ash and gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and silky on the attack, with fine intensity of flavor, little remaining tannins and fine length and complexity on the stylish finish. The wine does not have great grip these days and is a bit laid back structurally, indicating it is probably starting to approach the far side of its plateau, but it still remains fresh and tasty and is not sliding over the far side yet. 2016-2025. **88.**

1981 Château Palmer

The 1981 vintage at Château Palmer is really lovely middleweight and a wine that offers up lovely sappiness at the core to go along with very refined aromatic complexity. The bouquet is a lovely blend of cassis, mulberry, cigar ash, hints of chipotle pepper, sweet cigar wrapper and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very suave on the attack, with a good core, lovely focus and balance, melted tannins and a long, classy finish. Just a lovely wine that is now at its apogee, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. 2016-2035+. **92.**

1986 Margaux and the Southern Médoc

1986 Château Cantemerle

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

1986 Château La Lagune

The 1986 vintage at La Lagune is very strong, but like many of the wines from this vintage, this is still a few years away from fully blossoming. The bouquet is already quite first rate, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, espresso, cigar ash, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core of fruit, still a slight sharp edge to its remaining tannins and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced and still gently chewy finish. Another five years would be ideal for this excellent example of the vintage. 2021-2050+. **91**.

1986 Château Rauzan-Ségla

For me, the renaissance at Rauzan-Ségla began with the 1983 vintage here, but the first vintage that really came to the attention of American claret lovers was the superb 1986, which continues to drink splendidly well at age thirty. The bouquet is deep, vibrant and very classy, jumping from the glass in a blend of cassis, sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, a touch of bell pepper, leather, cigar smoke and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a fine core, lovely complexity and a long, poised and moderately tannic finish. This is now starting to drink very well indeed, but it has decades of life still ahead of it. 2015-2045. **93**.

1981 St. Julien

1981 Château Beychevelle

The 1981 vintage is not one of the strongest of the decade at Château Beychevelle, but the wine has aged properly and is still a good, solid middleweight. As I noted in my article on the estate a few years ago, the 1981 is completely mature today, but remains sound and still offers up a good glass of claret. The bouquet offers up scents of dark berries, cassis, a fine base of Beychevelle dark soil tones, cigar ash, a hint of violet and some mature nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and velvety, with no rough edges, good focus and nice balance on the complex, though not particularly long finish. This is a very pretty wine for drinking over the next several years. 2014-2020+. **87**.

1981 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou (served from magnum)

As I have written in the past, the 1981 vintage at Ducru-Beaucaillou is the great, sleeper vintage here in the decade of the 1980s and this is one of the top wines produced on the Gironde in '81. This was the first time I had drunk it out of magnum and the wine is stellar in its larger format. The nose wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of sweet dark berries, cassis, cigar wrapper, a hint of the chipotles to come with further bottle age, a beautiful base of gravel, gentle fresh herb nuances and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and

beautifully balanced, with a great core of fruit, moderate, seamless tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and complex finish. There is absolutely nothing “off vintage” about the superb 1981 Ducru. 2016-2065+. **94.**

1981 Château Gruaud-Larose

The 1981 vintage of Gruaud-Larose has been drinking well since age ten, but it remains very nicely balanced and structured and has plenty of life still in it. The bouquet is bright and complex and now transitioning to a nice, tertiary stage, offering up scents of backed black fruit, cigar wrapper, a touch of meatiness, charred wood, celery salt and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with fine focus, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This does not have the depth and muscle of vintages such as 1982 or 1986, but it is a very complete and engaging example of the '81 vintage. 2016-2030+. **89.**

1986 St. Julien

1986 Château Beychevelle

The 1986 vintage has produced a fine, fine example of Château Beychevelle, but this wine is still several years climbing and needs more time in the cellar to really blossom. The bouquet is deep, pure and vibrant, offering up scents of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil tones, cedary oak, coffee and a nice topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and starting to stir and show the first signs of the generosity to come, with a sappy core, fine soil inflection, ripe, firm tannins and a very long, very classy finish. This should prove to be a very long-lived vintage of Beychevelle. 2020-2060+. **94.**

1986 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1986 Ducru is also slightly affected on the backend from the cellar problems at the time at the estate, which is a shame, as this would have been one of the legendary vintages of Ducru-Beaucaillou of the second half of the twentieth century if this were not the case. The bouquet is completely untouched by the TCA issue, offering up a deep and vibrant blend of cassis and sweet, dark berry fruit, cigar smoke, a beautiful base of gravel, tobacco leaf and a gentle base of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with stunning focus and nascent complexity. This wine is a very powerful and very precise vintage of Ducru, but the cellar issue again pinched the fruit component on the backend a bit, leaving the wine a bit short and fairly chewy. Given the firm and tangy nature of the 1986s, one might think that this fruit compression would leave the wine a bit brutally tannic on the finish, but this is in fact not the case, as this is an impeccably balanced and refined wine that is just a bit short from the cellars issues of this short epoch at Ducru. 2018-2050. **87.**

1986 Château Lagrange

The 1986 Lagrange is a beautiful example of the vintage, as it delivers the purity, structural impact and depth of fruit that the best wines of the Médoc display in this vintage. The vintage is made up of a blend of fifty-seven percent cabernet sauvignon and forty-three percent merlot. The bouquet is beginning to show a lovely layer of secondary aromatics in its mélange of black cherries, cassis, dark chocolate, a bit of tobacco and deep, pure soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and rock solid at the core, with lovely complexity, plenty of ripe, substantial tannins, and excellent length and grip on the finish. I would opt for giving the '86 Lagrange another four or five years cellaring before having at it in earnest, but it is blossoming beautifully, and should prove to be a long-lived and excellent example of the '86 vintage. 2012-2040+. **92.**

1981 Pauillac

1981 Château Pichon-Lalande

For drinking at the present time, it is hard not to love the more middleweight vintage of 1981 at Pichon-Lalande. The wine is at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability at the present time, wafting from the glass in a beautiful and quite classic aromatic blend of sweet cassis, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones, a touch of chipotle pepper, cigar ash and a whisper of merlot-derived sweet herb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and utterly suave on the attack, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, melting tannins and impeccable balance on the long and complex finish. A lovely vintage of Pichon. 2016-2035. **92.**



Looking across the vineyards of Château Haut Bages Libéral in the direction of their neighbor, Château Latour.

1986 Pauillac

1986 Château Haut Bages Libéral

The 1986 vintage at Haut Bages Libéral is really outstanding and this has to be one of the great sleepers to be found in the Left Bank in this fine year. The bouquet is deep, pure and vibrant, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, a bit of tariness, gravelly soil tones and a discreet base of smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite tangy, with lovely focus and grip, a good core and a long, ripely tannic and well-balanced finish. This is still a few years away from really fully blossoming, but it is not a bad drink today by any stretch of the imagination. 2018-2050+. **92.**

1986 Château Mouton-Rothschild

There was a time when I thought that the '86 Mouton was one of the greatest vintages ever at this fine property, but as the wine crossed its twentieth birthday with no signs of more complexity starting to emerge, I really began to wonder if I had not just been incorrect in my great expectations for this wine. I have tasted the wine two or three times in the last few years and been moderately underwhelmed on each occasion, with this most recent bottle no exception. It is not that the wine is bad *per se*, but rather that it is still quite monolithic and simple, continuing to show very little development on either the nose and palate. Ten or fifteen years ago, this was not too alarming, as the wine possessed truly exceptional depth of fruit and great purity to go along with its monolithic personality, but at age thirty, I was hoping to see a bit of complexity starting to emerge. The bouquet is indeed starting to show some signs of age, but not a lot more complexity than previously, as it offers up scents of cassis, cigar ash, a touch of tobacco leaf and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, with a primary personality, good, but no longer that great depth of yesteryear. The wine still possesses fine focus, firm, ripe tannins and a long, youthfully simple finish. To be fair to this wine, there are plenty of other 1986 Left Bank wines that are still not remotely ready for primetime drinking, but it is the lack of complexity here that is really the question mark with this wine. It is still a perfectly serviceable vintage of Mouton, and may indeed be great down the road (if this is just a reflection of an extended adolescence), but today, it seems like a far cry from perfection and is not in the same league as the 1989 or 1985 Mouton, let alone the marvelous 1982. 2022-2060. **92+?**

1986 Château Pichon-Lalande

The 1986 vintage on the Left Bank remains a few years away from real blossoming, but at age thirty, the very best wines are starting to stir nicely and it is not a crime today to be dipping a toe in the water (if one has sufficient bottles still in the cellar for future needs). Such is the case with the excellent 1986 Pichon-Lalande, which is not quite fully open, but is starting to show some generosity on the palate and lovely depth on the nose. The bouquet is a youthful, but blossoming blend of cassis, espresso, cigar ash, gentle herb tones, a fine base of gravelly soil and a touch of smoky new oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and starting to just show some secondary development, with a fine, fine core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance and a long, still moderately tannic finish. Another four or five years in the cellar should really allow this wine to open more fully. It will make old bones. 2020-2060. **94+.**

**THE 2014 VINTAGE OF CHARDONNAY AND PINOT NOIR,
AS WELL AS 2013 SYRAHS, FROM RHYS VINEYARDS**



The Santa Cruz Mountains house some of the longest-tenured and exceptional producers in all of California, including Mount Eden Vineyards and Ridge Vineyards. Another of the star estates in this region is located another mountaintop over to the west from Ridge Vineyards, and this is the far less venerable, but every bit as exciting, Rhys Vineyards. Each year I eagerly await the new releases from the winery, which this summer sent me their 2014 bottlings of chardonnay and pinot noir, as well as their 2013 bottlings of syrah (which are always one year behind on the release schedule). I have a plethora of other top American releases in my cellar for an upcoming feature in a coming issue, but wanted to tackle the new releases from Rhys ahead of that article, as several of the wines are already on the market and will disappear fairly briskly. The 2014 vintage was another drought year in California wine country, with a precocious and warm spring getting the growing season out of the blocks early, and this accelerated timetable was kept throughout the year and it ended up being a very early harvest. Sparkling wine producers began picking their grapes in July (as was again the case with the 2016 harvest), with Rhys getting rolling in mid-August in their chardonnay vineyards. The crop was short in 2014, but Rhys owner Kevin Harvey was very happy with the quality of the grapes and, comparing the potential of 2014 to both 2013 and 2012, commenting that “I would not be surprised to see 2014 prove to be the best of these three great vintages.” Due to the drought conditions of this vintage, the wines across the board are a touch higher in octane than the magical 2013s crafted by the team at Rhys, with several of the 2014 wines here in the 13.4 to 13.6 percent range in alcohol, but perfectly balanced and crafted to age long and gracefully in the cellar.

As Kevin Harvey noted, “2014 was the second in a four year (and counting) series of very early, warm vintages,” as similarly early springs and hot summers have been the norm from 2013 through 2016 in the regions where Rhys has their vineyards. Despite the warm summer temperatures, the style of the 2013 and 2014 vintages has not been particularly “hot vintage” in character, with the wines at Rhys showing lovely purity and structural integrity. As Kevin continued, “the interesting thing is that the vintages have started warm, but then they have had normalized temperatures to finish,” and though “I would not have expected it, the pattern seems to produce great results for us.” Given that Rhys has vineyards in the Anderson Valley, the Santa Cruz Mountains and San Mateo county, and is growing chardonnay, pinot noir and syrah, the harvest can be fairly drawn out for the winery, as different AVAs mature at different times, and this is particularly true of some of the cooler sites where Rhys has its syrah vines planted. The spread in different microclimates for the various Rhys vineyards also means that there can be varying levels of ripeness in the wines from these different parcels. For example, the 2014 Alpine Vineyard chardonnay comes in at 13.5 percent octane this year, but the 2014 pinot noir from the Horseshoe Vineyard is only 12.7 percent. So despite the generally warm vintage conditions of 2014, one can see that this is not the case with each and every wine this year from Rhys Vineyards. Kevin notes that “we started picking on August 18th in 2014 and finished up with our Horseshoe Syrah on September 24th,” so the picking was stretched out over the course of more than a month.

The Rhys Vineyards lineup in 2014 is a bit different than followers of the winery have become accustomed, as there are some relatively new-planted vineyards that have now come on line here, as well as the short crop making some traditional bottlings impossible in this vintage. To begin with, the vines that were planted in the rolling hills of the Bearwallow Vineyard in Anderson Valley in 2009 are now starting to come into production for the winery, so there are new “Anderson Valley” bottlings of both chardonnay and pinot noir in 2014 from Rhys that utilize some of this new fruit. In this vintage, there are also no bottlings under the Alesia label that Rhys has used in the past for wines made from purchased grapes to augment the line up from their estate vineyards. As Kevin Harvey observed, “we have shelved Alesia again after the 2013 vintage, as with the maturation of Bearwallow’s new vines we have all the fruit we can handle from estate vineyards.” He continues, “I am hoping that the Rhys ‘Anderson Valley’ bottlings will fill that Alesia niche with our customers.” Additionally, the estate vineyard lineup of chardonnays has also been expanded in the 2014 vintage, as the very first Bearwallow Vineyard chardonnay has been released in this vintage and it is a lovely first step for this varietal from this lovely vineyard. It is an amazingly fine wine for young vines and augurs oh so well for future vintages of chardonnay from this *terroir*.

On the other side of the ledger, there are no Santa Cruz bottlings of either chardonnay or pinot noir in 2014, as the very small yields simply made it impossible to produce these two cuvées. In general, the 2014 crop is twenty-five percent shorter than either 2012 or 2013 at Rhys Vineyards, and this was felt quite a bit in their Santa Cruz parcels. There is also no 2014 “San Mateo” pinot noir this year, as again, there simply were not enough grapes to produce this wine. However, Kevin Harvey was quick to point out that all three of these bottlings are still considered permanent additions to the Rhys lineup, and they will be made again when there are enough grapes in future vintages. Sadly, this will not be in 2015 either, as “the crop was miniscule in the Santa Cruz Mountains” in particular in ’15, “but we do plan those bottlings for

2016” observed Kevin. So the range is different here in 2014, but no less impressive, despite a few of the familiar names missing in this vintage, and a few newer additions added to the lineup. The inevitable question will be where do these fine 2014s stack up with the otherworldly beauty of many of the 2013s produced at Rhys, which was my very favorite vintage so far here at the winery. The answer is that it is simply too early to tell with any certainty, as the 2014s seem just a touch more buttoned up behind their structural elements at this point in their evolutions than was the case with the 2013s a year ago. My gut instinct is that some 2014s will eclipse their 2013 counterparts with sufficient bottle age, while others will see a slight advantage retained by the corresponding 2013. But, either way, the 2014 lineup is an absolutely outstanding follow-up to the vinous fireworks here from the 2013 vintage, and no one is going to be disappointed in having any of the 2014s from Rhys Vineyards in their cellar for future enjoyment.

I would be remiss in not mentioning the pair of 2013s that are also now just being released from the winery this summer, as it is customary at Rhys to hold back the release of their syrah bottlings one year more than their pinot noirs and chardonnays, so the two single vineyard bottlings of syrah from Skyline and Horseshoe Vineyards are also just now finding their way onto the market. Much of the wine world’s attention at Rhys Vineyards seems to be primarily focused on their chardonnay and pinot noir bottlings, which are of course stellar in quality, but one should not lose sight of the fact that the two syrahs produced here are equally exceptional in quality and deserve every bit as much attention as the chards and pinots. Both vineyards seem equally adroit at turning out minerally-infused examples of low octane syrah that will age long and gracefully, and these two 2013s in their own way are every bit as brilliant as the top pinot noir cuvées from Rhys in this outstanding vintage. In fact, if I had to choose only one varietal to put in my cellar from Rhys Vineyards (happily, this is not the case!), I might actually choose the syrahs- that is just how good these wines are and they should most certainly not be overlooked when wine lovers are hunting down bottles of the chardonnays and pinot noirs here! As was the case in 2013, the team at Rhys has bottled “Hillside” examples of pinot noir from both the Alpine and Horseshoe Vineyard again in 2014. Readers may recall how enthusiastic I was about the 2013 versions, which were the first that I had ever tasted of these reserve cuvées, and the 2014s are every bit as special.

2014 Chardonnay

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Anderson Valley” Chardonnay

This is the first vintage of Anderson Valley chardonnay that the winery has produced, and it is a very lovely wine that will drink well from its release. The bouquet is very floral and esthery, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of pear, tangerine, fresh almond, white lilies, a hint of *crème patissière*, a nice base of soil and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very nicely generous on the attack, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core, bright acids and a long, complex and very refined finish. This is very nicely accessible out of the blocks, but it is still fairly primary in profile and I would be inclined to hold this two or three years in the cellar and allow it to develop its secondary layer of complexity. Really a lovely wine. 2016-2025. **92.**

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Bearwallow Vineyard” Chardonnay (Anderson Valley)

This is also the first vintage of vineyard-designated chardonnay produced from the Bearwallow Vineyard. Kevin Harvey and his team purchased Bearwallow in 2008, which at the time was planted only to pinot noir, and they put their chardonnay into the ground the following

year, so this is the produce of five year-old vines. However, high density planting and a close eye on yields has produced a 2014 chardonnay here that has plenty of intensity of flavor and little young vine character. This is more reserved and more serious in personality than the very lovely Anderson Valley bottling, offering up a deep and youthfully complex bouquet of fresh pineapple, pear, a touch of French butter, complex soil tones, citrus blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core, fine focus and grip, nascent complexity and impeccable balance on the long and still quite primary finish. I really love the elegance and personality of this wine, which augurs so well for down the road, as I can only imagine how good this wine is going to be when the vines are twenty-five years of age! Again, this is really a fine glass of wine today, but at least a couple of years in the cellar are highly recommended. 2018-2030. **93+**.



2014 Rhys Vineyards “Horseshoe Vineyard” Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2014 Horseshoe Vineyard chardonnay from Rhys Vineyards is a bit riper than normal, due to the drought conditions, coming in at 13.6 percent octane. This has produced a more wide open wine than the 2013 version, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of apple, tangerine, esthery tones, incipient notes of butter, lovely minerality and orange blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with quite a wide open personality out of the blocks for this bottling. The acids are bright and zesty, the focus is lovely and the core here is ample, with the potential to age gracefully, but an open-knit personality that is going to make it extremely difficult to keep one’s hands off of bottles in the cellar. 2016-2025. **93**.

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Alpine Vineyard” Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2014 vintage of Alpine chardonnay from Kevin Harvey and the talented team at Rhys is also a tad riper this year, coming in at 13.5 percent, but impeccably focused and balanced. The lovely bouquet delivers a nascently complex constellation of pear, acacia blossom, a marvelous base of soil tones, a touch of fresh almond, a very discreet base of vanillin oak, hints of the butter to come with bottle age and an esthery topnotes of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and still quite primary finish. I do not know why, but this year the Alpine chardonnay seems very, very Puligny-Montrachet-like in personality. Fine juice that will be approachable from the outset, but clearly is built to age and will offer more complexity a few years down the road. 2016-2025+. **92+**.

2014 Pinot Noir

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Anderson Valley” Pinot Noir

The 2014 Rhys Vineyards “Anderson Valley” Pinot Noir is a lovely and fairly wide open aromatically and will make friends immediately, but clearly it has the depth and seamless balance to age long and gracefully as well. The bouquet is bright and utterly inviting, offering up a constellation of black plums, pomegranate, hints of the cola to come, a fine base of dark soil, a really attractive dollop of sweet Mendocino weediness and a lovely framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with a bit more tannic structure than the wide open nose suggests. The finish is long, focused and ripely tannic, with tangy acids and impressive grip on the still quite primary backend. The very extroverted bouquet suggests a wine that will drink well from a young age, but the backend structure begs to differ! A quite serious bottle in the making, I would give it at least two or three years in the cellar to allow the palate to catch up with the generosity of the nose. 2020-2045+. **91**.

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Bearwallow Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

I simply adored the 2013 vintage of Bearwallow pinot noir, and the 2014 version is a fine follow-up to that superb wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, cola, black plums, woodsmoke, sweet herbs, a dollop of spicy oak and a topnote of cumin. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with outstanding mid-palate depth, ripe, perfectly integrated tannins, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the poised and youthful finish. This shows significantly more complexity and precision than the very good Anderson Valley bottling, but it is still a puppy and a bit bound up in its suave structural elements. It is built for the long haul and I would give this at least seven or eight years in the cellar before I even contemplated opening a bottle. Not that it is all that bad of a drink right out of the blocks, but there is so much more to come here with bottle age that it would be infanticide to even think of opening bottles before it really has had a chance to develop! 2023-2060+. **93+**.

2014 Rhys Vineyard “Porcupine Hill” Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

As I noted last year, the Porcupine Hill bottling of pinot noir from Rhys comes from the new, high density plantings in the Bearwallow Vineyard that went in the ground after the winery bought the vineyard in 2008. The 2013 version was the inaugural vintage for the Porcupine Hill cuvée and the 2014 follow-up is very impressive, wafting from the glass in a constellation of black cherries, red plums, pomegranate, chicory, dark soil tones, a bit of bonfire, just a whisper of fresh rosemary and a very understated framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very transparent in personality, with a lovely core of black

fruit, suave, seamless tannins, tangy acids, great balance and a very, very long, elegant and promising finish. Last year, I had to give the regular bottling from Bearwallow the slight nod over the Porcupine Hill, but this year the reverse is the case. This is a beautiful, beautiful bottle of pinot noir in the making! 2023-2060+. **94+**.

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Home Vineyard” Pinot Noir (San Mateo County)

The 2014 Home Vineyard cuvée of pinot noir from Rhys is a tad lower in octane than the Anderson Valley bottlings, coming in at 13.2 percent alcohol in this vintage. The wine is absolutely beautiful aromatically, offering up an utterly classic bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, incipient notes of cola, fresh thyme and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, fine-grained tannins, good acids and fine length and grip on the focused and very promising finish. This is more overtly black fruity in personality than the single vineyard bottlings from Anderson Valley, and though the acids here are very good, it is not quite as vibrant as those two wines. A lovely bottle in the making, but quite different in personality than the pinots from Mendocino and the Santa Cruz Mountains (as it should be!), as the lovely soil tones here play more of a supporting role than in the wines from those other two regions in 2014. Give this some extended time in the cellar to allow the tannins to fall away a bit and the textural polish to catch up with the aromatic fireworks. 2022-2050+. **92+**.

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Family Farm Vineyard” Pinot Noir (San Mateo County)

The 2014 Family Farm pinot noir is a bit more typical of the vintage’s ripeness level, coming in at 13.5 percent. The bouquet seems a tad more marked by its new wood than most of these other single vineyard bottlings, but this is just the stage the wine is in today. The nose is a fine blend of cassis, black cherries, a touch of chicory, dark soil tones, espresso, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and a bit more vibrant in personality than its San Mateo stable-mate of Home Vineyard. The balance is impeccable, the tannins suave and perfectly integrated and the finish very long, nascently complex and utterly refined. I have a gut feeling that this will age even longer than the Home Vineyard 2014, but it is so beautifully balanced that it will also offer more enjoyment early on in its evolution. 2020-2060. **93+**.

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Horseshoe Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2014 Rhys Horseshoe Vineyard pinot noir is one of the lowest octane reds in the lineup this year, coming at 12.9 percent alcohol. As was the case with the 2013 a year ago, this shows a bit of its stems from the inclusion of whole clusters, but this will just deliver more complexity when the wine is really ready to drink. The complex bouquet delivers a very refined constellation of sappy black cherries, plums, a touch of grilled meat, black minerality, raw cocoa, fresh herbs and a discreet base of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely reserved in personality, with a great core, superb soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a very, very long, transparent and gently meaty finish. This is the first 2014 single vineyard bottling in the lineup that strikes me as surpassing its excellent 2013 counterpart! This will need time in the cellar, but it will be stunning when it is ready to drink. 2022-2060. **94**.

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Skyline Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2014 Skyline Vineyard pinot noir is amazingly aromatic for its youth, with all sorts of exotic spice and herb tones wafting from the glass to augment gorgeous fruit and a profound base of soil. The bouquet is flat out stunning, offering up a complex and exotic nose of black cherries, plums, sarsaparilla, just marvelous soil tones, a potpourri of sweet herb tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a serious

chassis of ripe tannin, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, and very young finish. This is still a young and adolescent wine that needs some extended cellaring, but it is going to be sex appeal personified when it is ready to go. If there has ever been a more exotic Rhys Skyline pinot noir, I would love to taste it! 2022-2060. **94+**.



2014 Rhys Vineyards “Alpine Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2014 Alpine Vineyard pinot noir from Rhys is another outstanding young bottle of pinot, with its whole clusters showing a bit today, but all of the constituent components in place for greatness down the road. The wine offers up a deep and nascently complex nose of dark berries, espresso, woodsmoke, a superb base of dark soil tones, a touch of stems (which are already starting to show some cinnamon shadings), chicory and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and strikingly mineral, with a fine core, impeccable focus and balance, suave tannins and a very, very long, tangy and promising finish. This is going to be a great wine (I particularly like how vibrant it is on the backend), but it will demand a bit of patience to allow it to blossom completely with proper bottle age. 2024-2060. **94+**.

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Swan Terrace” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2014 Swan Terrace pinot noir, which comes from an easterly-facing section of Alpine Vineyard, is absolutely stellar in this vintage. The wine is a tad lower in octane than the Alpine bottling (12.7 versus 13.0 percent) and offers up a superb and absolutely precise bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, espresso, complex minerality, chicory, woodsmoke, a

youthful touch of stems and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and tangy, with a good core, fine-grained tannins and lovely length and grip on the soil-driven finish. This is fully a half point higher in octane than the thoroughbred 2013 version, but it continues the line of Swan Terrace bottlings that deliver great intensity of flavor without undue weight. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2055. **94.**

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Horseshoe Hillside” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2014 is the second vintage of the “Horseshoe Hillside” reserve bottling from Rhys Vineyards. The wine is once again a brilliant young pinot noir, offering up again stunning precision and nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. The very promising bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark berries, raw cocoa, a bit of gamebird, lovely, discreet spice tones, a fine signature of soil, still a bit of youthful stem tones and a discreet base of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and transparent, with a superb core, exceptional focus and balance, fine-grained tannins, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the youthful, but stunning finish. This is an absolutely exceptional young bottle of pinot noir and is a fine, fine follow-up to the magical 2013 version. 2024-2060+. **96.**

2014 Rhys Vineyards “Alpine Hillside” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2014 Alpine Hillside bottling of pinot noir from Rhys Vineyards is once again my favorite of this absolutely stellar roster of 2014 pinots from this great Santa Cruz Mountain property. The wine offers up a marvelous nose of black plums, black cherries, espresso, woodsmoke, black minerality, fresh thyme and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and tightly-knit, with a marvelous core, great mineral drive, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the ripely tannic and laser-like finish. At this point in its evolution, this does not seem quite as magical as the 2013, but this should not take away from the sheer brilliance this wine will deliver when it is fully mature. 2024-2060+. **96+.**

2013 Syrah

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

The 2013 Syrah from the Horseshoe Vineyard is quite ripe for this varietal from the Rhys team, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol, but the wine is all about precision and mineral drive and shows no signs of blowsiness on either the nose or palate. The superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a ripe and complex mix of cassis, black raspberries, woodsmoke, a touch of grilled meats, dark soil tones, chocolate, pepper and an exotic topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and complex, with its full-bodied format absolutely perfectly balanced, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, chewy tannins and simply outstanding length and grip. This is ripe like 1990 Chave is ripe, and I probably have a very slight preference for the lower octane 2012 version, but this is also a very, very serious young syrah. 2021-2060. **94.**

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

Interestingly, the 2013 Skyline Vineyard bottling of syrah from Rhys is lower in octane than both the 2013 Horseshoe and the 2012 version from this vineyard, as this comes in at a very civilized 13.1 percent alcohol. The bouquet is ripe, but very pure, wafting from the glass in an impressively complex constellation of sweet dark berries, cassis, grilled meats, a touch of black olive, lavender, eucalyptus, lovely minerality, just a dollop of new wood and a topnote of black licorice. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with ripe, chewy tannins, great depth at the core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and youthful finish. The backend vibrancy here is outstanding, and with sufficient bottle age, this is going to be a brilliant wine. 2023-2060+. **95.**