

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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DOMAINE DROUHIN IN OREGON TURNS THIRTY!



The entrance to Domaine Drouhin in Oregon, nestled into the Dundee Hills.

Domaine Drouhin in Oregon is celebrating their thirtieth anniversary this year, and I was fortunate to be invited out to the winery to help in the anniversary celebrations this past July. The history of the Drouhin family in Oregon goes all the way back to when Robert Drouhin first visited the Willamette Valley in the early 1960s and his interest in the state as a potential grape-growing region continued as the early pioneers of the Oregon wine trade, such as David Lett and Dick Erath were getting started in the late 1960s and putting in vineyards and starting out on the long road to creating a major wine-producing region. In 1979 and 1980, Monsieur Drouhin attended blind tastings of Oregon pinot noirs versus red Burgundies held in Paris (the second of which he organized), which further convinced him that this was an area where pinot noir and chardonnay could excel within a Burgundian framework in the new world. In 1986, his daughter Véronique Drouhin-Boss completed her degree in Oenology from the University of Dijon and headed west to Oregon to intern and work the harvest at three wineries: Eyrie Vineyards, Bethel Heights and Adelsheim Vineyards. From Véronique's time here in 1986, the bond was formed between the Drouhin family and Oregon wine country, and in the summer of 1987, when David Lett of Eyrie Vineyards mentioned to Robert Drouhin that a fine piece of property was coming up for sale in the Dundee Hills, which would be perfectly suited to vineyards, the Drouhin family

decided to set down some roots across the Atlantic and Domaine Drouhin in Oregon (DDO) was officially founded. The land was planted at this time to Christmas trees and wheat, so the first vineyards were cleared and planted in 1988 and winery construction was begun in early 1989. For many of the early Oregon wine pioneers, this was a seminal moment in the history of wine production in the Willamette Valley, as the arrival of the Drouhins in the Dundee Hills helped to cement the reputation of this still fledgling wine region, which had really only been up and running in a meaningful way since the early 1970s.

Robert Drouhin asked his daughter Véronique Drouhin-Boss to head the winemaking team at DDO, and she made the winery's first wine here from purchased grapes in the 1988 vintage. There were ninety-six barrels of the inaugural vintage of 1988 pinot noir, which Véronique crafted at Veritas Winery in Newberg (which is now Chehelam Winery). Her brother, Philippe Drouhin, who is in charge of the viticulture for the family domaine's vineyards back in Burgundy, oversaw the planting of the vineyards in the Dundee Hills at this time, though it would still be a couple of years before the Drouhins would be able to use fruit from their own vineyards for their early releases of pinot noir (1990 was the first vintage to include a modicum of estate grown fruit), and it was not until the 2010 vintage that their regular bottling of pinot noir was made entirely from pinot noir hailing from the estate's own vineyards. The construction of the winery was started in early 1989 and Véronique was able to use the *cuvier* and cellars to ferment the second vintage of DDO here in the autumn of that year, despite the fact that construction was ongoing and there was still no roof over the structure when the grapes went into the fermenters! She recalled that she made the 1989 vintage, with the classical music turned way up on the stereo and everyone in the cellars still required to wear hard hats on the site, as workers continued to push hard to finish up the winery infrastructure ahead of the winter of 1989. The first few vintages from Domaine Drouhin were exclusively pinot noir, and it was not until the 1992 vintage that the family first dipped their toes into the water of Oregon chardonnay, producing two casks of white wine in their inaugural vintage of chardonnay production at DDO.

The winery and vineyards sit nestled up in the Dundee Hills above the small city of Dundee, a bit under an hour's drive west of downtown Portland. Today, the estate includes one hundred and thirty acres of vineyard land, with one hundred and seventeen of these planted to pinot noir and thirteen acres to chardonnay. The rolling hillside vineyards sit at an elevation of between four hundred and eight hundred meters above sea level, primarily on a mix of Jory red volcanic soils. Since the outset, the Drouhin family has established a nursery on their property to propagate cuttings and their own rootstock, so that the latter-planted vineyards here have all been planted by *selection massale*. Early planting included some Pommard clones, but since the mid-1990s, everything has been planted on a mix of Dijon clones at DDO. Today, these densely-planted vineyards are farmed about sixty percent organically, with this sustainable viticulture in transition to cover the entire vineyard in due course. As is the case with all of the Drouhin vineyards in the Côte d'Or, all of the vineyards here in Oregon are picked by hand. With the winery building nestled into the Dundee Hills, its four story structure can all be worked via gravity, so that no pumping of the wines is ever required, allowing for as gentle a handling of the wines during the *élevage* and bottling of both the pinot noirs and chardonnays. The pinot noir grapes arrive at the crush pad at the top of the winery and are generally destemmed (there has been a bit of whole clusters used in 2015 and 2016, but typically Véronique has not found the stems sufficiently ripe to include in most vintages of DDO pinot), then crushed and given a short

“cold soak” prior to the onset of fermentation. The wines ferment in stainless steel fermenters and then are moved by gravity to the barrel room for malolactic fermentation and *elevage* in cask, with only about twenty percent new oak used for any of the pinot noir bottlings.

Presently, the domaine produces four distinct bottlings of pinot noir, with the regular “Estate” bottling now augmented by two special cuvées named for two of Véronique’s daughters, Laurène and Louise Drouhin-Boss. The fourth bottling is called “Édition Limité” and is made in very small quantities in only a few vintages, with the wines reserved for members of the DDO mailing list. In fact, the team at DDO is so discreet about the Édition Limité bottlings, that I was completely unaware of their existence until I arrived at the winery for some of the thirtieth anniversary celebrations! In addition to this fine roster of pinot noir bottlings, the estate also now produces three separate cuvées of chardonnay, with an estate bottling augmented by a reserve bottling called “Cuvée Arthur” named for Véronique’s son, and another Édition Limité bottling of chardonnay, which again is only made in small quantities and sold primarily to DDO’s Wine Club members on the mailing list. There is typically enough of the Édition Limité Chardonnay that the wine is available beyond the DDO Wine Club roster, and can be purchased either from the winery’s website or when visiting and tasting at the domaine. The Édition Limité Pinot Noir is mostly snapped up by members of the Wine Club, but there is occasionally enough for some to also be found on the website or when tasting at the estate, but neither one is sufficiently large enough in production to find their ways into the standard distribution channels of the Domaine Drouhin wines.



Véronique Drouhin-Boss, head winemaker of DDO, under the pines in one of the winery’s picnic areas.

In addition to the original Domaine Drouhin vineyards in the Dundee Hills, the Drouhin family has just recently purchased a second vineyard project in Salem, Oregon, called Roserock, which has been developed in the cooler Van Duzer Corridor in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA. This project saw its first wines released in the 2014 vintage and was purchased by the family in late 2013. It was a property that was already planted to vineyards, with one hundred and eleven acres of pinot noir and twelve acres of chardonnay vines extant, with the additional possibility down the road of perhaps planting another seventy acres or so of vineyard land on the property in the future. With the cooler inflow of air from the Pacific coast each evening through the Van Duzer Corridor (a break in the Coastal Range), the Roserock property has broader diurnal temperature swings and produces fruit that is “cooler” in profile than the original DDO vineyards in the warmer Dundee Hills AVA. Roserock was the name that the vineyard had already been given by its previous owners and the Drouhin family decided to simply keep the established name for the property. Véronique Drouhin-Boss and her team are presently producing three wines from the Roserock estate- two pinot noirs and a single chardonnay. There are the two “Estate” bottlings under the Roserock label (a chardonnay and a pinot noir), as well as a reserve pinot noir cuvée called “Zéphirine”, which it takes its name from a famous rose hybrid developed in Dijon back in the early nineteenth century which is called “Zéphirine Drouhin”. The wines at the Roserock property are vinified and aged similarly to those at DDO, with no more than twenty percent new wood used during the *elevage*, but the different microclimates between the two AVAs give the Roserock bottlings a racier character than the more plush bottlings from the Dundee Hills. These are a very exciting new addition to the Drouhin family’s portfolio of Oregon wines and it will be interesting to follow their evolution, as Véronique and her DDO team get to know the vineyards and the *terroir* here a bit better with each passing year.

As Véronique has a myriad of responsibilities to attend to over the course of the year at Maison Joseph Drouhin in Beaune, where she lives with her husband Michel Boss and their children, her overseeing the winemaking at Domaine Drouhin in Dundee would not be possible without a very strong team at DDO who oversee the day to day operations of the winery while Véronique is at home in Beaune during much of the year. Her right hand in the cellars is Aaron Bell, who has been working in the cellars here since 2002 and officially became the Assistant Winemaker and Operations Manager at DDO in 2009. His wife Ashley Bell is in charge of all aspects of the hospitality side of the winery, which has grown considerably in recent years, (as witnessed by the large number of very happy visitors whom had packed the parking lot to visit and taste at DDO at the time of my first arrival at the winery this past July), as well as overseeing the direct sales from the cellars to their Wine Club members around the globe (yes, she is the keeper of the keys to those “Édition Limité” bottlings). Ashley has been with DDO since 2004. In the same year, David Millman joined the winery as the Managing Director, and he has overseen the operation since that time, ensuring that everything is on track while Véronique is covering the globe for either Maison Joseph Drouhin or Domaine Drouhin as one of the wine world’s most recognizable and eloquent ambassadors, or overseeing the winemaking back in Beaune, rather than ensconced in the cellars at DDO making the wines here each harvest. Véronique leads a very peripatetic existence, as often to be found on airplanes as anyone in the wine world these days, and without a great staff at Domaine Drouhin Oregon, maintaining the very high quality of these wines (which has been evident since the very first release all the way back in the 1988 vintage) would simply not be possible.

As noted above, the first few years at DDO were dedicated to pinot noir production solely, with only an estate bottling of pinot noir produced from 1988 through 1992. In the 1992 vintage, Véronique and the team at Domaine Drouhin augmented their lineup by producing their first example of chardonnay, which has continued to the present day as their estate bottling, as well as their first reserve pinot noir cuvée, which was named after Véronique's oldest daughter, Laurène. The Cuvée Laurène bottling is a barrel selection made in the cellars, with Véronique choosing barrels that seem particularly structured and deep, as the goal is to make the Cuvée Laurène bottling for extended cellaring. Like all of the DDO pinot noirs, the grapes are destemmed for this bottling, fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in no more than twenty percent new oak. In 1999, the team at DDO further augmented the lineup with the addition of another reserve bottling of pinot noir for longer-term aging, which is named after Véronique's younger daughter, Louise, and the Cuvée Louise bottling was launched in this vintage when three casks were selected out of the cellar for the inaugural release. Like the Cuvée Laurène bottling, the Cuvée Louise is a barrel selection made after the wines have started their *élevage* post-fermentation, with an eye towards crafting a bottling from only a few casks that will fit together nicely and produce an ultimate expression of a given vintage. These days, most vintages will yield about a dozen casks of Cuvée Louise at DDO. In contrast to the estate bottling of pinot noir at DDO, which will typically start to drink nicely in most vintages a couple of years out from release, these two reserve bottlings definitely are built for the cellar and one should not consider opening a bottle until they are at least a decade removed from their given vintage.

The regular roster was completed at Domaine Drouhin in 2002, with the first reserve bottling of chardonnay from the estate, named after Véronique's son, Arthur. The Cuvée Arthur bottling is produced entirely from Dijon clones that were the first chardonnay planted on the estate, having gone into the ground in 1990. The wine is partially barrel-fermented and partially fermented in stainless steel, with Véronique and her cellar team making a selection for this bottling with an eye towards producing the most elegant rendition of chardonnay possible in a given vintage at DDO. At the thirtieth anniversary tastings, it was a great pleasure to have each of Véronique's children in attendance for the events, with each assisting in pouring bottles of their namesake cuvées. The DDO lineup of an estate and reserve bottling of chardonnay, and an estate pinot noir and two reserve bottlings of this red grape, was further augmented with the "Édition Limité" bottlings of both chardonnay and pinot noir, which were created partly to give something special to members of the winery's mailing list who purchase their wines through the Wine Club here. The Édition Limité series was first started in 2004 with the chardonnay bottling, as in this vintage, there were two casks that really stood out in Véronique's mind and she decided to bottle them on their own. Since that time, the Édition Limité Chardonnay has been produced in each subsequent vintage, with the production ranging from two to six casks, depending on the vintage. The Édition Limité bottling was not added to the roster until 2011, when a certain small section of the vineyard performed extremely well, and so this cuvée was added to the DDO lineup in this vintage, but it is not produced in every vintage (there was not 2013 for example), as it is dependent upon whether or not this parcel performs above the overall vintage average. The Édition Limité Pinot Noir is the only red at DDO that is now routinely made using whole clusters.



The estate vineyard at Domaine Drouhin cascading down the hillside from the winery at the top of the hill.

As I alluded to at the outset, I was only at DDO for a handful of events from what was a full week of various celebrations to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the winery. Most of the activities were geared towards the winery's distributors around the globe, as well as many of their long-time mailing list clients who have been buying and cellaring the Domaine Drouhin wines since the very earliest days here. It was great fun to get to meet some of these other long-time clients of the domaine, as back in my wine merchant days I started selling the wines from DDO with the very first vintage of 1988 and always carried them during my retail era. When I moved on to the sommelier side of the business in the mid-1990s, Domaine Drouhin's pinot noir was also a regular staple on my wine lists. So it was great pleasure to meet some of these other early supporters of the winery and hear tales of their memorable tastings and receive invitations to drop by on my next trip out to help them with a few bottles of the earliest vintages of DDO pinot, which they still have resting comfortably in their own cellars! In addition to all of the people who have supported DDO over the years, both in the wine trade and as collectors, the Thirtieth Anniversary events were also marked by one of the rare occasions when all three of Véronique's brothers were together out in Dundee to help the family celebrate this landmark occasion, not to mention several of their children as well.

During my time out in Oregon in the third week of July, I attended a marvelous vertical tasting of the three reserve bottlings of Cuvée Arthur Chardonnay and Cuvées Laurène and

Louise (not to mention a few venerable vintages of the Estate bottling of pinot) on one afternoon, as well as a couple of fine dinners served out under a grove of ancient pine trees, where it snowed food and rained wine, both of excellent quality! The second dinner I was a part of was an event where the Drouhin family invited a great many of the veteran winemakers that were here in Oregon when they arrived in the late 1980s and included many of the original pioneers from those early days in the Oregon wine business. All three were marvelous events and my only regret was saying “no” to pours of some of the fine Joseph Drouhin Burgundies that were also offered by the staff at DDO (I was probably the only guest foolish enough to do so!), as I tried to stay focused on tasting their Oregon wines on this visit and garnering notes for this particular article. Believe me, it took some serious resolve to skip some of those beautiful Burgundies, but I was well compensated by second pours of some of the older bottlings of the various reserve wines from DDO!

Chardonnay

2015 Chardonnay “Cuvée Arthur”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2015 Cuvée Arthur is really a lovely bottle of chardonnay in the making, which manages the ripeness of this very hot vintage admirably. The bouquet is deep and already beautifully expressive, offering up scents of pear, passion fruit, acacia blossoms, chalky soil tones, another gently musky floral element in the upper register (maybe honeysuckle?) and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely succulent on the attack, with a fine core, bright framing acids, fine focus and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. Given the ripeness inherent in the 2015 vintage, I suspect this will be a relatively short-lived vintage of Cuvée Arthur, but it will provide plenty of enjoyment during its peak of drinkability. The wine is certainly approachable out of the blocks, but my inclination would be to give it a couple of years’ worth of bottle age, just to allow those secondary layers to start to emerge. 2020-2035+. **91+**.

2012 Chardonnay “Cuvée Arthur”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2012 vintage of Cuvée Arthur is now starting to really drink beautifully at five years of age and has blossomed on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of apple, pear, white lilies, a fine base of soil tons, vanillin oak and again, that telltale topnote of gentle honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and a bit riper on the palate than the nose suggests, with a rock solid core, fine focus and balance, emerging complexity and a very long, gently warm finish. This was another ripe year and the wine shows it just a bit on the palate at the present time. Fine juice that is now drinking well, but again, probably will not be the longest-lived recent vintage for this bottling. 2017-2030. **91+**.

2011 Chardonnay “Édition Limité”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The cool and late harvest of 2011 has produced an outstanding example of Édition Limité Chardonnay from Domaine Drouhin. The wine is pure and complex on both the nose and palate, with the late harvest aspect of this vintage giving this bottling a really lovely spine of acidity to age upon as the years go by. Today, the wine is starting to drink very nicely, albeit still climbing, as it offers up a fine constellation of delicious apple, pear, a touch of almond paste, a suave base of soil, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and very elegant in profile, with a good core, fine transparency, bright acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and zesty finish. This has fine mid-palate depth (particularly for a 2011 chardonnay) and will continue to age long and gracefully. Fine juice. 2017-2035. **93+**.

2010 Chardonnay “Édition Limitée”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2010 version of the Édition Limitée Chardonnay was made from a total of four barrels, so there were ninety-five cases produced for release and five retained for the winery's library. This is a pretty ripe wine, coming in at 13.9 percent octane, but shows no signs of heat whatsoever on either the nose or palate. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of lemon, pear, complex soil tones, a touch of fresh pineapple, gentle notes of honeysuckle and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with impeccable focus and balance, a juicy core of fruit, bright, vibrant acids and outstanding complexity and grip on the long, poised and classy finish. This is really a beautiful bottle of chardonnay that is drinking with great style at age seven, but has years and years of life still ahead of it. 2017-2030. **93.**

2002 Chardonnay “Cuvée Arthur”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The inaugural vintage of Cuvée Arthur is still drinking at its apogee and fully underscores how ageworthy this bottling is, when Mother Nature cooperates and gives a classical growing season with which to work. At age fifteen, the 2002 Arthur is drinking at its peak, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of buttered pears, a touch of candied lemon (quite Raveneau-like!), beautiful floral tones, a fine base of soil and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is focused, complex and full-bodied, with bright, zesty acids, fine focus and grip, a lovely core and impressive balance on the long and still very vibrant finish. This wine is just cruising along without a care in the world and shows no signs of slowing down for many years to come! Fine, fine juice. 2017-2027+. **93.**



Pinot Noir

2014 Pinot Noir “Estate”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2014 Estate pinot noir bottling has started to blossom very nicely since I last tried a bottle a year ago. The bouquet is starting to show some secondary elements in its constellation of red plums, black cherries, a touch of cocoa powder, a fine base of soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with a plush core, tangy acids and impressive focus and grip on the long, moderately tannic and very nicely balanced finish. This was a pretty ripe vintage for this bottling, coming in at 14.1 percent octane, but it is cool and classy in the mouth. A year ago, it was still quite primary and in need of a bit of time to integrate its small percentage of new wood, which it has now done seamlessly and the wine should prove to be a very strong vintage for this workhorse cuvée at DDO. 2019-2045+. **92.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Zéphirine”- Roserock Estate (Eola-Amity Hills)

The inaugural release of the cuvée Zéphirine from DDO’s new Roserock Estate was utterly stunning when first released a year ago, and nothing has changed to dissuade me that this is destined for a very long and very beautiful evolution in bottle. The superbly perfumed bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of red plums, cherries, cocoa powder, a complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a deft framing of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with excellent depth at the core, fine soil signature, suave, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and impeccably focused finish. The cooler influence of the Van Duzer Corridor is very much apparent in this bottling, which is sleek and vibrant out of the blocks- no easy task in the very warm growing season of 2014! This will be a landmark bottling from the Drouhin family in Oregon! 2022-2060. **95.**

2012 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Laurène”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2012 vintage of Cuvée Laurène is really starting to open up and show some of its secondary layering at age five, and though it is still a very young wine and deserves plenty of further cellaring, it is starting to take shape and it is very easy to appreciate just how beautiful this wine is going to be at peak maturity. The really lovely bouquet delivers a fine combination of plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, a hint of graphite and a discreet framing of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure in profile, with excellent focus and grip, ripe, suave tannins and a very long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is still a puppy, but it is already starting to deliver a bit of its considerable promise. 2025-2075. **93+.**

2012 Pinot Noir “Édition Limité”- Domaine Drouhin (served from jeroboam)

Out of jeroboam, I expected the 2012 Édition Limité pinot noir to be even more closed down than the Cuvée Laurène bottling from the same vintage, but this was not the case. It is still not close to primetime drinking, but its reserved personality is still beautifully delineated and the wine is very easy to size up at the present time. The superb bouquet is a fine blend of black cherries, dark plums, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a deft touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, deep, and full-bodied, with an inherent sense of sappiness in the core, fine-grained tannins and excellent focus and grip on the balanced, nascently complex and very precise finish. Like the 2012 Cuvée Laurène, this wine still needs quite a bit of time in the cellar to properly blossom, but it is going to be excellent. 2025-2075. **93+.**

2009 Pinot Noir “Estate”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2009 Estate pinot noir from DDO is starting to really drink well at eight years of age, but clearly has a long road ahead of it as well. The bouquet offers up an expressive constellation of red and black cherries, a touch of cocoa, incipient notes of lavender, a fine base of soil,

woodsmoke and a dollop of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is ripe, deep and full, with a plush core, modest tannins, good acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. Good juice that is only going to get better with further bottle age. 2017-2040. **91+**.

2007 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Louise”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2007 vintage of DDO’s Cuvée Louise is a brilliant wine, and though it is still not really at its absolute apogee, it is so suave and seamless that it is pretty hard not to want to drink it today! The stunning nose soars from the glass in a very elegant blend of red plums, cherries, cinnamon, gamebird, mustard seed, complex soil tones and a bit of spicy wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and marvelously sappy at the core, with excellent focus and grip, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and a very long, vibrant and complex finish. This is a flat out gorgeous young bottle of pinot noir! 2017-2050+. **95**.

2003 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Louise”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2003 vintage of Cuvée Louise, from a torrid growing season, is far more black fruity in personality than either the 2007 or 1999 versions that were paired up with it at this vertical tasting of the domaine’s wines. The nose is a complex blend of cassis, dark berries, lavender, espresso, dark soil, fresh nutmeg and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and beautifully plush on the attack, with a fine core, ripe tannins and a very long, still quite primary finish. This avoids any signs of *sur maturité* and will be a very, very tasty bottle when it is ready for primetime drinking, but it is never going to be an archetypical vintage of Cuvée Louise. That said, it is going to be very, very good when it is fully ready to drink! 2022-2050. **93**.

2002 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Laurène”- Domaine Drouhin (served from magnum)

The 2002 vintage of Cuvée Laurène is really starting to show beautifully out of magnum at age fifteen, but this is still relatively early days for this wine and it will be even better with further bottle age. The bouquet is bright, complex and vibrant, offering up a fine mélange of red and black cherries, bitter chocolate, dark soil tones, a touch of nutskin, gamebird and a very discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very precise on the attack, with a rock solid core, tangy acids, lovely balance and a long, focused and ripely tannic finish. This is an excellent wine in the making, but out of magnum, it is really too soon to be opening the wine for anything beyond research purposes, as its apogee is still at least five years down the road! 2022-2060. **93+**.

2002 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Louise”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2002 vintage of Cuvée Louise is drinking very nicely indeed at age fifteen, but has clearly only just entered its plateau of peak maturity and has plenty of life still ahead of it. The bouquet is pure and very black fruity in profile, delivering a fine blend of sweet dark berries, black plums, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a lovely touch of lavender and a very discreet framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off outstanding mid-palate depth, with a very suave attack, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is really a lovely bottle at its zenith, but with a wide window of drinkability still ahead of it. 2017-2045. **93**.



2000 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Laurène”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2000 vintage of Cuvée Laurène is a beautiful bottle, with a quite black fruity personality on both the nose and palate. At age seventeen, the wine is not quite at its peak of maturity and could still do with a couple more years in the cellar to fully blossom! The nose wafts from the glass in a fine, classy blend of black cherries, a touch of espresso, charred wood, lavender, a fine base of soil, a touch of chicory and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and black fruity, with a fine signature of soil, tangy acids, fine focus and grip and still a bit of backend tannin in need of resolution on the long, balanced and very refined finish. Lovely juice, but give it still a couple more years to soften up a bit more on the finish. 2020-2050. **92+.**

1999 Pinot Noir “Estate”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 1999 vintage of Estate pinot noir from Domaine Drouhin is more black fruity in personality than typical for this Dundee Hills bottling, as the drought conditions of '99 have left their imprimatur on the style of the wine. The nose is a complex blend of dark berries, black cherries, lavender, charred wood, dark soil tones and just a touch of new oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with impressive mid-palate depth, melted tannins and a long, complex and black fruity finish. This is a lovely wine that is now into its apogee of peak drinkability. 2017-2030. **92.**

1999 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Louise”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The first vintage of Cuvée Louise was a drought year in Oregon, and the wine is still not quite ready for primetime drinking today and was probably fairly chewy in its youth. The bouquet is pure, complex and beautifully expressive, delivering a fine blend of dark berries, cassis, chicory, smoked meats, lavender, dark soil tones and a very discreet base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and marvelously sappy at the core, with refined

structure, excellent focus and balance, moderate, fine-grained tannins and a very long, complex and almost ready finish. This is a superb wine that really deserves just a few more years in the cellar to soften up completely on the backend. It has decades of life still ahead of it. 2020-2050. **94.**

1996 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Laurène”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 1996 vintage of Cuvée Laurène from DDO certainly underscores the fact that when Véronique Drouhin-Boss says she is making a barrel selection for this wine based on its potential longevity, she is not kidding, as the 1996 version is still a tad on the young side! The wine is outstanding and will drink with style and grace in a few more years, but it is still not quite ready for primetime today. The bouquet is a complex blend of dark berries, black plums, bonfire, a touch of clove-like spices, incipient notes of gamebird, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tightly-knit and still plenty tangy, with a rock solid core, modest tannins and impressive length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. Much like the 1996 vintage in Burgundy, this bottle is aging as much on its acidity as its remaining tannins and is taking its sweet time to reach its zenith! 2020-2050. **92.**

1992 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Laurène”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 1992 vintage of Cuvée Laurène is more resolved out of regular-sized format than it is out of magnum, but as is so often the case, the magnum has just a touch more sappy dimension at the core and a bit more backend length. The bouquet of the regular bottle is beautiful, wafting from the glass in a mix of red plums, black cherries, lavender, woodsmoke, spiced meats, a bit of charred wood and a lovely base of forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with a fine core, melted tannins and impressive length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. A gorgeous first vintage of Cuvée Laurène! 2017-2040+. **94.**

1992 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Laurène”- Domaine Drouhin (served from magnum)

The 1992 vintage of Cuvée Laurène is drinking with great style and grace out of magnum, which finds the wine at the peak of its powers and still with decades of life ahead of it. The excellent bouquet delivers scents of black cherries, pomegranate, a fine touch of meatiness, dark chocolate, superb soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with excellent focus and grip, fine-grained, moderate tannins, outstanding balance and a very long, complex and extremely classy finish. While most vintage charts will tell you that the 1992s from Oregon are getting long in the tooth, the Cuvée Laurène is at its apogee of peak drinkability, but with a vibrant personality that suggests it has at least another thirty years and maybe more of life still ahead of it- particularly in magnum. A great wine. 2017-2050+. **95.**

1989 Pinot Noir “Estate”- Domaine Drouhin (Willamette Valley)

The 1989 vintage of DDO pinot noir has aged beautifully and probably has exceeded the initial expectations of the Drouhin family for the potential of this bottling. Given that this wine was made from purchased grapes in a winery without a roof over its head, the results are simply stunning and the wine’s vibrancy at this age is very impressive indeed! The bouquet nose is complex and very beautiful, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red plums, a touch of cocoa powder, lavender, forest floor, woodsmoke, gamebird and a hint of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and still marvelously light on its feet, with fine focus and grip, still good intensity at the core, melted tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. Lovely juice! 2017-2035. **94.**

JACQUESSON'S EXCEPTIONAL CUVÉE 700 SERIES EXTRA BRUT



The Champagne house of Jacquesson was founded in 1789, in the year of the French Revolution, by Memmie Jacquesson and resides to this day in the village of Dizy, in the heart of the Marne Valley. Monsieur Jacquesson was ahead of his time in the Champagne area, as he is credited with being one of the first producers to actually train his vines in trellised rows in his vineyard parcels (as is customary today), rather than allowing the vines to grow out octopus style from a “mother vine” in the ancient method that was known as *provignage*. Monsieur Jacquesson worked closely with Docteur Guyot in the early days of his career rationalizing the layout of the vines in his vineyards in rows, and after mastering this, he was also the inventor and patent holder of the wire basket that continues to this day to secure Champagne and other sparkling wine corks in their bottles prior to opening. The house of Jacquesson remained within the family through several generations, but by the late nineteenth century, it was purchased by business people outside of the Jacquesson family tree. Eventually, in 1974, it was purchased by its present day owners, the Chiquet family and today is co-directed by the brothers Jean-Hervé and Laurent Chiquet. Jean-Hervé Chiquet is the older of the two brothers, and after a period of time spent as the *Chef de Cave* for the house, he has passed on the winemaking baton to his younger brother Laurent and takes care of the business side responsibilities of the *maison*.

In 2004, the Chiquets dramatically changed the direction of the house in regards to their non-vintage bottling, as they instituted their “700 Series” of wines, with the inaugural release under this program being labeled as “Cuvée 728” and each year, a subsequent number has adorned this bottling. The “700 Series” wines are always from a single base year, with a significant percentage of reserve wines added to the blend to bring depth and added complexity to the finished wine. As Jean-Hervé Chiquet recalls, the inspiration for the new bottling was quite simple: “the idea for our 700 Cuvée came originally from the frustration we were experiencing with the classic Brut NV consistency concept” which basically amounted to “why try to improve things if it is (essentially) for producing the same wine every year?” As he noted, it sometimes felt like the final blend for the non-vintage Brut bottling was, in certain exceptional vintages, even a bit lesser in quality, so that the consistency of house style could be maintained year in and year out. The genesis of this cuvée had begun a few years earlier, as Jean-Hervé recalls that “in 2000 we decided to try to (just) make the best wine possible instead of trying to make the same wine as from the previous year”, which were “in fact, the wines we would prefer” to make each year and the results spoke for themselves and the direction of the house of Jacquesson was dramatically changed. After a year aging in *foudres*, the wine was bottled up and three years later the first iteration of the Cuvée 728 was released. Today, the 700 Series bottlings represent roughly ninety-six percent of the house’s production, with their vintage-dated, single vineyard cuvées only produced in small quantities and in years where their being bottled on their own will not materially affect the quality of the 700 Series bottling.

The percentage of reserve wine in each 700 Series blend fluctuates with the quality of the given base year, with stronger vintages relying less on reserve wines and less gifted years seeing the percentage of reserve wines in the blend rising to as much as forty percent or more. This is the flagship wine from Jacquesson since 2004, with the inaugural Cuvée 728 made from the base year of 2000 and released in the summer of 2004, after having spent two and a half years aging *sur latte*. The original release took its name from a ledger of non-vintage bottlings in the Jacquesson archives, which dated back hundreds of years, so that when it was time to fashion the 2000 Base Year blended wine, its chronological number in the old ledger would have been number 728. Over the years, the team at Jacquesson has extended the amount of time this bottling spend on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, so that the most recent edition, Cuvée 740, spent three years aging *sur latte*, in addition to the full year the *vins clairs* for this bottling age in cask prior to the blending of the cuvée and its *mise* for its secondary fermentation. As noted above, in addition to their numbered, “700 Series” bottlings of Extra Brut, the house Jacquesson now also produces a small amount of four different single vineyard wines, one each from *lieux à dits* in Avize and Aÿ, and two different wines from vineyards in Dizy.

It is important to understand that the “700 Series” from Jacquesson is not a standard “non-vintage Brut” bottling at the base of their quality pyramid, with vintage-dated wines higher up the scale, as is the case with most other Champagne houses. From its creation, the Chiquets took the decision that this cuvée would be their flagship wine and their sole blended bottling, so there are no longer any Vintage Brut bottlings from the estate, with the last one having been the 2002 Vintage. The “700 Series” is also philosophically quite apart from the standard version of a blended Brut NV bottling from most *Grandes Marques*, which so often is designed to show the same year after year (or as close as is humanly possible) with a recognizable “house style” and vintage variations mitigated as much as can be in the blending decisions for each release. At

Jacquesson, the “700 Series” wines seeks to turn this precept completely around, as the blending team at the *maison* strives to allow the maximum expression of each and every “base year” in the blend and embraces the concept of vintage variations in this bottling. It is a relatively novel approach to Champagne crafting and is based on the premise that while all vintages are not created equal, each and every one will eventually have something interesting to say when it has aged sufficiently. For, as this vertical tasting of every 700 Series bottling released so far from the *maison* emphatically proved, this is a cuvée that is designed to age long and gracefully and not reach its apogee of peak drinkability until at least a decade has passed since its initial arrival in the market.

The house of Jacquesson owns approximately thirty hectares of vineyards today, which is enough to supply eighty percent of their needs at the present time. Their holdings are in the top villages of Aÿ, Dizy, Mareuil-sur-Aÿ and Hautvillers in the Marne Valley and Avize and Oiry in the Côte de Blancs. The remaining twenty percent of their production needs, which they buy in each year on long-term contracts, hail from small farmers in these same six crus. The sustainable farming practices in the domaine’s own vines are now organic in nature, but the *maison* has not yet made the transition to being certified for its viticultural practices. When fertilizing is needed, it is always organic products that are used and grass now happily grows between the vines in the Jacquesson vineyards and chemical treatments are eschewed, except perhaps in dire circumstances where the loss of the entire crop might be at risk. The farming philosophy of the Chiquets and their vineyard manager, Sylvain LeBlanc, is to keep yields low to add concentration of both aromatics and flavors and allow the underlying *terroir* in their various parcels of vines to shine in the wines. This is in notable contrast to much of the Champagne viticultural world, where yields are routinely kept very high, so that if the allowable production figures for any given vintage (which are not set by the CIVC until mid-summer of each growing season and are based on the projected need of how many millions of bottles of Champagne are going to be required to service the market two or three years down the road!) are generous, the grower will have enough bunches on the vines to maximize profits from a given plot of vines. This present day practice of the CIVC to set yields at the height of the summer may makes sense from an economic standpoint, but is absolutely obtuse if producing high quality grapes is the goal, and happily, Jacquesson does not farm to this prevailing form of madness. Working with lower yields is very important for the house these days on another front, as they have moved to bottling all of their wines with very low levels of *dosage* and lower yields and concentrated flavors are a prerequisite for these very low *dosé* wines.

In the cellars, the team at Jacquesson barrel ferments all of their *vins clairs* in older oak *foudres* of varying sizes and gives the wines a long *elevage* prior to bottling for the secondary fermentation. There are a few older *demi-muids* and casks also available, if a particular lot requires a smaller oak vessel for its fermentation and aging, for as Jean-Hervé Chiquet comments, “a vine does not always produce a round number of hectoliters.” Indigenous yeasts are used for the first fermentation, and the *vins clairs* routinely go through complete malolactic fermentation as well. Only the first pressing of juice is used for all the wines at Jacquesson, with the second pressing (or *Tailles*) sold off to other houses or cooperatives in the area. For their flagship “700 Series” cuvée, the period of aging of the still wines in casks stretches out to the following autumn, at which time the *vins clairs* are blended and the wines are capped for their extended period of aging *sur latte*. This is quite an extended period of aging in barrel prior to

blending, as at most Champagne houses, the *vins clairs* will be blended in the spring following the initial fermentation, rather than giving the wines a full year in barrel, waiting until the autumn and the completion of the next year's harvest. During this long *elevage*, the *vins clairs* that will form the blend for the "700 Series" wine are treated to *battonage* once every two weeks to help the wines nurture more fully on the fine lees in cask, see no sulfur adjustments and are generally racked once, around May of the year following the harvest prior to the final blending of the new cuvée and its bottling for secondary fermentation. The Chiquets do start working on the blend for this cuvée in May after the racking, but prefer to give the wines that full year of *elevage* before instituting the blend. After disgorgement, Jacquesson will now give the new version of their 700 Series four more months to recover from the *dégorgement* prior to its release into the market.



Laurent and Jean-Hervé Chiquet in the Jacquesson vines at winter pruning time.

The blend of *vins clairs* for the 700 Series varies rather markedly from cuvée to cuvée, as the cellar team at Jacquesson is intent of having each wine accurately reflect the vintage's character, and certain grape varieties excel in certain vintages. However, as Monsieur Chiquet is quick to point out, "in fact, the Cuvée includes almost ALL of the wines of Jacquesson, except, from time to time, the single vineyards, which are produced when they are good enough and not needed in the Cuvée- which always has the absolute priority," so that blending sessions generally revolve around questions of how much reserve wine to include in each new release. This is the beauty of not trying to make the same wine year in and year out for the 700 Series. All of the reserve wines held back at Jacquesson are simply previous generations of the 700 Series, rather than separate examples of chardonnay, pinot meunier or pinot noir that were not used in past renditions of this flagship bottling. Interestingly, despite the efforts at Jacquesson to make this wine really be a reflection of each vintage in the region, at our vertical tasting in July, I was struck by how beautifully similar many of the releases were stylistically (particularly once they had some extended bottle age), with only a couple of the weaker base years (2003 and 2001) really showing dramatic vintage-generated variations from other cuvées, with many of the others

simply deeper, longer and a tad more complex in the very top years (such as 2002, 2004 and 2008) and the wine has certainly started develop its own “cuvée style” that carries through rather dramatically from year to year and is at least as pronounced as the varying vintage characteristics!

As alluded to above, one of the changes that has taken place with this bottling is the systematic reduction in the amount of *dosage* that the wine is finished with after disgorgement, though the wine has always been in the Extra Brut range since its inception with the 2000 vintage. The first few releases ranged from four to six grams per liter of *dosage*, but this amount has been reduced progressively, so that the middle releases in the series were in the 2.5 to 3.5 grams per liter range (obviously varying from year to year, as each wine will find its proper balance point with a slightly different level of *dosage* depending on the style of the vintage and the percentage of reserve wines used in each particular cuvée), while the last couple of releases have been down in the 1.5 grams per liter range of *dosage*. The Chiquets are now also aging the wine a bit longer *sur latte* prior to disgorgement these days, perhaps reflecting their preference to use a lower finishing *dosage* for the bottling and wishing to allow the passage of time to do a bit of the buffering of the acidity that a slightly more generous *dosage* might have handled in the past. While the differences in *dosage* are not all that dramatic over the evolution of the 700 Series at Jacquesson, they are indeed noticeable on the palate, with some of the middle releases in the series a bit overly brisk to my palate when first released and needing some extended bottle age to allow the snappy acidity in the wines to soften up a bit. With the first cuvées released in this series having only aged two years *sur latte*, the wines probably needed their slightly higher *dosage* levels to better balance them, but this has been progressively extended over the course of the series, with the wines first being given two and a half years aging on their fine lees and now fully three years prior to disgorgement. That said, a new release from the 700 Series, at its now customary 1.5 grams per liter of *dosage*, is still a very snappy customer when first released and built for extended aging.

As I have written about in the past, one of the elements that I am extremely curious about with today’s top Champagne bottlings that now use such low levels of *dosage*, such as the Jacquesson 700 Series, is how this change will ultimately effect the very long-term evolution of the wines in bottle. I do not have a lot of experience with twenty-five or thirty year-old Champagne bottlings with such low a levels of *dosage*, so I am not at all certain of how this minimal level of residual sugar in the wines will affect their personality when they have reached a ripe old age. It is only in the freakishly hot vintages, such as 2003, that Champagne really lacks for acidity, but in virtually all “normal” growing seasons, Champagne is a wine that always has more than enough acidity and how to best buffer this is always one of the key questions for the *Chef de Cave* when he or she is settling on a final blend for the cuvée, and then again after the wine is disgorged and the final *dosage* decisions are taken by each house. This is not a critique of the low *dosage* style, but simply an open question, as the great Champagne bottlings of yesteryear that have aged so gracefully from the decades of the ‘50s, ‘60s and ‘70s certainly all had dramatically more finishing *dosage* than what is currently fashionable at many addresses today, including Jacquesson. At our vertical tasting, the Cuvée 730, which hails from the superb base year of 2002 and which was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter was so brilliantly balanced that I would have been loathe, if I were helping make decisions at Jacquesson, to move away from this level of residual sugar and reduce the level of *dosage* in the more recent

iterations of this bottling. Particularly, given the fact that 2002 was a plenty ripe year in Champagne to begin with, and the wine was so gorgeously and seamlessly balanced at our tasting, that to my palate, this seemed like the perfect point of balance for the cuvée. It will be interesting to follow the evolution of the Cuvée 740 for instance (which hails from another very strong base year of 2012) over the coming decades and see if its much lower *dosage* of 1.5 grams per liter will allow it to evolve in the same magical direction as the Cuvée 730. But, this is a question that will require another ten years in the cellar to answer.

Despite my curiosity with how the decrease in *dosage* over the course of the 700 Series at Jacquesson will affect the evolutionary arc of the wines as they age in bottle, one thing that was made abundantly clear at our vertical tasting of the entire series to date was that this is a very, very consistent cuvée year after year, with the quality set at an impressively high level. In our tasting, it was really only the two vintage outliers of 2001 and 2003 base years that stood out from the others, as not quite having the same degree of class and potential longevity, but all of the other wines were remarkably similar in quality. As I mentioned above, while each iteration also shows a good degree of vintage-inspired personality, this is a wine that is nicely developing its own stylistic calling card and which is at least as important as vintage variables. With Jacquesson using fruit primarily from their own estate vineyards, and then only buying in grapes from like-minded farmers in these same six villages of Dizy, Aÿ, Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, Hautvillers, Oiry and Avize to furnish the last twenty percent of the house's needs, this has allowed the 700 Series to really set its feet down in the *terroir* of these villages and there is now a remarkable consistency of style to each and every iteration in the series from basing the wine in these top premier and grand cru villages each and every year. While the intent of the Chiquet family may well be to allow each vintage to shine through in the finished cuvée, it seems that the respective *terroirs* of the vineyards that they work with each year may well have their own ideas in this respect and the signature style of this cuvée from vintage to vintage may well end up being as strong as other blended bottlings, where the cellar team takes the opposite approach and overtly seeks to craft a wine in the "house style". But, the overall quality remains higher with the Jacquesson approach. Perhaps, with the 700 Series from Jacquesson, we could say that it does not have a "house style" *per se*, but rather a "vineyard style", as despite the proportion of fruit varying in the blend from each village, not to mention the variations of *cépages* each year, there is indeed a very distinctive and consistent personality to all of the Jacquesson 700 Series wines.

One of the relatively new practices that the Chiquet family has put into place for their 700 Series is to hold back a percentage of the production each year for an extended period of aging in the bottle prior to disgorgement, which they call their "*Dégorgement Tardive*" program, which allows the wine several more years on its fine lees before disgorgement and release into the market. As Jean-Hervé Chiquet mentions, "the aging starts, but never lasts long enough and this is one of the problems of the Cuvée- it never tastes better than when we are out of stock!" So, after five releases, the Chiquet family decided to start holding back some of the production for a later release. The first of the 700 Series to be released in this manner was the Cuvée 733 from the base year of 2005, with its initial disgorgement having been in the fall of 2009. The "DT" release of this same wine came four years later, as this was disgorged in September of 2013 and offered up with the special "*Dégorgement Tardive*" label. Since the Cuvée 733 "DT", each and every year has seen a later disgorged version sent out into the market after further aging in the Jacquesson cellars, with the difference between the two releases ranging from three and a half to

four years of additional aging *sur latte*. This is a marvelous practice that allows those of us without the requisite will power to not touch our bottles of 700 Series in the cellar an opportunity to revisit certain cuvées that we just may have drunk a little bit before their time. Typically, the house will now hold back fifteen to twenty thousand bottles, as well as eight hundred to a thousand magnums of each current iteration of the 700 Cuvée for the DT program. One should note that the practice of holding back a percentage of their production for extended aging *sur latte* at Jacquesson is hardly a new phenomenon that is particular to the 700 Series, as the Chiquet family has been doing this since they first bought the house of Jacquesson and I recently published a note on their 1985 Vintage Brut bottling that had not been released from the cellars until the last decade.

What the tasting notes below will so eloquently demonstrate, Jacquesson's 700 Series is definitely a wine that is built for cellaring and really will not reach its plateau of peak maturity until the wine has had at least twelve to fifteen years out from the vintage and had a chance to really blossom with bottle age. Given how stunningly well the Cuvée 730 was drinking in our tasting (base year 2002), it is hard not to argue that fifteen years out from the vintage is a perfect time to start enjoying this long-lived and very classy bottling. But, even the very first release of 728, from the far less heralded base year of 2000 was drinking with great style and complexity, with years and years or life still ahead of it, so one should not underestimate the aging potential of this flagship wine at Jacquesson. While it is still too early to say definitively, my gut instincts are that the more recent releases in the series, with their lower levels of *dosage*, are going to demand cellaring time even a bit more vociferously in their youth than the earlier releases, which had just a bit more buffering residual sugar, so that wines from top base years like the Cuvée 738 or 740 are going to really require at least a good decade's worth of bottle age before they really start to blossom properly and drink with overt generosity. But, based on how beautifully the younger releases have been showing upon release, they are going to be more than worth the wait!

Once the Chiquet family decided to do away with their Vintage Brut bottling after the release of the 2002, they settled on only producing a small quantity of single vineyard wines that would bear a vintage date on their labels. As Monsieur Chiquet mentioned, the priority at the house is always the 700 Series, so the single vineyard cuvées are only produced in top flight years and where it is ascertained that their being bottled on their own will not materially affect the quality of the 700 Series cuvée from the same vintage. He notes that the single vineyard wines "are produced when they are good enough and not needed in the Cuvée," so "if a Single Vineyard wine is good enough to be bottled on its own, but is needed in the Cuvée, it will go into the Cuvée." Jacquesson now produces four of these single vineyard wines, when circumstances allow, with each named for the *lieu à dit* from which it hails. These include their two bottlings from their home village of Dizy: the Corne Bautray from a one hectare parcel of chardonnay in this *lieu à dit* at the top of the slope (these vines were planted in 1960) and their Terres Rouges Rosé, from a 1.3 hectare section of their parcel of pinot noir in this vineyard, which sits on a limestone plateau just up above the town of Dizy and facing due east. The other two single vineyard wines are produced from *lieux à dits* in the family's holdings in the villages of Avize and Aÿ. From the former village comes the *lieu à dit* of Champ Caïn, which is a 1.3 hectare plot that was planted in 1962 and is naturally, a Blanc de Blancs. The parcel in Champ Caïn has a due south exposition, on the classic limestone bedrock of this grand cru in the Côte de Blancs. The fourth single vineyard cuvée at Jacquesson is their Vauzelle Terme from Aÿ, which is composed

entirely of pinot noir from thirty *ares* of vines planted in 1980. This bottling was first done on an experimental basis in 1996, and the first commercial release of Vauzelle Terme followed in the outstanding year of 2002. All of the single vineyard bottlings are handled exactly the same in the cellars as the wines earmarked for the 700 Series, with the exception that the decision on whether or not to bottle them on their own is taken during the blending trials in May and June and the wines are bottled prior to the next harvest, instead of just after, which is the case for the flagship 700 Series cuvée. Typically, the single vineyard wines are aged *sur latte* longer than the 700 Series, with the recent 2009 Rosé from Terres Rouges having spent six and a half years on its fine lees and the 2007 Blanc de Blancs from Corne Bautray having aged *sur latte* for eight and a half years. They are beautiful wines that nicely augment the superb 700 Series.



Jacquesson Cuvée 740 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

Disgorged Spring 2017

The upcoming new release of Cuvée 740 Extra Brut from Jacquesson, due out in most markets in the spring of 2018, is from the base year of 2012 and only included twenty percent reserve wines in the blend. It was finished with an extremely low *dosage* of 1.5 grams per liter. The wine is obviously still very youthful and built for a long and profitable life in bottle, but offers up fine depth and nascent complexity in its aromatic blend of lemon, green apple, chalky minerality, warm bread, spring flowers and a nice topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and promising, with a rock solid core, fine mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a very well-balanced finish that closes with brisk acids and fine grip. The low *dosage* of this release is going to demand some extended bottle age to allow the wine to drink with a bit more gentle backend impression, but it should prove to be an excellent wine in the fullness of time. 2022-2055. **93.**

Jacquesson Cuvée 739 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)**Disgorged June 2016**

The Jacquesson Cuvée 739 Extra Brut is from the base year of 2011, with nearly a third of the blend composed of reserve wines this year. The *cépages* is fifty-seven percent chardonnay, twenty-two percent pinot meunier and twenty-one percent pinot noir, with all of the *vins clairs* having been barrel-fermented and the finishing *dosage* the customary 3.5 grams per liter for this cuvée. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality, beautiful meunier-derived floral tones and a nice touch of incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, very nicely balanced finish. This bottling is already quite tasty, but like all of the Jacquesson wines, this is built to age and will be even better three to five years down the road. A really strong result for a base year 2011 wine. 2017-2035+. **91+**.

Jacquesson Cuvée 738 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)**Disgorged March 2015**

The Cuvée 738 is from the base year of 2010, which saw the wine composed of a blend of sixty-one percent chardonnay, twenty-one percent pinot meunier and eighteen percent pinot noir. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter, after having aged *sur latte* for three and a half years. One-third of the blend was made up of reserve wines in this year. This wine is in pretty deep hibernation at the present time and really should be left alone in the cellar for three or four years, as its nose is quite reticent, eventually offering up scents of apple, incipient notes of orange, warm bread, a touch of sea shell, dried flowers and gentle upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows nicely ripe fruit at the closed down core, with refined *mousse*, crisp acids and very good length and grip. My gut feeling is that my score for this bottling will go up considerably in a few years' time, as it is really quite hermetically sealed at the present time. 2020-2045. **91**.

Jacquesson Cuvée 737 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)**Disgorged November 2013**

The Cuvée 737 is from the base year of 2009 and spent just over three years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter. This has more red grapes in the *cépages* than the Cuvée 738, with the blend forty-three percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot meunier and twenty-seven percent pinot noir. Thirty percent of the cuvée is composed of reserve wines in this vintage. This is far more ready for primetime drinking than the above wine, offering up a fine, nicely blossomed bouquet of pear, apple, nutskin, sourdough bread, dried flowers, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely ripe at the core, with fine focus and grip, crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the complex and still snappy finish. This is a lovely drink today, albeit still climbing, and has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2017-2035+. **92**.

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

Jacquesson's Cuvée 736 is base year 2008 and was finished with a *dosage* of 1.5 grams per liter. The *cépages* here is fifty-three percent chardonnay, twenty-nine percent pinot noir and eighteen percent pinot meunier, with just over a third of the blend being reserve wines. This wine has blossomed nicely and is even more ready to drink than the Cuvée 737, as the wine wafts from the glass in a wide open and complex constellation of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality, a touch of fresh almond and that signature upper register smokiness of this bottling. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, and a long, complex and vibrant finish. The Cuvée 736 is now entering its plateau of peak maturity, where it should continue to cruise along with style and grace for another couple of decades. 2017-2035+. **92+**.

Jacquesson Cuvée 736 “Dégorgement Tardif” Extra Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged Nov. 2016

The Cuvée 736 “Dégorgement Tardif” is a half-step up in precision from the earlier disgorged version, but both bottles are outstanding and it is really hard to pick a favorite between the two, as most of their differences are probably a result of the wines now being at slightly different stages of their respective evolutions. Interestingly, there is more spice tones on the nose of the DT bottling, as it delivers a fine aromatic constellation of pear, apple, chalky minerality, brioche, citrus peel, smoke and those lovely, almost nutmeg-like spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully precise and focused, with a fine core, excellent cut and grip, elegant *mousse* and a bit more backend mineral drive than the earlier-disgorged version. This is really, really good juice, but I would give it a few more years in the cellar to allow the wine to fully blossom. 2020-2040+. **93+**.

Jacquesson Cuvée 735 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

Disgorged February 2012

The regular release of Jacquesson’s Cuvée 735 is now wide open on the nose and starting to drink with a fair bit of generosity on the palate. The slightly higher *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter has buffered the girdle of acidity here nicely (and a bit more than subsequent releases, which are lower *dosage*) and makes the wine quite attractive at age ten. The bouquet is a fine blend of apple, lemon peel, plenty of smokiness, a fine base and the first vestiges of nutskin in the upper register which is the harbinger of maturity for this bottling. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. 2017-2035. **91**.

Jacquesson Cuvée 735 “Dégorgement Tardif” Extra Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged Nov. 2015

Jacquesson’s Cuvée 735 “Dégorgement Tardif” is from the base year of 2007 and spent more than seven years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine’s *cépages* is forty-seven percent chardonnay, thirty-three percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier and the *dosage* was 3.5 grams per liter. The wine has developed beautifully on its fine lees and offers up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, pear, a hint of nutmeg, brioche, beautiful soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with a fine girdle of acidity, a rock solid core, superb soil signature, frothy *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is terrific wine and I love the combination of secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate, coupled to a youthful chassis of acidity. This is drinking with great style today, but will also age for many years to come. 2017-2035. **93**.

Jacquesson Cuvée 734 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

Disgorged April 2011

The Cuvée 734 is from the base year of 2006, with twenty-seven percent of the blend composed of reserve wines. The *cépages* this year is fifty-four percent chardonnay, twenty-six percent pinot meunier and twenty percent pinot noir, and the *dosage* was 3.5 grams per liter, as was customary in this era for the bottling. Like so many examples of the 2006 vintage, this wine is now fully mature (and the first wine in the tasting that is truly at its apogee), offering up a nutty bouquet of apple, pear, walnuts, chalky soil tones and a topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and wide open on the attack, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and long, classy finish that closes with a touch of backend bitterness that recalls quinine a touch. My gut feeling is that just a touch more *dosage* might have worked wonders here on the finish. My score is a point or two lower, as that touch of bitterness is not overly attractive to my palate. 2017-2030. **90**.



Jacquesson Cuvée 734 “Dégorgement Tardif” Extra Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged Nov. 2014

The Jacquesson Cuvée 734 “Dégorgement Tardif” follows the same pattern of delivering more precision on both the nose and palate, in comparison to its companion bottling from the initial disgorgement. This would have spent a bit more than seven years aging *sur latte*, with the bouquet offering up a more youthful patina of apple, lemon, chalky minerality, nutskin, dried flowers and that telltale smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and focused, with a good core, fine complexity and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, zesty, and again, gently bitter finish. The three and a half years of additional time on the fine lees that this wine spent prior to disgorgement has probably given this bottling at least another decade of further life in bottle on the backend. Good juice. 2017-2040. **91.**

Jacquesson Cuvée 733 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

Disgorged September 2009

The Cuvée 733 from Jacquesson is from the base year of 2005 and includes twenty-two percent reserve wines in the final blend. The *cépages* this year was fifty-two percent chardonnay and twenty-four percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. Interestingly, this release had lower *dosage* 2.5 grams per liter) than the subsequent two releases. This wine is a bit behind in its evolution than the Cuvée 734, so despite it drinking nicely today, it is still blossoming and will be even more generous on the palate with a couple more years of cellaring. The bouquet is fine and complex, offering up scents of apple, nutskin, peach, the classic smokiness of this bottling, chalky minerality and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full, complex and quite minerally in profile, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and a long, vibrant and still youthful finish. I had no problems drinking this wine with pleasure at our tasting, but if I

had bottles still in my cellar, I would be tempted to leave them alone for at least a few more years. 2017-2040. **91+**.

Jacquesson Cuvée 733 “Dégorgement Tardif” Extra Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged Sept. 2013

Of all the Dégorgement Tardif examples, only the Cuvée 733 showed at a similar point of evolution from the earlier-disgorged version. The bouquet on the 733 DT is quite nutty today, wafting from the glass in a blend of peach, apple, smoke, walnuts, stony minerality, menthol and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, lovely complexity and a long, nutty and beautifully resolved finish. There is none of the issue with backend bitterness here that plagues the two 2006 vintage bottlings. Despite the nutty tones of maturity on the nose and palate here, I definitely would let the DT version of the 2005 blossom a bit more with further bottle age. This is a lovely wine. 2019-2040.

92.

Jacquesson Cuvée 732 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

Disgorged March 2007

The Cuvée 732 is composed of a blend of thirty-nine percent chardonnay, thirty-six percent pinot meunier and twenty-five percent pinot noir, so this is the year with the lowest percentage of chardonnay for this bottling since the first two releases of the 728 and 729. This is from the base year of 2004 and the *dosage* is again 3.5 grams per liter (as was the case with the 2007 and 2006 versions) and the wine aged two and a half years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. This bottling has the cut and mineral drive that is so characteristic of the 2004 vintage, as well as a fine bouquet of orange, apple, wet stone minerality, smoky overtones, wheat toast and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full, crisp and svelte, with fine complexity, elegant *mousse* and a very long, racy finish that closes with blossoming complexity and impressive grip. Like so many 2004s, this wine is not yet ready for primetime drinking, but it is aging very gracefully and will probably prove to be one of the best of the 700 Series to date, when it is fully mature. 2020-2045. **93.**

Jacquesson Cuvée 731 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

Disgorged March 2007

With the Chiquet family’s desired goal for the 700 Series for each release to accurately reflect its base vintage, it is not surprising that the Cuvée 731, from 2003, is a bit of an outlier stylistically. The wine did include fully forty-one percent reserve wines (one of the highest percentages since the 700 Series was created) and was comprised from a blend of fifty-two percent chardonnay, thirty-one percent pinot meunier and seventeen percent pinot noir. The wine was finished with a fairly low *dosage* of two grams per liter and offers up today a mature bouquet of orange, peach, walnuts, a touch of honey and a very discreet touch of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just getting a bit oxidative, with good *mousse* and complexity and a respectable, but slightly short finish. This is a good, solid effort for 2003, but it will want drinking up in the next several years, as it is already starting to creep towards the far side of its plateau. 2017-2025. **88.**

Jacquesson Cuvée 730 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

Disgorged March 2006

The Cuvée 730 from Jacquesson, hailing from the base year of 2002, is absolutely superb and at this point in time, is the finest of the series that is now ready for primetime drinking. The *cépages* for this bottling was forty-eight percent chardonnay, thirty-two percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier. Surprisingly, given the outstanding quality of the 2002 vintage, the Cuvée 730 included fully forty percent reserve wines, which was nearly the same as was the case with the base year 2003 bottling. In our vertical lineup, this was by a good measure my favorite wine in terms of absolute quality for drinking today (with wines from the base years of 2008 and 2012 possibly positioned to ultimately reach this same fine level, but that will be many

years in the future), as the wine is really stunning. The bouquet jumps from the glass in pitch-perfect blend of pear, apple, chalky minerality, brioche, gentle smokiness and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and a very long, poised and zesty finish. This wine was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter, and today shows such beautiful balance on the backend that it is hard not to conclude that this level of *dosage* could well be the sweet spot for this cuvée. 2017-2045+. **94.**

Jacquesson Cuvée 729 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

Disgorged March 2005

This bottling is from the base year of 2001, which was not a particularly strong vintage in Champagne and the wine is now getting towards the far side of the plateau. The *cépages* of the Cuvée 729 is nearly a third each of each grape variety, as it is thirty-four percent each of pinot noir and chardonnay and thirty-two percent of pinot meunier. This wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter, for in its earliest iterations, the lower *dosage* philosophy at Jacquesson for this bottling had not evolved to today's far lower levels. The wine is fully mature and getting tertiary in its blend of yellow plum, walnuts, warm bread, tangerine and some overtly oxidative tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more vigorous than the nose suggests, with a good core, sound acids, pinpoint bubbles and a touch of backend bitterness that suggests the wine is getting a tad long in the tooth. Drink up. 2017-2025.

87.

Jacquesson Cuvée 728 Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

Disgorged March 2004

The Cuvée 728 was the very first in this series from Jacquesson, and having hailed from the base year of 2000 (with thirty-two percent of the blend being reserve wines), the wine is drinking with great style and complexity at age seventeen. The *cépages* here was thirty-six percent chardonnay, thirty-seven percent pinot meunier and twenty-seven percent pinot noir. Again, the *dosage* here is a bit more generous than is the case today, with five grams per liter utilized for the inaugural release of the 700 Series. The wine today is fully mature, but still bright and energetic, as it delivers a complex bouquet of pear, apple, warm biscuits, a hint of honey, dried flowers, chalky soil and a nice topnote of almond. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and still displays excellent mid-palate depth, with elegant *mousse*, zesty acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is really a lovely wine at its absolute apogee today. 2017-2035. **92.**

Single Vineyard Vintage-Dated Bottlings

2007 Jacquesson “Dizy Corne Bautray” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime

The 2007 Corne Bautray bottling from Jacquesson was barrel-fermented in older casks and goes through full malolactic, like all of the Jacquesson *vins clairs*. This was the only single vineyard bottling made in 2007 at Jacquesson, and the wine was aged *sur latte* seven and a half years prior to disgorgement in January 2016. It is non-*dosé* in the 2007 vintage. The wine is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a very complex blend of pear, apple, chalky minerality, lovely notes of almond, brioche, fresh nutmeg, gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is superb, with a full-bodied and still nicely snappy format, lovely depth at the core, elegant *mousse*, superb focus and grip and a long, very nicely balanced and still fairly youthful finish. This is first class Blanc de Blancs. 2017-2045. **94+.**

2009 Jacquesson “Dizy Terres Rouges” Rosé Extra Brut Millésime

The Dizy Terres Rouges Rosé bottling from Jacquesson is produced entirely from pinot noir, in a subsection of the Chiquet family’s larger parcel of this well-situated *lieu à dit*. This is made by the *saignée* method, with half of the juice seeing partial whole clusters and the other half completely destemmed. The wine was aged five and a half years *sur latte* and bottled in 2009 with zero *dosage*. It offers up the deeper color of the *saignée* method and a fine bouquet of cherries, rhubarb, rye bread, chalky minerality, a touch of smokiness and just a hint of cinnamon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and gently vinous in personality, with outstanding minerality, frothy *mousse*, bright, beautifully integrated acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is already delicious to drink, but it will be even better with a handful of years in the cellar. This shows none of the overt generosity found in some bubbly from this ripe and buxom vintage. 2017-2040. **93+**.

RECENTLY TASTED MATURE WHITE BURGUNDIES



In addition to white Burgundy, premature oxidation has cut into my consumption of mature white Bordeaux and Alsace dry Riesling rather dramatically in the last fifteen years, so that these days, there are virtually no bottles left in my cellar reserved for long-term aging from recent vintages from any of these region. As neither white Bordeaux or Alsace Riesling appeals to me as much in their youth as they do when they have had a long and leisurely stay in the cellar, the number of bottles of both has gotten infinitesimally small in my collection over the last decade and a half. This is not quite the same with white Burgundy, which also suffers from the plague of premox (and is far more widely recognized for this problem), as I find a bit more pleasure drinking younger white Burgundy than I do younger white Bordeaux or dry Alsace Riesling. However, given that I am from the Burgundy-loving generation that had plenty of experience drinking fifteen year-old premier crus and twenty year-old grand cru white Burgundies back in my early years, I still have a very hard time getting all that excited drinking a five year-old bottle of Bâtard-Montrachet or Meursault “Perrières”, as I still vividly recall how much better those wines would be if they could still age unmolested for longer periods of time. For my palate, a good bottle of St. Aubin or Chablis or Puligny *villages* at age five is equally satisfying as a five year-old bottle of Leflaive Chevalier-Montrachet. And, my general rule of thumb is that the five year window out from the vintage is still the safety point of avoiding premox issues, and from that point forward, one’s likelihood of hitting a prematurely oxidized wine grow exponentially from all producers. As premature oxidation has been with us now for

nearly twenty years, I imagine that there is now a new generation of white Burgundy drinkers that really has no historical ties to the aging curves of these wines from that golden age prior to premox, and for them, perhaps there is more pleasure to be had drinking younger bottles of great white Burgundy. In time, perhaps this generation will become the majority of clients for these wines and the problem of premature oxidation will become less of a “problem”, as there will simply not be a statistically significant percentage of the market that recalls or expects the wines to age longer than a half dozen or so years and we will simply see shorter term aging of these beautiful wines become the norm. It is too bad, as a fully mature, twenty year-old bottle of white Burgundy at its true zenith of maturity remains one of the most breathtakingly beautiful wine experiences to be found.

Despite premox having cut into my consumption of white Burgundy rather dramatically in the last fifteen years, I do still drink the white wines of the region with some regularity and thought it would be proper to follow up last issue’s mature red Burgundy report with a bookend article on mature and maturing white Burgundy. As readers will recall, my view on premature oxidation is that it is a universal problem for producers of white wines in the Côte d’Or and Chablis, not to mention all white wines from Bordeaux and a great many dry white wines from Alsace as well, though my experience with premoxed Alsace wines is pretty Riesling-centric, as these are the wines from this region that I have historically cellared over the long haul. There is a pretty widely-shared proposition that some producers are less prone to premox than others, but this has not been my experience and I continue to hold that variations in the perceived incidences of premox are more statistical variations based on small sample size, rather than meaningful differences between premox issues amongst growers. That said, I also fully believe that the onset of premox can be affected to some degree by cellar practices of winegrowers, with those who still utilize some form of *battonage* accelerating the onset of premox in their wines, while those who now bottle their wines in a far more reductive state are often successful in slowing down the arrival of the scourge and providing a wider window of “early drinkability” for the wines before premature oxidation issues start to threaten on the horizon. The variations on level of SO₂ additions at bottling, not to mention how much SO₂ is used during the *elevage* (or even out in the vines in the weeks leading up to harvest) also have some effect on how the wines stand up to premox, and some of the variations that others cite as indications of certain estates being “less prone to premox” can also probably be attributed to the sulfur regimen at a given estate.

But, within the context of these variables (and there are several others too, one being the shipping temperatures of bottles, with examples of white Burgundy seeing some warmer temperatures somewhere along the line from cellar door to consumer often showing an earlier onset of premature oxidation issues), I would argue that premox remains a universal issue that confronts all producers of white Burgundy and that no one is entirely immune from the plague. A very recent dinner can serve to illuminate these points. We happened to have two white Burgundies as part of a dinner last evening: 2004 Chevalier-Montrachet “les Demoiselles” from Louis Jadot and a 2007 Meursault “Tessons” from Jean-Marc Roulot. For most in the school who share the notion that certain producers are more prone to premox and others less so, Louis Jadot would appear in the column of “those most likely to premox” and Jean-Marc Roulot would be in the category of a domaine with far less instances of premature oxidation (particularly in more recent times, as the cellar team at Domaine Roulot has been very proactive in trying various methods to slow or eliminate the scourge). However, on this particular evening, both bottles that

we tasted had early and varying signs of premature oxidation, though neither bottle was completely undrinkable and the Roulot the tastier and fresher of the two. The comparison would, of course, been more interesting, if both wines were either from the 2004 or 2007 vintages, making for a more linear sampling, but each was illuminating in its own manner.

Let's start with the Louis Jadot 2004 les Demoiselles, whose premature oxidation characteristics were an overtly honeyed, nutty aromatic and flavor profile, coupled with a lack of focus and delineation on both the nose and palate. The acidity still remained sound here, to a certain degree, and the wine was still long on the finish, albeit four-square. Of course, Louis Jadot often partially blocks malolactic fermentation for its white wines, so the good remaining acidity at age thirteen can be partially attributed to this practice. However, the wine's remaining acidity was starting to peel away from the fruit component and the wine will continue to become less harmonious for this reason as the years go by. But, the premox issues here were really the honeyed, evolved and slightly oxidative aromas and flavors and the glaring lack of detail in the wine. For those of us fortunate enough to have drunk fully mature bottles of Jadot's les Demoiselles from the pre-premox era, great focus was always one of the hallmarks of this wine at age twenty, thirty or even older, so the blurry and honeyed personality of this wine were most certainly premox-related. In contrast, the 2007 Roulot Tessons was still had a bouquet that was fresh as a daisy, with overt signs of reduction still quite evident on the nose and it took some time in the glass for the wine to start to open up a bit aromatically. Its premox issue was far more palate-related, as the wine was very, very short on the backend and showed absolutely no signs of grip, which has been my first red flag of impending premature oxidation issues since the 1995 white Burgundies started going south all those years ago.

What was most interesting about the two wines in their varying expressions of premox was more the philosophical discussion about each wine at the dinner, and whether its showing was really something that could be attributed to premature oxidation at all. We were four very seasoned Burgundy hands around the table, so the varying perspectives certainly served as food for thought. Interestingly, all four of us were in accord that the Louis Jadot 2004 les Demoiselles was a victim of premox, despite the wine now being thirteen years of age and three years older than the Roulot bottling alongside of it. In a nutshell, our shared reasoning was based on all of us having had experience with les Demoiselles from vintages prior to the mid-1990s, so we had all happily drunk bottles of this iconic Jadot cuvée from 1993 and back, when the wine was significantly older than thirteen years or age at the time and still at the peak of its powers. There was also a shared assumption, that premox aside, a grand cru such as Chevalier-Montrachet in a snappy vintage like 2004 would be in its prime, if not still in climbing mode, if premature oxidation was not part of the equation with this particular bottle. With the bottle of 2007 Roulot Tessons, there was far less consensus, with one opinion being that despite Jean-Marc Roulot doing such an admirable job with his *lieux à dits* bottlings, it is still after all only a village wine, and at age ten, we should really not be too surprised if it is starting to slip a bit. Simply stated, this view held that ten years is probably a good life expectancy for a Meursault *villages* bottling in any case, even from Domaine Roulot.

I did not share this sentiment, as the wine showed certain elements that seemed to belie this line of reasoning (not to mention, the historical track record of Jean-Marc's *villages* bottlings of Meursault prior to the onset of the premox age, which included many, many wines that easily

aged more than twice this span of years with far more impressive results than this particular bottle of the 2007 Tessons). But, to get back to the specific elements in this wine that were inconsistent with the above stated evaluation of the wine (at least to my mind), the aromatics of the wine were still very much marked by reductive elements and the wine had clearly gone into bottle in a reductive state and was still quite primary in terms of its development of secondary layers of aromatic complexity. This was also true of the flavors on the palate. Given this element, it would have been highly logical to expect the same thing to be true of the structural elements of the wine, but, in fact, the finish was short, clipped and showed zero signs of grip. The dichotomy of a fresh and primary bouquet and flavor profile, coupled to a structural chassis that was beginning to slide on the finish and lose length and grip, led me to a far different conclusion than others at the table. I suggested that the more reductive winemaking obviously practiced in the Roulot cellars for this particular wine had allowed it to have a far wider window of youthful freshness prior to the onset of premature oxidation issues than what would have been customary with wines not made and bottled in such an overtly reductive manner. Recall my general rule of thumb stated at the outset of this article, that today, five to six years out from the vintage is really the end of the “safety zone” for consumption of white Burgundies without fear of premo issues starting to enter the equation. However, the Roulot Tessons '07 had lasted a decade without showing any signs of aromatic or flavor oxidation (or even much evolution at all in this regard) and was just starting its slippage on the backend of the palate. So, in that regard, the more reductive handling of the wine in the cellars has to be deemed a success.

However, there is another side to that coin that also has to be examined, and that was that this wine also showed rather remarkably little in terms of secondary development on the nose and palate, which perhaps is also a reflection of the reductive winemaking style. At age ten, one can reasonably expect a fair bit of evolutionary complexity to have emerged aromatically and in the spectrum of flavors on the palate, but the wine was relatively devoid of these and really still smelled quite similar to the wine in tank prior to bottling or right after the *mise*. Apparently, the wider window of youthful exemption from premo issues brought about (most likely) from the more reductive winemaking approach in the cellars here had come with a price, that being less aromatic and flavor evolution during this ten year period since the harvest. This is, of course, speculative, as there is no clear causal link between the more reductive approach in the cellars and the relative lack of evolution of the bottle in terms of aromatic and flavor complexity, but it seems to be a reasonable guess. Given that this bottle was now starting to show the first signs of premo in its structural integrity on the backend, the question philosophically is whether or not this extra handful of years of freshness on the nose and palate was worth the price of less evolutionary complexity in the wine. It is only a single bottle of a single 2007 Roulot *lieu à dit* Meursault, and hence statistically meaningless on its own, but it does raise some interesting questions if it proves that other cuvées and recent vintages *chez* Roulot show similar characteristics, not to mention wines from other *vignerons* who might also be following this path of more reductive bottling. If it does turn out that there is a causal link between less development of complexity and more reductive winemaking and bottling, would it be considered worth the cost to add just a few more years to the wine’s “safety zone” before premo starts to become part of the equation? Just a little food for thought.

I should mention that within the ranks of the notes that follow, few wines have been included that are overtly premoxed, though I certainly taste my fair share of those today. The

reason for this is that I simply do not bother to take notes on prematurely oxidized bottles from any region, as the random nature of this problem makes my experiences with premoxed wines not really relevant to whether or not the bottles of the same wine in your cellar will perform similarly. It is only bottles that are just starting to show a bit of premox, but which are still basically drinkable that I take notes on, so I do not want to give the false impression that the problem is getting better (as its causes remain a mystery, despite now many years of serious research) just because I do not have notes on premoxed wines included in this feature. With the notes that follow, the wines are arranged chronologically from youngest vintage to oldest, and then geographically from Chablis south through the Côte d'Or. Within each village and vintage grouping, the wines are listed in ascending order of appellation, from *villages* to premier cru to grand cru, and then alphabetically by producers where there happens to be any overlap. I have not included any notes on mature wines from the Côte Chalonnaise or Mâconnais in this report, as I will be doing another feature on those two regions in the not too distant future and will save my notes on mature wines from those two areas for that article. The projected drinking windows for each wine are framed as if premature oxidation did not exist (as I do when tasting young white Burgundies out of barrel as well), so that one can get a sense of the structure and point of development of the wine today and how it would have evolved in yesteryear, when white Burgundy was a long-lived and far more predictable wine that it is at the present time. As always in this age of premox, individual bottles will vary.



2012 Chablis “les Clos”- Domaine Joseph Drouhin

Twenty years ago, I would never have considered including a note on a five year-old bottle of les Clos in an article on mature white Burgundies, but in this day and age, the five year mark is a very safe, sweet spot in the evolution of these wines. The 2012 les Clos from Joseph Drouhin is drinking beautifully, with still a nice, zesty and youthful edge to its structural elements. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of candied lemon, green apple, complex, chalky minerality, hints of paraffin and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and focused, with a fine core, excellent cut and backend mineral drive and a long, balanced and snappy finish. Happily, this wine is just starting to enter the near side of its plateau of peak maturity and is drinking with style today, but with some luck, has many more years ahead of it. 2017-2030+. **93.**

2010 Chablis “la Forest”- Domaine Dauvissat-Camus

The 2010 bottling of la Forest from Vincent Dauvissat was just starting to show the first signs of premax on the structural backend, with the grip starting to slip and the wine absolutely wide open for inspection on both the nose and palate. That said, it was still a pretty tasty bottle for drinking now, as it offers up a classic nose of lemon, grapefruit, flinty minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and wearing its heart on its sleeve, with good acidity and focus, but with the grip disappearing on the backend and the wine already showing signs of wandering a bit on the finish, rather than closing with distinction. As premax is a bottle by bottle phenomenon, there can still be plenty of pristine examples out there, but it is time to consider drinking this up. 2017-2020+? **88.**

2008 Chassagne-Montrachet “Morgeot”- Marquis de Laguiche (Joseph Drouhin)

The 2008 Marquis de Laguiche bottling of Morgeot from Joseph Drouhin is fully mature at age nine and drinking with great style and grace. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a bright and wide open constellation of pear, tangerine, chalky soil tones, pastry cream and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine acidity, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and *à point* finish. This has the structure to cruise along nicely for another eight to ten years at the least. 2017-2027. **93.**

2008 Chassagne-Montrachet “Morgeot”- Domaine Bernard Moreau

The 2008 Morgeot from Alexandre Moreau is drinking beautifully, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, pear, lemon blossoms, chalky minerality, a touch of beeswax and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and presents a nicely racy chassis, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. Fine juice. 2016-2025+. **93.**

2008 Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet- Domaine Louis Carillon

The 2008 Bienvenues from Domaine Carillon is just now entering its plateau of peak maturity. The bouquet offers up a lovely, ripe and complex blend of apple, pear, a beautifully complex base of chalky soil tones, spring flowers, a hint of orange and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with superb focus and grip, bright acids and a long, ripe and classy finish. This is a touch more powerful in profile than the 2007 vintage here, but it is an excellent wine all the same. 2016-2035. **94+.**

2007 Meursault “Tillets”- Domaine Guy Roulot

Jean-Marc Roulot made beautifully piercing and mineral-driven wines in 2007 and the Tillets is drinking beautifully as it closes in on its tenth birthday. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a pure and vibrant combination of pear, passion fruit, iodine, superb minerality, lime blossoms and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and racy, with a fine core, zesty acids and impressive focus and balance on the long, complex finish. Good juice with plenty of life ahead of it. 2016-2030. **93.**

2007 Meursault “Tessons”- Domaine Guy Roulot

As I alluded to in the introduction, this was a very interesting bottle of Tessons from Domaine Roulot, as the wine still had some reductive elements on the nose from its having gone into bottle in that state. Whether or not this had an adverse effect on the development of secondary layers of aromatic complexity is an open question, but the wine was still fairly primary on the nose. On the palate, the wine was fresh and vibrant on the attack, but fell off the table with a very short finish that displayed no discernable grip, which for me is the first sign of the onset of premoxy. The wine was dramatically shorter than the bottle of 2007 Tillets listed above. Whatever the reason for this, the wine offers up a fresh and still reductive nose of apple, pear, hazelnut, iodine, chalky soil, vanillin oak and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, clean and still quite primary on the attack as well, with a good core, but a short, clipped and flat finish that seems to me to be the first chapter of full premoxy issues. Others at the table did not share my opinion on this I should note, and they too were very seasoned Burgundy hands! 2017-2025+? **88.**

2007 Meursault “Clos de la Barre”- Domaine Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Clos de la Barre from Dominique Lafon is drinking beautifully and is wide open and at its peak today. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, passion fruit, a touch of iodine, salty, chalky soil tones, almond and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very elegant in profile, with a good core, bright acids and a long, complex and zesty finish. I would be inclined to drink this wine over the next several years, as it is really in a nice place right now and the future is always uncertain these days with premoxy a possibility. 2016-2025+? **93.**

2007 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaine Jean-Michel Gaunoux

This was the first wine I have ever tasted from this domaine and I was not particularly impressed. The nose is ripe and fairly simple, offering up scents of apple, pineapple, chalk, a hint of iodine and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with little complexity, but respectable length and grip on the zesty finish. This should be more complex, given that it hails from Perrières. 2017-2025. **86.**

2007 Chassagne-Montrachet “Maltroie”- Domaine Bernard Moreau

The 2007 vintage of Maltroie from the Moreau family is a superb wine, delivering a bright and refined bouquet of apple, pear, iodine, wet stone minerality, citrus zest and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. Really a beautiful bottle of Maltroie. 2017-2025+. **92.**

2006 Pernand-Vergelesses “Île de Vergelesses” Blanc- Domaine Chandon de Briailles

The 2006 Île de Vergelesses” Blanc from Chandon de Briailles was drinking beautifully when I last tasted it a couple of years ago. The bouquet is pure, bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of pineapple, pear, acacia blossoms, chalky soil and a gentle framing of

vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and fresh, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, succulent and complex finish. Lovely juice that is oh, so easy to drink today! 2015-2022+. **92.**

2006 Meursault “Vireuils” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Coche-Dury (Domaine et Selection)

This is the special bottling made by Jean-François Coche from a parcel of Vireuils owned by Johan Björklund, proprietor of the l’Hôtel de Beaune. The vines in this parcel are older than the ones owned by Monsieur Coche himself in Vireuils, but lower down on the slope from the domaine vines. The 2006 version is lovely and drinking very well, offering up scents of tangerine, apple, iodine, almonds, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with very good focus, lovely grip and a long, wide open finish. If one were to compare this with the domaine bottling, perhaps there is not quite the same core in this version, but this is still fine juice. 2014-2020. **92.**

2006 Beaune “Clos des Mouches” Blanc- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2006 Clos des Mouches Blanc is fully mature at age ten, offering up a complex and impressively fresh bouquet of apple, pineapple, chalky soil tones, a touch of honeycomb, a discreet base of vanillin oak and a bit of peach stone in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and quite delicious to drink today, with a good core, fine soil signature, bright acids and a long, focused and well-balanced finish. If I were to have any complaint with this wine, it is not a particularly complex vintage by the high standards of this cuvée. I would opt for drinking it over the next ten years or so. 2016-2025. **89.**

2004 Chablis “les Clos”- Domaine Vincent Dauvissat (served from magnum)

I have to admit to have been very excited to drink this magnum of 2004 les Clos from Vincent Dauvissat, but this particular example was just starting to show a bit of backend slippage and would probably have been premoxed six months down the road. Happily, we caught it early enough to really enjoy the wine, but I have to believe that there are significantly more vibrant bottles still out there for those luckier than me. The wine shows lovely resolution on the nose, albeit, not the same deep and profound complexity of the 2002 les Preuses (see below), offering up scents of apple, beeswax, gentle flintiness, candied lemon and a nice touch of anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just starting to lose a touch of backend grip, with a good core and soil signature, sound acids and fine focus on the long finish. Expect to add five points if you are lucky enough to find a pristine example. 2016-2020+? **89.**

2004 Chevalier-Montrachet “Les Demoiselles”- Maison Louis Jadot

The 2004 les Demoiselles from Louis Jadot was in a perplexing stage, which I suppose must be put down to modest premox, but it was not a classic case of the plague. Due to the blocked malolactic fermentation, the wine retained at age thirteen a very good spine of acidity and was not typically short on the backend as one finds with most prematurely oxidized bottles. On the other hand, the wine was far from delineated on either the nose and palate, and was just a four-square, chunky mélange of honeyed old fruit, nutty tones and a bit of chalky soil- hardly the classic aromatic and flavor profile of a thirteen year-old bottle of les Demoiselles from a top vintage back in the days of yore! The bouquet is a mature and honeyed mix of apricot, nuts, chalky soil, just a hint of pastry cream and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and chunky, with solid depth, not detail, but respectable grip on the tangy finish. The fruit and acidity here seem somehow divorced from each other on the palate, and this perception grows as the wine has a chance to open up in decanter. This wine is far from dead on the palate, but without the focus and complexity one normally finds here, not to mention the divergent paths

of the fruit and acidity on the backend, it is still probably best to drink it up over the short-term. A very weird showing. 2017-2027? **86.**

2003 Chassagne-Montrachet “Caillerets”- Domaine Ramonet

I do not know what it is about the 2003 white Burgundies, but somehow they seem to have managed to steer clear of premox issues in my experience, as well as aging far better than such low acid wines had any right to do! The '03 Ramonet Caillerets is another surprise, for though it is not a great wine, it is still perfectly sound and drinkable at age twelve. The bouquet is pretty and surprisingly fresh, delivering scents of apple, pear, a touch of corn meal, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and fairly low acid, but with still a fair bit of vibrancy and lovely detail. There is plenty of depth at the core, modest framing acids and good length on the slightly chunky, but eminently drinkable finish. 2015-2023. **87.**

2002 Chablis “les Preuses”- Domaine Vincent Dauvissat

The 2002 les Preuses is really a beautiful wine and is drinking at its apogee at age fourteen. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a ripe and complex blend of flinty minerality, green fruit, candied lemon peel, plenty of smokiness and a topnote of chalk dust. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and laser-sharp in its focus, with a rock solid core, bright acids and a very, very long, zesty and complex finish. This was a very ripe vintage of les Preuses (probably close to fourteen percent octane), but the wine has aged beautifully. 2016-2030+. **94.**

2002 Meursault “Rougeots”- Domaine Coche-Dury

The 2002 Rougeots from Jean-François Coche is an excellent example of the vintage that is just hitting its apogee at age thirteen. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a gorgeous blend of pineapple, butterscotch, salty limestone soil tones, iodine, sweet nuttiness, orange peel and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a fine core, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the poised and very well-balanced finish. Very impressive juice at its zenith. 2015-2025. **94.**

2002 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaine Rémi Jobard

I imagine that the 2002 Meursault “Charmes” from Domaine Rémi Jobard was very attractive in its youth, but at age fourteen, it has lost just a touch of vibrancy and not really replaced it with more complexity. The bouquet today offers up a blend of apple, honeycomb, chalky soil tones, nutskin, a touch of iodine and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and still quite solid at the core, but a bit four-square, with modest complexity, but still good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Other than the wine not developing more complexity with extended bottle age, it has evolved pretty well, holding onto much of its acidity and still shows good mid-palate depth. 2016-2025. **88.**

2001 Puligny-Montrachet “Pucelles”- Domaine Leflaive

The 2001 vintage of Pucelles from Domaine Leflaive has turned out quite well from a year that I was not overly sanguine about for white wines. The bouquet is a bit tropically-inclined on the nose, but fresh and complex, offering up scents of tangerine, peach, orange zest, a touch of corn meal, chalky soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly soft in acidity, with a good core and perfectly sound complexity. The finish is long and nuanced, albeit not with the customary grip of a top flight white Burgundy vintage. However,

given my fairly low expectations for this wine, it is better than anticipated and not a bad drink. The low acids would lead me to drink this fairly quickly. 2015-2020. **88.**



2000 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Raveneau

The 2000 vintage of Montée de Tonnerre from the Raveneau family is drinking very nicely, but remains still quite youthful in its profile and a bit primary in terms of its aromatic development at age seventeen. The bouquet is bright and focused, wafting from the glass in a mix of tangerine, fresh coconut, candied lemon peel, chalky minerality, a touch of beeswax and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in personality, with a solid core, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. This remains bright and has plenty of life still ahead of it, but I would have expected just a bit more complexity by now, based on how lovely the wine was out of the blocks. 2017-2035. **92+.**

2000 Puligny-Montrachet “Pucelles”- Domaine Leflaive

The 2000 Pucelles from Domaine Leflaive is a very pretty wine that is drinking at its apogee today. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a stylish blend of apple, tangerine, a nice touch of *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones, vanillin oak and still a bit of reductive toastiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and lively, with a good core, fine length and grip and just a touch of backend heat surprisingly poking out on the long finish. This is at its apogee and probably has been for a half dozen years already, but should continue to cruise along nicely

for several more to come. It is only the touch of backend alcohol that would lead me to drink the wine sooner than later. 2015-2020+. **92.**

1999 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Raveneau

The 1999 Montée de Tonnerre from Domaine Raveneau is far more advanced than the 2000 version which was paired up with it, with a honeyed and quite evolved nose and palate. The bouquet delivers a mature blend of apricot, orange peel, beeswax, honey and a good base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fresher and more vibrant than the nose might suggest, with a good core and fine framing acids, lovely focus and a complex, well-balanced and fully mature finish. This tastes like it is ten to fifteen years older than the 2000 version, but there is nary a sign of premox and this is just the path that this vintage has taken. I would drink up the 1999 Montée de Tonnerre over the next eight to ten years. 2017-2025. **91.**

1996 Petit Chablis- Domaine Vincent Dauvissat

Vincent Dauvissat always notes that there is no reason that a well-placed parcel of Petit Chablis should not be able to age gracefully, if the *vigneron* harvests by hand, and here is a very nice example that this is indeed the case! The 1996 Dauvissat Petit Chablis is still bright and classy, delivering a mature aromatic blend of candied lemon, pear, a touch of browned butter, wet stone minerality and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and still quite long and racy on the backend, with a good core and fine cut and grip on the finish. Really quite lovely still and showing no signs of imminent decline! 2014-2020+. **89.**

1996 Corton-Charlemagne- Maison Louis Latour (served from magnum)

This particular magnum of '96 Louis Latour Corton Charlie had managed to escape any issues with premature oxidation, but it is a good solid wine, rather than a great example of this magical *terroir*. The deep and honeyed bouquet offers up scents of apple, orange peel, salty soil tones and plenty of creosote-like, smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still plenty vibrant with the vintage's lovely acidity, but rather four-square in personality. The finish is moderately long, but the wine has not aged particularly well and is rather devoid of complexity. For my palate, the last high quality vintage of Latour Corton-Charlemagne was the 1993 and the last truly great one was the 1990. The house seemed to lose its way with this bottling from 1993 forwards. 2016-2025+. **87.**

1996 Puligny-Montrachet “Pucelles”- Domaine Leflaive

Like the other extant 1996s here, the Pucelles bottling from Domaine Leflaive is certainly remarkable for not having been touched by the plague of premox. In this era, Anne-Claude Leflaive was bottling her wines in a quite reductive state and this is still evident twenty years out from the vintage in this particular bottle of Pucelles. The bouquet, underneath the lingering note of reduction, is really quite fine, offering up scents of lemon, golden delicious apple, a fine base of limestone minerality, orange zest, toasty reductive notes and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very long, with superb focus and grip, a bit of SO2 still lingering and a complex, classy finish. I do not really know how to score this wine, as the reductive traits remain quite strong at age twenty and really should not be here anymore, so it is likely that they will always be part of the equation on into the future. However, maybe they will eventually disappear and the wine will be flawless, energetic and completely stunning! There are certainly at least a couple of decades of life still locked up in pristine bottles, so the wine may eventually unlock and merit the score at the top of the range. 2016-2035. **89-94?**

1996 Chassagne-Montrachet “Vergers”- Domaine Michel Niellon

The 1996 Vergers from Michel Niellon is a very good bottle of fully mature white Burgundy that will probably want drinking up in the next half dozen years or so. The bouquet offers up a deep and honeyed blend of apple, peach, leesy tones, a nice base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open structurally, with a plush attack, moderate acids (particularly for 1996) and a long, suave and tasty finish. This is a good, solid example of the vintage that will be best over the next few years. 2016-2020. **90.**

1996 Bâtard-Montrachet- Domaine Paul Pernot

When 1996 white Burgundies are good (having escaped the clutches of premo), they are really, really good, as is this example of Bâtard-Montrachet from Monsieur Pernot. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex and classy blend of apple, tangerine, a touch of honey, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a nice base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very vibrant, with great structure and focus, very good complexity and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice. 2016-2030+. **93.**

1995 Auxey-Duresses Blanc- Maison Leroy

The 1995 Auxey-Duresses Blanc from Maison Leroy has held up nicely and shows no signs of premo, but it is also a rather chunky and four-square wine. The bouquet is my favorite part here, offering up a fine mix of candied lemon, pear, chalky soil tones, a touch of lanolin and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and reasonably deep at the core, with bright acids, quite modest complexity for a twenty year-old white Burg and a bit of heat poking out on the four-square finish. This has survived nicely to age twenty, but was probably never a very promising example and is really rather pedestrian fare. 2015-2022+. **86.**

1995 Meursault “Narvaux”- Maison Leroy

The 1995 Meursault “Narvaux” from Maison Leroy is a step up in breed from the Auxey Blanc, but only a small step up on the palate. The bouquet is quite promising, delivering a bright and stylish blend of pineapple, apple, geranium, butter, lemon oil and still a bit of lingering sulfur. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, a tad four-square, with a good core, bright acids and good length and grip on the slightly blunt finish. The 1990 vintage of this bottling was really good, but this 1995 version seems a bit heavy-handed by comparison and is a bit less interesting. Still a solid effort with life ahead of it, I would opt for drinking the '95 Leroy Narvaux over the next decade or so. It is the most satisfying of these three 1995 Leroy whites. 2015-2030. **88.**

1995 Puligny-Montrachet “Folatières”- Maison Leroy

Maison Leroy's 1995 Folatières is another example of the vintage that has managed to steer clear of any premo issues, which is quite laudable, but it has also failed to develop any serious complexity or elegance over the twenty years of its life in bottle- probably from its sheen of botrytis. The bouquet is deep and wide open, offering up scents of pineapple, corn meal, a touch of baking spices, chalky soil and some inelegant, not entirely botrytis notes. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chunky, with a plump core, crumbling structure and a long, tropical and inelegant finish. I am very seldom a fan of botrytis and chardonnay, so it is not too surprising that this wine does not float my boat. 2015-2022. **85.**

1995 Puligny-Montrachet “Pucelles”- Domaine Leflaive

The 1995 vintage of Domaine Leflaive's Pucelles does not have the reductive issues of the 1996, and though it is not quite as racy and powerful as its 1996 counterpart, it is drinking beautifully at age twenty and offers up plenty of pleasure in the glass. The first class bouquet

delivers scents of apple, white peach, vanilla custard, spring flowers, chalky minerality and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open at peak maturity, with a good core, lovely focus and balance, sound framing acids and a very long, complex and elegant finish. The backend grip here is pretty gentle today, indicating that this wine is getting to the far side of its plateau of maturity and will probably start a gentle decline in the next four or five years, so drinking up is probably merited. 2015-2020+. **92.**

1995 Montrachet- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

The quality of the winemaking today at Maison Bouchard Père et Fils is a serious step or two up from what was going on back in 1995, so this wine really bears little resemblance to what more recent vintages will do here with extended bottle age. The '95 Montrachet is a rather modest effort for this vineyard, delivering a mature and fairly simple bouquet of peach, toasted nuts, salty soil tones and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and lacking in complexity, with a solid core, still good acids, but a chunky, simple finish of respectable length, but little cut or grip. This wine still has plenty of life in it, but after twenty-two years in the bottle, to show so little complexity is rather disappointing. 2017-2030+. **85.**



A last touch of the winter sun over the vines in Meursault.

1993 Chassagne-Montrachet “Morgeot”- Marquis de Laguiche (Joseph Drouhin)

I once owned a case of the '93 Laguiche Morgeot and drank every bottle with great pleasure, but I finished my dozen bottles long ago. This most recent bottle was still pretty, but

the wine has begun to slide down the far side of its plateau and is starting to gently decline. The bouquet offers up a bright, but tertiary blend of lemon, apple, a touch of butter, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, but with its previous precision now receding markedly and giving the wine a slightly chunky personality. The acids here are still quite zesty, but the fruit is beginning to fade a bit on the backend and the writing is on the wall for this wine. Drink up. 2016-2020+? **89.**

1993 Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet- Domaine Louis Carillon

The 1993 Bienvenues from Louis Carillon is at its zenith of peak drinkability and is loaded with complexity and breed at the present time. The bouquet delivers a marvelous blend of pear, tangerine, sweet butter, salty soil tones and a topnote of candied lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature, bright, zesty acids and a very long, classy and beautifully balanced finish. Gorgeous wine. 2014-2035. **95.**

1992 Chablis “les Clos”- Domaine Vincent Dauvissat

The 1992 les Clos from Vincent Dauvissat shows a touch of botrytis, but is otherwise, a fine, mature bottle of Chablis. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, a hint of pineapple, candied lemon peel, chalky, oyster shell, beeswax and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and zesty finish. There is just a whisper of backend bitterness showing on the backend here from the botrytis, but this is drinking very nicely at age twenty-three and will continue to cruise along nicely for at least another decade. This was a ripe vintage *chez* Dauvissat and this wine is probably in the high thirteen percent range, but shows absolutely no signs of backend heat or imbalance from the high octane. 2015-2025+. **92.**

1992 Montrachet “Baron Thenard”- Remoissenet Père et Fils

The 1992 Montrachet “Baron Thenard” bottling from Remoissenet is excellent and drinking with style and grace as it enters its third decade in the bottle. The complex nose offers up a fine constellation of peach, fresh apricot, a nice touch of butter, chalky soil tones, a bit of corn meal and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely *à point*, with a superb core, fine focus and grip, lovely acidity for the vintage and a very long, poised and complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2030. **93.**

1991 Chassagne-Montrachet “Vergers”- Domaine Michel Niellon

I do not recall liking the 1991 white Burgundy vintage particularly well when it was released, but this bottle of Vergers from Michel Niellon has aged quite nicely and was far better than I might have expected, if it had not been served blind. The bouquet is fully mature, but still bright, as it offers up a ripe and warm vintage mix of pineapple, chalky soil tones, corn meal, citrus peel, plenty of smokiness and a nice base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively fresh still, with a good core, modest remaining acids and a long, well-balanced and *à point* finish. A very surprising and enjoyable bottle for drinking over the next four or five years. 2016-2021. **90.**

1990 Chablis “la Forest”- Domaine Vincent Dauvissat

I have loved the 1990 Chablis “la Forest” from Vincent Dauvissat since the earliest days after its release and sadly drank all of mine (and I bought more than my fair share!) many years

ago. This most recent bottle, tasted at the domaine with Monsieur Dauvissat was still splendid, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of candied lemon, apple, flinty minerality, a nice touch of smokiness, beeswax, lime peel and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and beautifully transparent, with a good, solid core (if not great depth), bright acids and lovely complexity on the long and zesty finish. Just a beautiful middleweight that continues to cruise along with verve and elegance. 2016-2025+. **92.**

1990 Meursault “Clos des Perrières”- Domaine Albert Grivault

The 1990 Clos des Perrières from Domaine Grivault remains fresh and vibrant and still has plenty of life still ahead of it, but it is a good, rather than a remarkable wine. The fresh bouquet offers up a reasonably complex blend of lemon, apple, chalky minerality, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fresh and nicely mineral in personality, with a respectable core and solid length, but not really the breed and complexity one would expect from a good vintage of Perrières at age twenty-five. This is perfectly okay, but not first division juice. 2015-2025+. **88.**

1989 Meursault “Narvaux”- Domaine Chavy-Chouet

I have never tasted a wine from Domaine Chavy-Chouet before, but this '89 Narvaux was really pretty tasty. The wine delivers a fine old nose of candied lemon, toasted almonds, salty soil tones, orang and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and still shows good acidity, with a fine core and very respectable complexity on the long and solid finish. This is not a great wine, but a very good wine that has aged nicely and continues to drink well. 2015-2025+. **88.**

1989 Puligny-Montrachet “Referts”- Domaine Etienne Sauzet

Gerard Boudot's 1989s were really tasty in their early days, but this bottle of Referts was a bit long in the tooth the last time I tasted it. The wine offers up a deep and quite ripe bouquet of dried pineapple, almonds, apricot, new leather, a bit of honey and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is not quite as interesting as the nose promises, with its full-bodied format rather four-square today and lacking in complexity. The acids here are still acceptable and the finish remains pretty long, but the fruit seems to be drying out on the backend and it is time to drink up. 2015-2020. **85.**

1989 Montrachet- Marquis de Laguiche (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

It had been almost nine years since I last drank a bottle of the 1989 Montrachet from the Marquis de Laguiche, and given how beautifully this bottle showed, I wonder if my bottle was not pristine all those years ago. This is a vintage of Montrachet from the Drouhins that I drank quite a bit when the wine was young, when it had a lovely, tropical veneer typical of so many 1989s in their youth, but impressive soil signature and complexity underneath. Today, those tropical fruit tones are long gone and the wine is plush, but quite classic in aromatic and flavor profile. The bouquet is really quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a mature blend of apple, pear, almond, chalky soil tones, hints of *crème patissière*, a nice touch of browned butter and a very suave, understated framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite zesty, with a fine core, excellent complexity and focus, good acids and very fine grip on the poised and beautifully balanced finish. This is really a fine vintage of the Laguiche Monty, with plenty of life still ahead. 2017-2030+. **94.**

1988 Musigny Blanc- Domaine de Comte de Vogüé

The 1988 Musigny Blanc from Domaine de Comte de Vogüé is drinking splendidly at age twenty-eight, delivering a deep and complex aromatic constellation of honeyed almonds, tangerine, chalky soil tones, citrus peel, a touch of smokiness and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its absolute zenith of maturity, with excellent focus and grip, lovely mid-palate intensity, superb acids and a very, very long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. Fine, fine juice with years of life still ahead of it! 2016-2035. **94.**

1988 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Bonneau du Martray

The 1988 Corton-Charlemagne from Bonneau du Martray is a superb example of the vintage and it remains at its pinnacle of peak maturity as it closes in on its thirtieth birthday. The bouquet delivers a superb, complex blend of apple, pear, a touch of fresh nutmeg, chalky soil tones, beeswax and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely *à point*, with a fine core of fruit, superb soil signature, bright acids and a very long, complex and utterly refined finish. Great juice with decades of life still to come. 2016-2035+. **94.**

1988 Meursault “Rougeots”- Domaine Coche-Dury

Fifteen years ago, I remember vividly being dazzled by both the Corton-Charlemagne and Perrières from Jean-François Coche, but after fairly frequent sightings of this vintage *chez* Coche around the turn of the century, I had not crossed paths with a bottle of 1988 here for many a year. Consequently, I was delighted to have a chance to taste a bottle of the 1988 Rougeots, which is a classic expression of this dynamic white Burgundy vintage. The wine delivers a lovely bouquet of apple, almonds, pastry cream, a lovely base of chalky soil, a touch of iodine and a floral topnote that hints at geranium. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a solid core, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. This is drinking very nicely today, but I was left wondering if its leanness at this age is a reflection of the vintage or the first sign that the fruit may be starting to fade a bit? I might be inclined to drink the wine up out of concerns that the latter option may be what is happening here, despite the wine still retaining plenty of acidity and grip. 2014-2020+?. **91.**

1988 Puligny-Montrachet “Referts”- Domaine Louis Carillon

The 1988 Referts from Monsieur Carillon is a superb example of the vintage, with the bounce and verve that one expects mostly to find in grand crus at this point in the vintage’s evolution. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex and still quite vibrant blend of peach, apple, a touch of iodine, beeswax, chalky soil tones and a floral topnote that now smells distinctly of lavender. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still with plenty of the zesty exuberance of youth, with marvelous mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip and a very long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This has simply magical backend energy and length for a premier cru at nearly thirty years of age! 2017-2035. **94.**

1988 Puligny-Montrachet “Champs Canet”- Domaine Etienne Sauzet

The 1988 Champs Canet from Gérard Boudot is a lovely old wine that remains structurally sound and shows fine tertiary complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a golden blend of apricot, nutty tones, orange peel, chalky soil, butterscotch and a touch of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still impressively fresh in personality, with a sound core, lovely soil signature and impressive length and grip on the complex and fully mature finish. This will eventually start to slide down the far side of the plateau, but I suspect that it still has at least a few years at this lovely stage of white Burgundy endgame before it starts to slip. 2015-2020. **90.**

1988 Criots-Bâtard-Montrachet- Domaine Blaine-Gagnard

The 1988 Criots-Bâtard-Montrachet from Domaine Blaine-Gagnard is a gorgeous example of this vintage and is drinking at its absolute apogee of peak maturity at the present time. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of pear, peach, honeycomb, corn meal, a fine base of soil tones, butter, a hint of vanillin oak and a touch of cut grass in the upper register that still shows the moderate ripeness of the year. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully resolved, with lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids and fine focus and cut on the very long, zesty and impeccably balanced finish. This has at least another decade of life ahead of it and probably more. 2015-2025+. **93.**



The Le Montrachet wall that runs along the Route des Grands Crus.

1986 Bâtard-Montrachet- Domaine Paul Pernot

In my experience, the vast, vast majority of 1986 white Burgundies have seen their sun rise and set, with the botrytis that initially added just a gentle glaze of tropical overtones to the wine has now gained the upper hand and the wines are far less interesting today than in the days of yore. The '86 Pernot Bâtard is still reasonably complex, offering up scents of pineapple, buttered pears, a bit of remaining soil and vanillin oak. Aromatically, this is really not all that influenced by its botrytis, but the noble rot throws its weight around on the palate. The wine is full-bodied, deep and still reasonably complex, with sound acids, but some signs of heat now poking out from the concentrating effect of botrytis and the wine no longer delivers the breed

and elegance of a grand cru. The wine remains alive, but one has to like the combination of botrytis and chardonnay far more than I do to really warm up to this wine today. In its youth it was lovely, but to my palate, it is high time to drink it up. 2016-2023? **85.**

1986 Montrachet- Marquis de Laguiche (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

I have had the pleasure to drink many, many bottles of the '86 Laguiche Montrachet over the years, and the wine has gotten to the far side of its plateau in recent times, with some bottles still quite lovely and others starting to descend into gentle decline. This particular bottle was one of the best I have tasted in the last five years, offering up a really lovely bouquet of pear, almond, a touch of browned butter, complex, chalky soil tones, a dollop of orange peel and a suave base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still nicely complex, with the refined profile of youth, a fine core, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. The touch of botrytis here is still buried in the other elements of the wine and this bottle is drinking with style and grace. 2017-2030+. **93.**

1986 Montrachet- Domaine Ramonet

The decade of the 1980s at Domaine Ramonet was one of the most remarkable “hot streaks” that any white Burgundy-producing domaine has ever been on, and the '86 Montrachet is an absolutely magical wine that transcends the general tenets of this vintage. The bouquet is flat out stunning at age thirty-one, soaring from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, passion fruit, complex, chalky minerality, orange oil, a faint whiff of peppermint, gentle vanillin oak and a touch of exotic spiced meatiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and razor-sharp, with a bottomless core of fruit, superb soil signature, impeccable focus and balance and a very, very long, complex and racy finish. This majestic wine is at its absolute apogee, but will continue to dazzle for decades and decades to come. Brilliant juice. 2017-2040. **97.**

1981 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaine Coche-Dury

I cannot really recall drinking much 1981 white Burgundy, even in my earliest days in the wine trade, so this stunning bottle of Coche-Dury Perrières completely caught me by surprise. The bouquet is fully mature, tertiary and still plenty vibrant, wafting from the glass in a very classy blend of buttered corn, apricot, salty soil tones, almonds, orange peel, a gently savory element that might be carrots and a very exotic topnote of gingerbread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and seamlessly balanced, with stunning focus and grip, still plenty of mid-palate intensity and a very long, pure and vibrant finish. This is really shocking in its zesty complexity at this age! 2014-2025. **95.**

1978 Meursault “Poruzots”- Domaine René Manuel

The vineyards of René Manuel have now been split up between domaines Roulot and Comtes Lafon in recent times, and I cannot recall ever having tasted an old example from this estate. It turned out that the 1978 Poruzots from René Manuel was an excellent wine that was still at its apogee and had plenty of life ahead of it. The bouquet is quite tertiary, but bright and enticing nonetheless, wafting from the glass in a blend of walnut, orange, apple, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and new leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still possessing lovely acidity, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. This is a broad-shouldered example of Poruzots that has probably been at its apogee for twenty years already, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. Impressive old juice! 2014-2025. **92.**

1950 Meursault “Perrières”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

To my knowledge, 1950 was not a remarkable year for white Burgundy, but this example of Meursault “Perrières” from Joseph Drouhin has aged very, very well and remains a very tasty bottle of old white Burgundy. The bouquet is still quite vibrant, wafting from the glass in a tertiary blend of orange, nutskin, a touch of sweet corn, citrus peel, plenty of smokiness and buttered almonds. On the palate the wine is every bit as complex as the nose promises, with its full-bodied format offering still solid depth at the core, lovely focus and balance and sneaky length and grip on the zesty finish. Remarkable to still be cruising along so nicely at age sixty-six, the 1950 Perrières from Maison Drouhin shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon! 2016-2030+. **89.**

VISITING A FEW EXCELLENT WINERIES IN THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY AND OTHER RECENTLY-TASTED OREGON WINES



The biodynamically-farmed Momtazi Vineyard in McMinnville, right next door to Kelly Fox's winery.

During the third week in July, I was out in Oregon to attend some of the thirtieth anniversary celebrations of Domaine Drouhin, located in the Dundee Hills section of the Willamette Valley. This was my first trip out to Oregon wine country and I managed to add a few days onto my trip to visit a handful of other producers whose wines I had very much enjoyed in the past, or whose wines came highly recommended and which I had never had a chance to taste previously. I was extremely impressed with what I had a chance to sample and I intend to make regular visits out to the Willamette Valley in the future to try and stay more on top of what is going on in this excellent wine-producing region. While the Willamette Valley has had a long history of agricultural production, the wine side of the farming business here remains a very small percentage of overall agricultural production, with crops such as hazelnuts (more than ninety-five percent of all of these nuts produced in the United States are grown here) and grass seed far more important than grape growing, and I had the distinct impression that the winegrowing community remains a bit on the outside of the mainstream of activity in this beautiful, rambling region. Though one reaches wine country in the Willamette Valley barely an hour's drive outside of Portland, the valley remains a nicely rural region of primarily small towns and rolling hillsides, interspersed with big farming operations on the valley floor and plenty of

woodlands. One imagines that Napa Valley was quite a bit like this in the 1940s and 1950s when the early wine pioneers started to arrive and plant grapes to go along with the fruit trees that had been traditionally farmed in Napa, and though the population has been growing rather rapidly in the Willamette Valley in recent years, the wine production side of the local economy remains a distinctly minority partner.

The amount of acreage under vines has grown far, far beyond the initial plantings of pinot noir and pinot gris put in by David Lett of Eyrie Vineyards all the way back in 1966, and I am sure that at the latter stages of his life, David could look back on his pioneering days and see that his initial vision for the region had been realized. David Lett passed away in October of 2008, but his legacy lives on in the hundreds of wineries now dotting the hillsides or flanking Route 99-W as it cuts its way across the Willamette Valley to the Oregon coast, and it is quite clear that Oregon wine has reached a level of quality at age fifty that exceeds the initial visions that even David Lett and other early pioneers like Dick Erath (who arrived in 1968) had in those formative years. I first got to know the wines of Oregon in the vintages of mid-1980s, with producers such as Knudson-Erath, Eyrie Vineyards and Dick Ponzi's and David Adelsheim's eponymous wineries amongst my earliest introductions to the wines of the Willamette Valley. I lost touch with this region a bit as my business focus changed over the years, so I missed most of the vintages of the 1990s and early 2000s here and only really began to taste a bit from the valley again in the last few years. Winegrowers whom I chatted with on this trip related that I missed a bit of a dip in the quality in the region (or that would have been my palate's interpretation) in the latter half of the '90s, as the "bigger is better" stylistic fetish that plowed its way through so much of California in this era found its echo in the Willamette Valley as well, but those days are long gone from most top properties today and the winemaking at the wineries that I visited was absolutely superb and the wines everything one could ask for those who values *terroir* and balance in their wines.

I had wanted to visit Oregon wine country for many years, but had never found an open slot on my travel schedule until this past July, as I had promised Véronique Drouhin-Boss when I was in Burgundy last November that I would most certainly come out to the Willamette Valley to join in the thirtieth anniversary celebrations at their Domaine Drouhin in the Dundee Hills. Happily, my knee had recovered enough from my spring surgery to make the short trip and I extended my visit by a few days to be able to visit some additional wineries. The result was an excellent tasting trip, loaded with superbly-crafted wines and the pleasure of getting to meet some extremely talented and passionate winegrowers in the valley. It is testimony to the great work that the Drouhin family has done at DDO since their first vintage in the new winery all the way back in 1988, not to mention how they embraced the winegrowing culture in the Willamette Valley since day one, that everywhere I went, other *vignerons* were quick to point out what marvelous work the family has done at DDO since those early days and what a watershed moment it was in the history of winegrowing in Oregon when the Drouhins arrived and set down roots in the region. In recent years, their example has been followed by other Burgundy producers, so that today, Dominique Lafon, Louis Jadot's Jacques Lardière, Jean-Nicolas Méo and Louis-Michel Liger-Belair (amongst others) have all brought their Burgundian experiences to the new frontier of the Willamette Valley. While I have no doubt that they will all produce excellent wines as they get to know the *terroirs* that they are now working with in Oregon, my

July trip was focused on visiting the established American winegrowers in the region, rather than the relatively new projects of Burgundians here.

The wine producers whom I visited with in this trip all shared a farming philosophy of following either biodynamic or organic agricultural methods. Many are small-scale properties content to buy in most of the grapes that they work with each harvest, but they place heavy emphasis on sustainable farming practices from the grape growers whom they contract to buy grape from. These folks are certainly a heterogeneous and iconoclastic lot and I immediately felt right at home with them, whether it was the ever-curious and searching Chad Stock of Minimus Vineyards, or the deeply philosophical Kelley Fox, or the properly crusty, transplanted New Englander, Jim Anderson at Patricia Green Cellars, all of the folks that I met on this trip were a deeply talented and committed group of winegrowers who are intent on taking the quality of Oregon wines ever higher, while taking no shortcuts in either the vineyards or cellars (virtually everyone I tasted with on this trip relies on indigenous yeasts to start fermentations, eschews the usual suspects of extraction enzymes and the other roster of cellar parlor tricks during the winemaking, and bottles their wines as naturally as possible). The results speak for themselves, as these are wines that are alive with possibility, so often speaking beautifully of their underlying *terroirs* and built to age long and gracefully. Having cut my teeth on the vintages here of the mid to late 1980s, I can speak concisely of the dramatic uptick in precision, elegance and complexity that today's Oregon wines show over their early counterparts from thirty years ago. It is a very, very exciting time in Oregon wine country!

The *terroir* of the Willamette Valley is primarily of two types (of course, with endless variations and combinations on these two main themes): volcanic and marine sedimentary, with the sedimentary soils generally on the valley floor and the volcanic soils found on the foothills of the two mountain ranges that form the eastern and western boundaries of the valley as it runs south from Portland down to Eugene. The Coastal Range to the west of the valley rose up in a series of volcanic eruptions ice ages ago, eventually blocking out the Pacific Ocean from this basin and creating the beautiful patchwork of soil variations that lends itself so beautifully to grape cultivation in the valley. It was probably these beautiful soil complexities that led David Lett to plant his pinot noir and pinot gris here back in 1966, and pinot noir in particular has enjoyed great success since the very early days. The pioneering pinot gris grape has had a bit more of a mixed track record, and the grape is currently out of favor with many of the cutting edge producers, who echo the comments of Chad Stock of Minimus when he says "the problem with pinot gris is that it is essentially a grape that produces wines of zero complexity- at least if it is vinified as a white wine- as all of its personality is in the skins." There are a number of winegrowers who are experimenting with allowing pinot gris some extended skin contact during maceration and fermentation, arguing that the grape is nearly a red grape for all intents and purposes and all of its potential complexity resides in the skins, so there are some very interesting, offbeat examples of pinot gris starting to pop up with colors that range from orange to pale ruby, as the skins get to play a greater role in the crafting the personality of the resulting wine.

On the flip side, chardonnay in Oregon, which generally went into the ground as an afterthought and then sought its own personality at times throughout its history in the valley, and at other times, simply mimicked the big, buttery, higher octane style that was dominant at that

moment in Napa Valley (and singularly unsuccessful in Oregon), is starting to see a true renaissance in the region and many winegrowers feel that they are on the edge of really mastering the synthesis of Oregon *terroir* and this grape variety. One of the absolute leaders in this regard is Ken Pahlow at Walter Scott Wines in Salem, who is making outstanding, mostly single vineyard pinot noirs and the absolute reference point chardonnays in the entire state. At several of my winery visits, *vignerons* asked me who else I had visited or was still going to visit, and when I mentioned Ken's name, the first comment out of their mouths was often "he is making great chardonnays!" Ken is not alone in mastering this varietal (Chad Stock's bottling of chardonnay, which he calls "Dijon Free" is another utterly brilliant example) and we are bound to see more and more serious, ageworthy and soil-driven chardonnays emerging from the top, artisanal producers in the Willamette Valley in the coming years, as the grape take ascendancy over the earlier-planted pinot gris and starts to really find its stylistic paradigm in the top vineyards in the region.

However, beyond these three customary grapes of Oregon wine cultivation, there are an awful lot of other varieties that are starting to gain some very serious traction in the vineyards of the Willamette Valley, with riesling, grüner veltliner, vermentino, gamay, syrah, grenache, trousseau and blaufränkisch all starting to find very talented and vociferous proponents for their suitability to the *terroirs* of the vineyards up and down the Willamette Valley, and these are also some of the most exciting wines currently being produced. As the ever thoughtful Chad Stock of Minimus comments, "we really have to ask ourselves why pinot noir, pinot gris and chardonnay are the grapes that are planted here- was it because they were the best-suited to our *terroirs*, or was it just that they were the first grapes that went into the ground in the sixties and seventies?" He continues, "if we are systematic at looking at some of these other grapes, we may just find that they are even better-suited to our *terroirs* than pinot or chardonnay- we just have to be open minded and curious." The notes on my visit to Chad at Minimus in Carleton will certainly demonstrate that he is both open-minded and curious in this regard, as though there are a still few pinot noir bottlings produced here, it is hardly Chad's focus these days!

Despite the curiosity with other grape varieties amongst a segment of the younger generation of winegrowers in the Willamette Valley these days, pinot noir still continues to be the king of the wine grapes in this region and with good reason, as many of the finest examples in the US are currently being crafted in the cellars here. The region has certainly not escaped completely the long arm of global warming and its impact on summer temperatures in the region (in fact, as I write this, the Pacific Northwest is in the midst of an historic heat-wave and temperatures yesterday climbed to 108 degrees Fahrenheit in the Willamette Valley!), which has perhaps adversely impacted some of the slightly warmer microclimates found in areas of the Dundee Hills for instance, but there are routinely cooler sections further south in the valley in what is known as the Van Duzer Corridor, where cooling evening air streams in from the Pacific coast through a gap in the coastal range. Johan Vineyards in Rickreall is located in this area and their far cooler temperatures can be seen in the wines produced from their biodynamically-grown fruit (purchased by many top producers, in addition to the wines made at Johan itself) and their habitually lower octane levels. But, in general, global warming has probably had a less adverse impact on viticulture in the Willamette Valley than in the Napa Valley in the last fifteen years, and it is a pretty rare Oregon wine that ever crosses the threshold of 14.5 percent, even in a very, very hot summer like 2015. Most wines are 13.5 percent and below and it is not a rare

occurrence to find ones closer to twelve percent than thirteen percent, particularly from vineyards in the cooler Van Duzer Corridor. That this cooler area has enormous potential is very much evident in the fact that Domaine Drouhin's superb new project, Roserock, is located here.

All in all, the Willamette Valley is clearly in a cyclical highpoint of quality at the present time for its wines, both reds and whites and within a very wide spectrum of different varietals. I dipped my toe in the water last summer with the current releases of some of the cutting edge producers in Oregon and was very happy to finally have a chance to spend some time in the region this past July tasting and meeting some of these very talented winegrowers. It is very easy these days to be persuaded that Oregon wines have never been better than they are today, and to anticipate that the climb in quality is just really revving up and even more exciting prospects await in coming vintages. Both the 2014 and (particularly) the 2015 vintages were hot years in the region, but the wines at the top addresses have handled their ripeness very nicely and the vast, vast majority of the wines have not succumbed to the attendant problems that surround ripe years. It is also nice to poke around in cellars here and see the percentage of new oak being fairly low (at least in comparison to several other wine regions around the globe), so that at many of the very top producers of pinot noir in the Willamette Valley, the use of new oak is significantly below that of similarly top domaines in Burgundy. The number of gifted, non-interventionist winegrowers here is also very admirable, and with organic and biodynamic farming spreading briskly through many of the best vineyards, the present is a very happy time in the world of Oregon wine and the future looks even rosier!

The following article is based primarily on the seven wineries that I had a chance to visit while out in Oregon in the second half of July. My primary purpose on this trip was to attend some of the thirtieth anniversary celebrations held at Domaine Drouhin, so that I kept my visits to other wineries on this trip down to two a day, allowing for plenty of time with each winegrower, as this was my first trip to the region and I did not want to rush through my first visits, and also keeping late afternoons and evenings free for some of the DDO events. As this was also my first tasting trip after my spring knee surgery, I also did not want to extend the trip too many days, in case the knee did not handle the rigors of tasting in a positive manner, but all in all, it held up reasonably well and this augurs well for its eventual full recovery and the possibility of my spending more time on the road in the coming year. I have listed the wineries that I visited here in the order that I scheduled my appointments, to give an idea of how my days unfolded while on the road for this trip. Following the brief domaine profiles on each winery and the notes on the wines that they chose to show during my visit, I have appended all the other Oregon wines that I have tasted in the last couple of months as part of my bi-annual series on American wines. I had originally intended to include those notes with the wines from California, Washington and Canada that are also reviewed in this issue, but in the end, it seemed to make more sense to place those notes in this article, so they appear at the end of the piece, sorted by varietal and vintage, as is the case in the piece on other North American wines. I was not able to visit all of the estates whose wines I had really enjoyed last summer or which came highly recommended to me by a couple of subscribers who have been after me to expand my coverage of the wines of the Willamette Valley, and whom I reached out to prior to starting to plan my schedule, so there remain plenty of wineries to add to the itinerary on the next trip out to the Pacific Northwest, which will also have to include a trip to Washington state wine country as well!

Day Wines (Dundee)

Brianne Day was eight and a half months pregnant at the time of my visit in the second half of July, expecting her first son in only a handful of days. Though she lives in Portland, she has a beautiful new winery on the side of Route 99-W (the main east-west artery from Portland to the Pacific Ocean) just to the west of the center of Dundee, where she also rents out space to several other fine young winemakers on the Oregon wine scene. It is easy to find and a beautiful place to visit and taste, so folks making a trip to the Willamette Valley would do well to schedule in a visit to Day Wines. Brianne makes beautiful wines and has a much wider range of bottlings these days than I was aware of prior to my visit to taste *sur place*, as I had only tasted a few different cuvées from her in previous vintages, but she now has more than a dozen different bottlings available for tasting when visiting the winery, and all of the wines that I tasted during my visit were excellent in quality. Several of the bottlings have fun, whimsical names such as “Mamacita” for her Pétillante Naturelle or “Vin de Days” (a twist on the French *Vin de Pays*) for a pair of well-priced, blended wines made from a variety of different grapes. Brianne spent several years working harvests and interning at wineries in New Zealand, Argentina, France and Oregon before dialing back her wanderlust a bit and settling back in Portland and starting her own label in time for the 2012 vintage. Her first vintage of 2012 only produced a single wine, a vineyard-designated pinot noir made in the corner of a friend’s winery, but she expanded to a few other bottlings in 2013 and really got rolling in earnest with the 2014 vintage, when friends became partners and she was able to produce seventeen hundred cases of wine. She buys grapes from some of the top vineyards in the Willamette Valley, including the superb, biodynamically-farmed and cool Johan Vineyard down in Rickreall, and practices a minimalist approach in the cellars. Her cellar methodology includes only using natural yeasts, no extraction enzymes or other cellar parlor tricks and a preponderance of older oak casks and puncheons used for the *elevage* of her wines. For example, her excellent pinot noirs usually see no more than fifteen percent new oak in any given vintage and several of her other bottlings receive zero new oak. She is known in many circles as a “natural” winemaker, but I have never tasted any wines from her that are out on the edge in terms of stability (as can sometimes be the case in that idiom). All in all, Brianne Day is making some absolutely beautiful and compelling wines that nicely define the dynamics of the most talented newer generation of winegrowers in Oregon. I cannot recommend her wines highly enough!

2016 “Vin de Days” Blanc- Day Wines (Willamette Valley)

The 2016 “Vin de Days” Blanc from Brianne Day is a blend of forty-two percent Pinot Blanc and sixteen percent each of Pinot Gris, Riesling, Müller-Thurgau and ten percent Muscat. The grapes are fermented and raised in stainless steel and the 2016 finished with twelve percent alcohol and four grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is very pretty, wafting from the glass in a fine aromatic blend of peach, gently musky floral tones, other stone fruit and a nice dollop of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with lovely acidity, fine focus and really quite good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. A lovely quaffer that would make a good wine by the glass. 2017-2020+. **89.**

2015 Chardonnay “Belle Pente Vineyard”- Day Wines (Yamhill-Carlton)

The 2015 Belle Pente Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Brianne Day is barrel-fermented and aged in about twenty fifteen percent new oak (one new, five hundred liter puncheon and four older Burgundy casks) and has a leisurely nineteen month *elevage* prior to bottling in the Day cellars. The wine is an excellent example, offering up a fresh and vibrant

bouquet of apple, pear, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of spice, gentle floral scents and a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, impressive focus and grip and a long, zesty and complex finish. Very good chard. 2017-2023. **92.**



2015 Queen D- Day Vineyards (Applegate Valley)

The 2015 Queen D bottling from Day wines is a blend of fifty percent Marsanne and twenty-five percent each of Roussanne and Grenache Blanc. This is a wine that is loaded with personality and shows off the beautiful sense of balance found in all of Brianne Day's wines, as it offers up a fine bouquet of yellow plum, almond blossoms, dried flowers, gently savory notes and a dollop of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with fine mid-palate depth, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is cool in the mouth and really, really tasty! 2017-2024. **92.**

2016 Mamacita Pétilante Naturelle- Day Wines

The 2016 vintage of Mamacita from Brianne Day is produced from an eclectic mix of eighty percent Vermentino and twenty percent muscat. Brianne is not sure exactly what its final residual sugar was, as she disgorged the wine when it still had eight grams per liter and put on its crown cap, but she expects it probably ended up with a finished RS of around two grams per liter. The wine is very pretty, offering up a nose of peach, green olive, salty soil tones and a nice touch of musky, muscat-derived floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is

medium-full, bright and zesty, with frothy *mousse*, good focus and a long, vibrant finish. A good example. 2017-2019. **88.**

2016 Tears of Vulcan- Day Wines

The “Tears of Vulcan” cuvée is another very interesting white wine blend from Brianne Day, as this is a blend of three grapes: viognier, pinot gris and muscat. The percentages are sixty-three percent viognier, twenty-one percent pinot gris and sixteen percent muscat. Brianne co-ferments the viognier and pinot gris in barrel (including one puncheon made out of Russian oak with Acacia wood heads), while the muscat is fermented in stainless steel, and then everything is blended together and raised in older casks. The wine has a very slight orange-ish tint to its color, as there is a bit of color from a short skin contact with the pinot gris skins. The bouquet is bright and complex, offering up scents of tangerine, white cherry, citrus peel, a bit of spring flowers and a nice touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full, complex and nicely balanced, with a good core, bright acids and a nice dollop of backend bitterness (again from the pinot gris skin contact) on the long and complex finish. This is completely off the beaten path stylistically, but beautifully done and a very enjoyable bottle. 2017-2023. **90.**

2016 “Vin de Days” Rouge- Day Wines

The 2016 “Vin de Days” Rouge here happens to be all composed of pinot noir, but this information does not appear on the front label, as Brianne Day notes that “it may end up having some gamay in the cuvée in future vintages.” Half of the blend is fermented with whole clusters in a semi-carbonic style, while the other half is destemmed, with the blended wine raised in stainless steel and the overall goal to make a lighter, vibrant red that is quaffable right out of the blocks. The 2016 comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a pretty bouquet of red and black cherries, cranberries, woodsmoke, soil and a nice topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and modestly tannic, with good focus and grip, a fine core and good length and grip on the wide open and tangy finish. Good juice. 2017-2030. **89.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Silvershot Vineyard”- Day Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

As was the case in Burgundy, 2015 was a very hot summer in the Willamette Valley and ripeness was robust in many vineyards, whereas others shut down for periods of time during stretches of drought and hydric stress. This was the case with the dry-farmed Silvershot Vineyard’s pinot noir, which actually lagged in ripening because of the drought conditions of mid-summer. The result was grapes that only reached twenty-one Brix this year, with the vines dropping leaves and clearly at the end of their cycle, so Brianne picked them and ended up with a very low octane 2015 pinot, as this wine ended up at twelve percent alcohol. She commented that “early on in cask, I could not bear to taste this wine, as it was really lean and showing very little, but towards the end of its eighteen months in cask, it really began to blossom.” Today, three months out from the bottling, it is really showing beautifully, offering up a bright and seriously complex bouquet of black cherries, blueberry, a touch of allspice, chalky soil tones, bitter chocolate, just a hint of new oak and a fine topnote of juniper berry. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and intensely flavored, with a nice core, moderate tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, poised and beautifully balanced finish. This is a complete surprise for the 2015 vintage, but a low octane pinot of breed and impressive complexity. 2017-2040. **92+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Johan Vineyard”- Day Wines (Willamette Valley)

I have tasted some truly superb examples of pinot noir from the Johan Vineyard down in the cooler Van Duzer Corridor, and Brianne Day’s 2015 example is another truly exceptional bottle in the making. This wine is right in the sweet spot of ripeness in 2015, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and jumping from the glass in a very classy aromatic constellation of black

cherries, red plums, raw cocoa, beautifully sweet herbal tones, a superb base of soil, a touch of stems and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a nice reserve of sappy fruit at the core, excellent soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. This has absolutely superb potential, but deserves some time in the cellar to properly blossom. 2020-2050. **94.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Cancilla Vineyard”- Day Wines (Willamette Valley)

The Cancilla Vineyard was the opposite story from the Silvershot bottling in 2015, as though Brianne asked the owner of the vineyard to harvest her grapes earlier, it took the picking teams more than a few days to actually get out there and start bringing in the fruit and this wine ended up higher in octane than Brianne would have liked, eventually tipping the scales at an atypical 14.5 percent for this winery. The wine has ended up pretty good despite the grapes coming in late, but it is not in the same league as the other two 2015 pinots here. The bouquet is a ripe blend of sweet dark berries, balsamic overtones, smoke, hung game, spices and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is big, full and well-balanced, with moderate complexity, a good core, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, plush and nicely structured finish. This is not the kind of wine Brianne personally likes, but it shows no signs of heat and has really turned out pretty well under the circumstances. It will need just a couple of years to allow its tannins to soften a bit. 2019-2040. **88.**

2014 Hock & Deuce “Mae’s Vineyard” - Day Wines (Applegate Valley)

The Hock and Deuce bottling, which is a blend of eighty-five percent syrah and fifteen percent viognier, was the first wine from Brianne Day that I had the pleasure to taste a couple of years ago and it immediately caught my attention. The two grapes are co-fermented and raised principally in neutral oak. The 2014 version is youthful and very promising, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, dark chocolate, a touch of pepper, superb soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and very refined on the attack, with a full-bodied format, a good core, ripe tannins and excellent focus and balance on the long and nascently complex finish. This will be lovely, but give it at least a few years to blossom. 2020-2050. **92+.**

2015 Running Bare “Mae’s Vineyard”- Day Wines (Applegate Valley)

This cuvée from Brianne Day is a field blend of cabernet franc, malbec and Tannat, with the proportions approximately fifty, twenty-five and twenty-five. The 2013 version I tasted two years ago was excellent and this 2015 is a superb follow-up. The wine delivers a complex bouquet of cassis, dark berries, woodsmoke, spiced meats, black olives, a touch of rosemary and a gentle framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with a fine touch of sappy black fruit at the core, soft tannins and lovely balance and grip on the long, focused and simply delicious finish. This wine will age very nicely, but it is already a great drink right out of the blocks! 2017-2030+. **93.**

Franny Beck Vineyards (Rickreall)

Michael Sterling and his wife Allyson only began their winery with the 2014 vintage, after Michael worked for several other wineries (including a stint in Virginia, as both he and his wife are native east coasters) and I was lucky enough to taste two of their inaugural releases last year. Theirs is a pinot noir-only winery right now, with the Sterlings working with fruit from three different sources: Armstrong Vineyard in the Ribbon Ridge AVA, Johan Vineyard in the Van Duzer Corridor and la Chênaie Vineyard in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA. Armstrong Vineyard is the warmest of the three sites that the winery works with, but the grapes are picked early to maintain freshness and balance in the finished wine and Michael Sterling notes that

“often the grapes from Armstrong arrive here at the winery fully two weeks before we consider picking in our other two parcels.” Michael now makes four distinct bottlings of pinot noir, with three being single vineyard wines and the fourth cuvée a blended “Willamette Valley” bottling that in 2015 is composed of sixty percent Johan fruit and twenty percent each from the other two vineyards. Interestingly, Michael prices all four of his bottlings at the same price (\$38 retail), figuring that this allows customers to buy the wine whose style they like the best, rather than putting the wines in some sort of hierarchy of price out the cellar door. Currently, Michael rents space out at Johan Vineyards to make and raise his wines, which makes for a very easy visit to these two fine producers on a given day!

The three vineyards that Franny Beck sources fruit from are farmed either organically or biodynamically. Michael’s winemaking style is very non-interventionist, using indigenous yeasts, about one-third whole clusters, gentle fermentations and little or no new oak used for the *elevage* of his wines. The 2015s were bottled in February of 2017 and were showing beautifully at the time of my visit in July. Michael commented that he may increase the percentage of whole clusters he uses in future vintages, as he is just getting to really know the fruit from the vineyards that he is now working with and in certain vintages, more stems in the mix is certainly going to be a bonus for the finished wines. I was struck with how refined his wines were when I tasted samples of a couple of his 2014s last summer and was very eager to visit him on my trip out to Oregon this past July. The winemaking here is very thoughtful and, needless to say, I was drawn to Michael’s philosophy when it comes to new oak in the *elevage* of his pinot noirs, with both his 2015 Armstrong Vineyard and la Chênaie Vineyard bottlings seeing only used casks for their time in the cellar, and his Johan Vineyard pinot having been raised in one-third new oak. As Michael commented, “when it comes to new oak, I really cannot envision ever going above one-third new casks, as what interests me the most is the differences of *terroir* between these three vineyards and I do not want to cover that up with too much new wood.” The Franny Beck pinot noir bottlings are all built to age long and gracefully, albeit with a certain sense of accessibility from their impeccable balances evident right out of the gate that may lead some folks to drink them on the younger side. Though this is still a fledgling operation, these are already some of my absolute favorite pinot noirs in all of Oregon and their prices make them absolute bargains!

2015 Pinot Noir “Armstrong Vineyard”- Franny Beck Vineyards (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2015 Armstrong Vineyard pinot is the first wine that Michael has made from this property, with his grapes having been picked on September 4th and yielding up a very classically ripe wine at 13.2 percent octane. He used one-third whole clusters and all older casks for his debut vintage of Armstrong, which offers up a beautiful and youthful bouquet of red plums, cherries, raw cocoa, a superb base of soil, incipient notes of cinnamon from the stems and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and tangy, with a lovely core, fine-grained tannins, excellent balance and a long, focused and very classy finish. The wine is very accessible right from the start, but has the balance to age long and gracefully as well. This is really a beautiful bottle in the making and an auspicious beginning for the Armstrong Vineyard pinot noir from Michael and his wife. 2017-2045+. **92+**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Johan Vineyard”- Franny Beck Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

Michael Sterling is making one of the most beautiful examples of pinot noir from Johan Vineyard fruit and his 2015 is outstanding. The wine comes in at 13.3 percent octane and was raised in one-third new oak in this vintage. The nascently complex bouquet jumps from the glass

in a very pure and gently sappy blend of red plums, cherries, raw cocoa, a very complex base of chalky soil tones, lovely spice elements in the upper register and a judicious framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and transparent, with a sappy core, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the seamlessly balanced and still fairly primary finish. This deserves at least a couple of years in the cellar to allow some of its secondary layer to emerge, but it is already a great glass of wine and it is not going to be easy to keep one's hands off of it! It will age beautifully and its real peak is probably tent to fifteen years out from the vintage. Superb juice. 2019-2050. **94.**

2015 Pinot Noir “la Chênaie Vineyard”- Franny Beck Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

The la Chênaie Vineyard was planted in 2001 and sits at six hundred feet above sea level and in the pathway of the cool afternoon winds that blow in from the ocean through the Van Duzer Corridor. This was clearly beneficial in the hot summer of 2015, with the resulting wine at Franny Beck coming in at 12.9 percent octane. Michael used one-third whole clusters for this wine and no new oak for the *elevage*. The bouquet on the 2015 la Chênaie is lovely, offering up a more black fruity mélange of plums, black cherries, bitter chocolate, lovely notes of clove and nutmeg, woodsmoke and a fine base of volcanic soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a beautiful core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, suavely tannic finish. This too is excellent and will offer the option of either earlier drinking or long-term cellaring. Impressive juice! 2017-2050. **93.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Franny Beck Vineyards

This bottling is a barrel blend of the three different vineyards, so the wine ended up around fifteen percent new wood and thirty percent whole clusters. The finished octane is 13.4 percent and the wine is lovely, encompassing many of the appealing elements of its three constituent components. The bouquet is a deep and complex blend of red and black cherries, cocoa, lovely spice elements, a fine base of dark soil, a touch of fresh herbs and a discreet framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil tones, tangy acids and a long, classy finish that closes with fine-grained tannins and impeccable balance. Lovely juice. 2017-2050. **92+.**

Johan Vineyards (Rickreall)

Johan Vineyards is fast developing a reputation for some of the very best-farmed fruit in all of Oregon. They still sell a significant percentage of their production off to other top producers such as Chad Stock, Brianne Day, Division Wines and of course, Franny Beck. The vineyard and winery are owned by Dag Sundby, who is originally from Norway. He is ably assisted by his winemaker and vineyard manager, Dan Rinke (who previously worked at Rhys Vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains), with the two of them farming all of the vineyards at Johan biodynamically for several years now (some are now Demeter-certified and others organically-certified and in conversion to full biodynamic certification) and producing marvelous fruit. Johan Vineyards is a good-sized operation, with currently eighty-five acres under vines, though some of this had been leased to their next door neighbors, Left Coast Cellars, and is just now returning to their control. Their vineyards sit right in the coolest part of the Willamette Valley in what will soon be known by the AVA of the Van Duzer Corridor (the petition is in and probably by the time the 2017 vintage is in bottle, we will see this AVA on wine labels), which allows for excellent diurnal swings in temperature and nicely measured ripening, even in the hottest of summers. There is a variety of different grapes planted at Johan, with the usual suspects of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris augmented by Grüner Veltliner, Gamay and

Blaufränkisch. Dan and Dag consider themselves natural winemakers and seek to be as non-interventionist as possible in the cellars, with a few of their wines sometimes showing a bit of the “wildness” of natural wines and others more mainstream in style, but all of them impeccably well-made and loaded with personality. Alcohol levels here stay naturally low from the influx of cool ocean air each evening, only indigenous yeasts are used in the cellar and new oak generally will never rise above twenty percent. These are some beautiful wines that are often cut in a more elegant, medium-full style that is light on its feet, but loaded with intensity and complexity. As Dag was kind enough to open a few older bottles for our tasting, it was quite clear that the wines at Johan Vineyards are meant to age long and gracefully and for many of the bottlings, it is a pity to be opening them too soon in their evolutions in bottle, as the older wines we tasted were absolutely beautiful!



2015 Pinot Gris- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

The 2015 Pinot Gris from Johan was made entirely with whole clusters and was barrel-fermented, with the wine showing just a bit of “natural wine” volatility on the nose and palate. The bouquet is bright and fairly complex however, offering up scents of peach, what toast, a touch of guava and fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and shows just a bit of backend residual sweetness, with good acids and very good length and grip. This is good juice, if a bit of volatile acidity is not a problem for you. 2017-2022. **88.**

2014 Grüner Veltliner- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

While I like the varietal of Grüner Veltliner, I do not get to drink too many of them, as many of my favorite bottlings from the best sites in Austria have just gotten to ripe for my palate in our sad age of global warming. So, it was great to taste this impeccably well-made and low octane (11.8 percent) version from Johan Vineyards. The wine offers up a bright and superb nose of apple, smoke, chalky soil tones, orange peel and a nice touch of other fruit skins in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and beautifully balanced, with bright acids and very good length and grip on the vibrant finish. Very good juice and more structurally stable than the 2015 Pinot Gris. 2017-2020+. **92+**.

2011 Chardonnay “Visdom”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

The 2011 vintage in Oregon was very cool and ripening was no easy matter for most vineyards, with the resulting wines often coming in notably low in octane and in need of some extended bottle age to blossom. Dag Sundby commented that this was exactly the case with their 2011 chardonnay, which at age six is now wide open and at its apogee of peak drinkability. The bouquet is superb, delivering a fine blend of apple, mildly candied lemon, white soil tones, butter, spring flowers and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and zesty, with a lovely core, impressive complexity and a long, svelte and beautifully balanced finish. This wine came in at 12.3 percent octane and I imagine it was pretty tight out of the blocks, but today it is drinking splendidly and has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2017-2030. **93.**

2014 Drueskall- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

The 2014 Drueskall bottling from Johan Vineyards is composed entirely of pinot gris, but fermented like a red wine with half the cuvée fermented in open top fermenters with full skin retention for a period of two to three weeks, which gives the finished wine a pale red tinge from the pigments in the grape’s skins. The 2014 version is superb, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of tangerine, a touch of sweet onion, hazelnuts, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and focused, with a solid core and excellent length and grip on the balanced and zesty finish. There is just a bit of backend tannin here from the extended maceration on the skins and the wine drinks like a very light-bodied and intensely flavored red wine, rather than a white. Exotic in style and beautifully done. 2017-2025. **91.**

2015 Pétillante Naturelle (Pinot Noir)- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

The 2015 Pétillante Naturelle is very pretty follow-up to the 2014 version I wrote about last summer. The wine is made entirely from pinot noir and offers up a stylish nose of strawberries, soil, orange peel and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full, frothy and focused, with well-done *mousse* and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. A lovely, very quaffable example. 2017-2020. **88.**

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

I tasted the 2014 Estate pinot noir last year and was very happy to see it again in our lineup at the winery on my visit this July. This is a very stylish middleweight, having included around fifty percent whole clusters and being raised in twenty percent new oak. The bouquet is superb, offering up a red fruity mélange of red plums, strawberries, fresh nutmeg, lovely soil tones, a touch of cinnamon, gentle notes of cedar and a topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and soil-driven, with a good core, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the poised and tangy finish. This is a lovely example. 2017-2035. **91.**

2011 Pinot Noir “Three Barrel”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

The 2011 vintage of “Three Barrel” reserve from Johan Vineyards is a lovely wine, showing a high-toned and red fruity personality from this cool vintage. The vibrant bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of red berries, beetroot, fresh herb tones, forest floor, a hint of dill and plenty of woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and intensely flavored, with solid depth, excellent focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and low fat finish. There is not a lot of superfluous meat on the bones here, but the wine is loaded with personality and is a superb middleweight that is starting to drink very well and will continue to age gracefully for many years to come. 2017-2035+. **90+**.

2007 Pinot Noir “Nils Reserve”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

The 2007 vintage of Nils Reserve is a more black fruity example of pinot noir, offering up a fine bouquet of black cherries, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of red plum, fresh nutmeg, mustard seed and incipient notes of the spices meats to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine, gently sappy core, lovely transparency, moderate tannins and impressive length and grip on the focused and quite complex finish. At age ten, this wine is just hitting its stride and is drinking very well indeed, but has decades of life still ahead of it. 2017-2035+. **93**.

2013 Blaufränkisch- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

There is a small block of Blaufränkisch planted at Johan Vineyards and it has done well in its microclimate. The grapes ripen fully at lower sugar levels, so that this fully ripe and extroverted example comes in at a cool 11.9 percent alcohol! The bouquet is excellent, jumping from the glass in a mix of black cherries, cigar smoke, lovely soil tones, a touch of red plum, pepper and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and quite soil-driven in personality, with a nicely sappy core, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. I can understand why other winegrowers in the Willamette Valley are excited about the potential of Blaufränkisch here! 2017-2030. **91**.

2013 Chardonnay “Noble”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

The Chardonnay “Noble” bottling at Johan is made from desiccated grapes that are glazed with a bit of botrytis, ultimately producing a wine that is like a Vouvray Demi-Sec in style. The 2013 version delivers a lovely nose of apple, peach, a touch of sweet quince, gentle smokiness and touch of honey. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and moderately sweet, with good focus and grip and a long, juicy finish. This is not the most complex example of chardonnay that one will encounter, but it hits all the right notes in its more limited range. 2017-2027. **89**.

Walter Scott Wines (Salem)

Ken Pahlow and his wife Erica Landon worked a variety of jobs in the Oregon wine trade for many years prior to finally realizing their dream of having their own winery, Walter Scott, which is named after Ken’s grandfather Walter and his nephew Scott (who sadly passed away at a very young age). The Walter Scott label was started in 2008 on a part-time basis, while Erica and Ken continued to work their day jobs. The first serious vintage here was the 2009, when Ken and Erica were able to purchase fruit from some of the top vineyards in the Eola-Amity Hills region, including Freedom Hill and Temperance Hill Vineyards. The couple produced six hundred cases in their inaugural vintage of 2009 and have since slowly expanded to a production level of five thousand cases a year, primarily of various single vineyard bottlings of pinot noir and chardonnay. Ken worked as the assistant winemaker at St. Innocent for fourteen years,

beginning in 1995 and staying there until the summer of 2009. He then moved over to Patricia Green Cellars for the 2009 harvest, before taking a job with Evening Land Cellars running their northwest sales program in 2010. The Walter Scott vintages from 2009 through 2011 were produced in Ken and Erica's spare time in a corner of the winery at Patricia Green Cellars. In 2012, the couple finally realized their dream of finding a winery of their own, renting a small facility in Salem from Bethel Heights winery, which they continue to work out of to this day. Having worked with Jim Anderson and Patty Green at Patricia Green Cellars, and then working harvests at Evening Land alongside of Dominique Lafon, Ken has had some very good winemakers to work with over the years and his stylish and very classically-inspired wines no doubt owe somewhat to the inspiration of others he has worked alongside over the years. Erica has also had a long and serious career in the Oregon wine trade, having worked as a sommelier and run the wine programs at some of the most prestigious restaurants in Portland and Oregon wine country, as well as teaching for the International Sommelier Guild, amongst others. Finally, in 2014, both Ken and Erica were able to give up their day jobs and devote one hundred percent of their time to Walter Scott.

The Walter Scott wines are primarily from top vineyards in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA, with ninety percent of the fruit for Walter Scott hailing from this section of the Willamette Valley. Ken only utilizes indigenous yeasts for his ferments, has a very flexible approach to whole clusters (using them when the stems are great and cutting back if they are not in pristine condition), racks the wines only once during their fifteen month *elevage* and bottles without fining or filtration (if the wines fall clear after their racking). The methodology in the cellars here reminded me quite strongly of the practices at Domaine Roulot in Meursault, with the wines getting their racking out of casks around the twelve month mark and then given three months to settle and clarify in stainless steel tanks after their *assemblage*, prior to bottling. The pinot noirs are generally give a one to three day "cold soak" *à la* Henri Mayer and are generally aged in thirty to forty percent new oak. The winery is making excellent pinot noirs, but it is their superb chardonnays (again, stylistically hailing back a bit to the Guy Roulot wines) that are garnering so much buzz in Oregon these days, as these are truly world class examples of chardonnay. The chards are generally raised in about the same percentage of new wood as the pinots, with very little *battonage* practiced during their *elevage* and are racy, mineral-infused examples with taut structural chassis and built to age long and gracefully. As of the 2016 vintage, chardonnay now constitutes forty percent of the production at the winery. My July visit here was my first introduction to the wines of Walter Scott and I was very, very impressed across the board!

2015 Pinot Noir "Sojourner Vineyard"- Walter Scott Wines

The Sojourner Vineyard bottling of pinot noir is Ken's young vine cuvée, as these are only ten year-old vines grown on volcanic soils on a hillside vineyard that ranges up to six hundred feet above sea level. The 2015 was made with thirty percent whole clusters, raised in forty percent new wood and tips the scales at 13.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is lovely, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, black plums, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, a touch of gamebird and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a good core, fine-grained tannins and impressive grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. This is fine juice. 2019-2040+. **91+**.



Ken Pahlow and Erica Landon in their cellars at Walter Scott.

2015 Pinot Noir “Freedom Hill Vineyard”- Walter Scott Wines (Willamette Valley)

The well-known Freedom Hill Vineyard is planted on the foothills of the coastal range, with an easterly exposition on primarily loam soils. The vines here went into the ground in 1982 and 2012 was the first vintage that Ken and Erica were able to buy fruit here, though Ken had worked with production from this vineyard during his time at St. Innocent. The 2015 is fairly ripe for a Walter Scott wine (this was a very hot year), coming in at 13.9 percent octane, but it is very well-balanced. The wine included ten percent whole clusters in 2015 and offers up a fine bouquet of dark berries, espresso, woodsmoke, cocoa, a touch of plum, lovely soil tones and a fair bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core, suave tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and focused finish. The slightly higher octane here has absorbed a bit more wood tannin than the other pinots I tasted during my visit, which will have no problem being absorbed into the depth of fruit here, but which will require a bit of time in the cellar to fully integrate. 2020-2040+. **91+**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Clos des Oiseaux”- Walter Scott Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

The Clos des Oiseaux Vineyard has been leased and farmed by Ken since the 2011 vintage, with the farming evolving to organic methods by 2014. This is a slightly cooler site than Freedom Hill, with the 2015 pinot coming in at 13.4 percent and offering up beautiful purity in its nose of black plums, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, bitter chocolate and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and elegant in profile, with a full-

bodied format, fine-grained tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, balanced and still quite primary finish. This will be an excellent bottle with a bit of cellaring. 2020-2045+. **92.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Temperance Hill Vineyard”- Walter Scott Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

The Temperance Hill Vineyard bottling from Ken Pahlow hails from a one acre, north block section of this vineyard, which lies at an elevation of 950 feet above sea level on a fine base of volcanic soils. The vines in the section that Ken buys fruit from were planted in 1990, so just coming into their prime in 2015 by Burgundian standards. Temperance Hill has been farmed organically since 1999 and 2012 was the first vintage produced at Walter Scott. The wine includes ten percent whole clusters in this vintage and offers up a superb bouquet of black cherries, black plums, raw cocoa, a touch of fresh bay leaf, a lovely base of soil tones, just a dollop of stems and a fine base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively soil-driven in personality, with a sappy core of fruit, beautifully integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish. I love the tension here on the palate. Fine, fine juice in the making. 2021-2050. **93.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Dubay Vineyard”- Walter Scott Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2015 Dubay Vineyard bottling at Walter Scott is the inaugural vintage here for this wine, which hails from a very steep, south-facing vineyard planted on marine sedimentary soils. The 2015 included thirty percent whole clusters and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of blackberries, black cherries, raw cocoa, lovely spice tones (mostly nutmeg), a complex base of soil nuances, violets and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and soil-driven in personality, with fine mid-palate depth, suave tannins and outstanding grip and focus on the long, sappy and very impressive finish. This is going to be a terrific bottle of pinot. 2021-2050. **93+.**

2015 Chardonnay “Cuvée Anne”- Walter Scott Wines (Willamette Valley)

The Cuvée Anne bottling of chardonnay is a blend from several of the top vineyards Ken works with, including Freedom Hill and X Novo. Ken utilizes one new larger puncheon and four older casks for the *elevage* of this bottling, which is barrel-fermented and spends eleven months in barrels prior to *assemblage* and three more months settling in tank. The wine is bright and bouncy on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of pear, white peach, chalky soil tones, spring flowers, a touch of fresh almond and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and light on its feet, with a good core, nascent complexity and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. Lovely juice. 2017-2030+. **92+.**

2015 Chardonnay “Freedom Hill Vineyard”- Walter Scott Wines (Willamette Valley)

As is the case with the pinot noir from Freedom Hill, 2012 was the first vintage of chardonnay produced at Walter Scott from this vineyard. The wine was raised with the same methodology as the Cuvée Anne, with one new oak puncheon and four older barrels used for the fermentation and *elevage*, which was again eleven months in wood and three months in stainless after the *assemblage*. The wine came in at a cool 12.85 percent octane in 2015 (no small accomplishment in this hot summer!) and offers up a fine nose of pear, lemon, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively racy in profile, with a rock solid core, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, zesty and laser-like finish. This is absolutely superb, but will need some bottle age to start to reveal its secondary layers! 2020-2040+. **94.**

2015 Chardonnay “X Novo Vineyard”- Walter Scott Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

X Novo is a relatively new vineyard that was planted by Craig Williams (long-time winemaker at Joseph Phelps) in 2010 on a base of three feet of volcanic soils over a base of pure

rock. Craig planted the vineyard at a high density of three thousand vines per acre and this has quickly become Walter Scott's most highly sought-after bottling of chardonnay- with very good reason. Beginning with the 2016 vintage, Ken and Erica have contracted to purchase all of the chardonnay from X Novo, which is very good news. The 2015 version offers up the most reserved, but also the deepest nose of the three chardonnay bottlings that I sampled, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of pear, fresh almond, lemon zest, complex minerality and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a great core, superb transparency and great cut and grip on the very long, primary and oh, so promising finish. The balance here is beautiful and the wine has such enormous backend energy that it will clearly be brilliant when it has had a chance to fully blossom! 2021-2050. **95.**

Patricia Green Cellars (Newberg)

Patricia Green Cellars was founded in 2000, when Patty Green and partner Jim Anderson purchased the fifty-two acre estate vineyard in the Ribbon Ridge AVA in Newberg that forms the backbone of their production. The winery lies just over the next hill from Beaux Frères, and Patty and Jim share responsibilities in the cellars and vineyards for the wide array of different bottlings that they produce. Their winemaking partnership dates back to 1995 at Torii Mor Winery, in the Dundee Hills, where they co-directed the winemaking prior to their departure in the late 1990s. In addition to producing several different bottlings of pinot noir and other varietals from their own vineyard in Newberg, the team also purchases grapes from several other top vineyards in the Dundee Hills and Chehelam Mountain AVAs. Not only do Patty and Jim produce a bevy of single vineyard bottlings of pinot noir, but they have expanded in recent years to craft multiple bottlings from some of their vineyards, focusing on a specific block of the vineyard or a particular clone of pinot noir from the site, so that in the 2015 vintage, they produced fully twenty-one distinct bottlings of pinot noir, in addition to their chardonnay, two cuvées of sauvignon blanc and their unique Dry Muscat Ottonel. When Jim Anderson apprised me of how many different bottlings that they currently produce (as this was my first visit to the property), I suggested that he put together a nice selection of the different bottlings at his discretion, to give a broad view of the excellent work that he and Patty are doing in their cellars in Newberg. It was a great tasting, which due to a freak automobile accident on the main artery in this section of the Willamette Valley, Route 99-W, closing the road for a period of the time in the afternoon, was augmented by a couple of older bottles to round out my introduction to Patricia Green Cellars while waiting in the *cuvierie* for the road to be reopened in the late afternoon. It was a very civilized variation on being stranded on a desert island!

Jim and Patty make primarily pinot noir from their beautifully situated vineyards on Ribbon Ridge, augmented by purchased grapes from a handful of other top vineyard sites. Roughly forty percent of their production hails from their Estate Vineyard, with the Freedom Hill Vineyard in the Eola-Amity Hills area (though just outside of the official limits of this AVA and, hence labeled as Willamette Valley) the next largest contributor of grapes to their lineup, giving just over a quarter of the production here in 2016. Another important vineyard source for the winery is the historic Durant Vineyard in the Dundee Hills, that was first planted in 1973 and lies right next door to Domaine Drouhin's Estate Vineyard. Jim and Patty like to give their pinots a four or five day "cold soak" along the lines of the classic Henri Mayer model, prior to letting the fermentations get started and new oak is kept to a very small percentage of their barrel rotation, so that only six casks were new out of a total of one hundred and twenty-one utilized in the 2016

vintage. My kind of percentage of new oak! Jim, Patty and the rest of the team at Patricia Green Cellars farm their own Estate Vineyard organically (though they have no desire to be certified), and also have been in charge since 1997 of the farming of another of their primary vineyard sources, the Balcombe Vineyard in the Dundee Hills. This too is farmed organically. From the seven or eight different vineyards that they work with each year, the produce a wide array of different single vineyard, or specific blocks in a given vineyard, bottlings, each characterized by its own singular personality. As Jim Anderson noted, “we always vinified the different blocks separately and after a while, we started to understand that it made no sense to blend them together each year, when they had their own individual characteristics, so we just started making more individual bottlings of pinot noir.” In addition to single vineyards or single blocks of pinot noir that are bottled on their own, Jim and Patty will also make separate bottlings made from different pinot clones in a given *terroir*, as each one will interpret the underlying soil differently and sometimes these differences merit a bottling on their own as well. The pinot noir portfolio here is vast, broad and fascinating to taste through. While pinot noir certainly takes pride of place in the cellars at Patricia Green, the winery also produces two distinct bottlings of sauvignon blanc, with their estate vineyard bottling of this varietal one of the best American sauvignon blancs I have tasted outside of the purview of Terry and Frances Leighton at Kalin Cellars. There is also an excellent bottling of chardonnay from the Durant Vineyard that I was shown by Jim on my visit and a fun, dry Muscat Ottonel bottling that makes a superb aperitif wine. Jim Anderson and Patty Green form a dynamic, experienced winegrowing team and this is one of the top sources to be found in all the Willamette Valley. I am already looking forward to my next visit to the PGC in Newberg, just to dip my beak in a few of the other single vineyard or single clone bottlings that I did not get a chance to try on this visit!

2016 Dry Muscat Ottonel “Oak Grove Vineyard”- Patricia Green Cellars (Eola-Amity Hill)

The 2016 Dry Muscat Ottonel from PGC is raised in a combination of two-thirds stainless steel and one-third Acacia wood puncheons (one was new and one was used once before). The wine is very pretty, offering up a vibrant bouquet of honeysuckle, pear, a touch of coriander seed and a nice dollop of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and easily quaffable, with good focus and very nice length and grip on the bouncy finish. 2017-2019. **88.**

2016 Sauvignon Blanc- Patricia Green Cellars (Willamette Valley)

The “regular” bottling of sauvignon blanc from Patty and Jim is a blend of three different vineyards, with the younger vines from their Estate Vineyard making up a small percentage of the blend and three-quarters hailing from younger vines in the Oak Grove Vineyard where they also buy their Muscat Ottonel. This wine offers up a gently musky bouquet of green apple, tangerine, damp grass and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely grassy in personality, with a good core, fine cut and grip and a long, impressively vibrant finish. Good juice. 2017-2020. **89.**

2016 Sauvignon Blanc “Estate Vineyard”- Patricia Green Cellars (Ribbon Ridge)

The sauvignon blanc vines in the PGC Estate Vineyard were planted in 1990, making these the oldest surviving vines in the state for this variety. Like the Muscat Ottonel, this wine is raised in a combination of stainless steel (seventy percent) and Acacia wood puncheons and is truly exceptional in quality. The bouquet is deep, pure and very classy, jumping from the glass in a vibrant constellation of gooseberry, lime, superb minerality, gentle botanicals and just a

whisper of Acacia wood influence in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and zesty, with an excellent core, great mineral drive and a very long, complex and snappy finish. The percentage of the blend raised in Acacia wood adds a nice, distinctive element to the backend texture of this very sophisticated sauvignon blanc. 2017-2025. **93.**



Jim Anderson, co-owner of Patricia Green Cellars, in the barrel room in Newberg.

2015 Chardonnay “Durant Vineyard” Bishop Block- Patricia Green Cellars (Dundee Hills)

The Durant Vineyard was one of the very first vineyards to be planted after David Lett put in his vines in 1966 (only a couple of hundred yards from where the Durant Vineyard was planted), and though the vines here do not all date back to 1973, this is an important and historic vineyard in Oregon that one drives past as they climb the hill to Domaine Drouhin. The chardonnay vines that PGC uses from Durant were planted in 1995 (Dijon clones) and the wine is raised in four older casks and one new puncheon. The 2015 version is the first chardonnay produced at the winery since the 2008 vintage and it is very classy, offering a fine nose of pear, lemon, tangerine, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and zesty, with a fine core, good cut and grip and a long, complex finish. This wine came in at 13.7 percent octane in 2015, which is fairly tame for this section of the Dundee Hills and the hot summer growing conditions. Good juice. 2017-2030. **91+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Reserve”- Patricia Green Cellars (Willamette Valley)

This is the entry level pinot noir bottling from Patricia Green Cellars and it hails from a wide variety of different vineyard and block sources, with perhaps a third of the blend hailing from the Estate Vineyard. It is a barrel selection made from the various single vineyard bottlings with an eye towards making a classic, Willamette Valley blended pinot bottling. The 2016 had just been bottled a few days before my visit, and as the 2015 was already long sold out, we set about dissecting this wine before its time. The wine offers up a fine, black fruity nose of black cherries, dark berries, chocolate, a good base of soil, a touch of violets and a very discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and nicely plush on the attack, with a good, suave structural chassis, moderate, ripe tannins and fine length and grip. Given that this was just bottled, my score could be a bit conservative and the wine may click up a few points when it has a chance to settle in post-bottling. I would opt to give it a few years in the cellar to start to blossom before drinking it in earnest. 2019-2040+. **90+**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Balcombe Vineyard”- Patricia Green Cellars (Dundee Hills)

This fine vineyard abuts the Durant Vineyard in the Dundee Hills, and as I mentioned in my introduction, Patty and Jim have been in charge of the farming here since back in their days together at Torii Mor Vineyards. The vineyard is dry farmed and organic, with the 2015 version including twenty percent whole clusters and being raised in four percent new oak casks. The 2015 comes in at 14.2 percent octane in this hot vintage and offers up a fine, classic Dundee Hills nose of red and black cherries, a nice touch of beetroot, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush again on the attack, with excellent acidity for the vintage, a sappy core, excellent focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and perhaps just a hint of backend heat on the long and complex finish. Fine juice. 2020-2050. **91+**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Freedom Hill Vineyard”- Patricia Green Cellars (Willamette Valley)

Jim and Patty first started working with fruit from the Freedom Hill Vineyard in 2012. This section of the vineyard is still relatively young vines, having been planted between 2000 and 2004, and though the 2015 version has the same octane as the Balcombe Vineyard bottling, it seems a touch cooler on the backend and is impeccably balanced. The bouquet is superb, jumping from the glass in a ripe blend of black plums, black cherries, a touch of balsam bough, dark soil tones, bitter chocolate and a nice touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, nascently complex and generous on the attack, with a sappy core, ripe, suave tannins and a very long, poised and tangy finish. This is going to be excellent, and though it is already all too easy to drink, I would try to tuck it away for at least a handful of years and allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. 2017-2050. **92+**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Estate Vineyard”- Patricia Green Cellars (Ribbon Ridge)

The Estate Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from the warmer Ribbon Ridge sector is surprisingly high in octane- at least surprising given the fact that it does not seem particularly ripe at all and shows absolutely no hint of heat or *sur maturité*, despite it tipping the scales at fully 14.6 percent alcohol! This bottling was completely destemmed in 2015 and saw zero percent new oak during its *elevage*, with the wine a blend of seventy percent Pommard clones planted in 1998 and thirty percent Dijon clones planted in 2000. The complex bouquet is excellent, offering up a fine blend of black cherries, a touch of beetroot, mustard seed, gentle meatiness, lovely soil tones and a dollop of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, plush and impressively tangy, with a full-bodied format, a fine core, a good signature of

soil and a long, suavely tannic and very well-balanced finish. I kept expecting to feel a bit of heat on the backend, given the octane here, but it was nowhere to be found! 2020-2050. **92.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Estate Vineyard” Old Vine- Patricia Green Cellars (Ribbon Ridge)

The special Old Vine bottling from the Estate Vineyard at PGC is produced from vines planted on *Francs de Pieds* that went into the ground in 1984, 1987 and 1990, so these vines are now a “*bon age*” to quote the Burgundians. There were just over forty casks produced (one barrel out of twelve new), with some lots completely destemmed and others including a third whole clusters. The old vines came in at fourteen percent octane and the wine is stellar, offering up a very classy bouquet of black cherries, black plums, beautiful spice tones, a lovely base of soil, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a bit of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively soil-driven in personality, with superb focus and grip, bright, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, balanced and elegant finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2060. **93+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Durant Vineyard” Bishop Block- Patricia Green Cellars (Dundee Hills)

The Bishop Block in Durant Vineyard includes the original 1973 plantings of pinot noir here, all on Pommard clones. The 2015 included twenty percent whole clusters and was raised in eight percent new wood. This is a stunning young bottle of pinot, delivering a superb bouquet of black raspberries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, red plums, Vosne spices, duck and just a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with a sappy core, superb complexity and a very long, focused and suavely tannic finish that is tangy and impressively light on its feet. This is very easy to drink already, but I would not touch a bottle for at least five years, as there are plenty more fireworks to come! 2021-2060. **94.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Weber Vineyard”- Patricia Green Cellars (Dundee Hills)

The 2015 Weber Vineyard bottling of pinot noir here is produced from old vines planted back in 1978. Jim and Patty first began working with these vines in 2005, when their bottling was known as Ana Vineyard, but a portion of the vineyard was sold off to a third party and the rights to the name Ana Vineyard were sold along with that section of vines. Hence the new name for the same wine, beginning with the 2013 vintage here. The old vines here came in at an even fourteen percent in the hot summer of 2015, with some lots completely destemmed and others entirely whole cluster, depending on how the stems were. It saw just under a quarter new wood in this vintage and delivers a beautifully red fruity bouquet (actually quite Morey St. Denis-like in many respects) of cherries, beetroot, mustard seed, dark soil tones, a touch of chicory and a nice dollop of spicy oak. With some time in the glass, more black fruity stones start to emerge as well. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classy, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent transparency, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and laser-sharp finish. Great juice in the making. 2021-2060. **94.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Olenik Vyd.” Wadensvil Block - Patricia Green Cellars (Chehelam Mt.)

There is another Olenik Vineyard bottling at PGC, as well as this cuvée made solely from the Wadensvil clones in the vineyard, with these particular vines having been planted in 1991. Jim Anderson notes that “when Wadensvil Clone is planted in Marine Sedimentary soil it produces exceptional wines that are deft, graceful and so full of minerality that they often smell of quartz.” The 2015 version came in at 14.4 percent alcohol and simply soars from the glass in an almost exotic nose of black raspberries, black plums, a touch of balsam bough, discreet elements of both cola and mustard seed, espresso, lovely minerality and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core, ripe tannins, impressive nascent

complexity and a very long, energetic and impeccably balanced finish. This is going (yet again) to be terrific pinot! 2022-2060. **94.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Estate Vyd.” Wadensvil Block- Patricia Green Cellars (Ribbon Ridge)

There is a block of Wadensvil clones in the PGC Estate Vineyard as well and the comparison of the two bottlings side by side was fascinating. These vines are a tad younger than those in the Olenik Vineyard, having been planted in 1997, and the 2015 bottling here was completely de-stemmed and raised in seven percent new cask. The wine is absolutely loaded with beautiful black fruit tones, redolent of plums and sweet dark berries, as well as notes of raw cocoa, refined spice tones, a touch of balsam bough, a lovely soil signature and gentle notes of cedar. On the palate the wine is full, suave and quite elegant in profile, with a sappy core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and very refined finish. 2020-2060. **93+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Freedom Hill Vyd.” Dijon 115 Clone- Patricia Green (Willamette Valley)

There are sixteen casks of this is single clone bottling from Freedom Hill, with thirteen of the sixteen barrels made with fifty percent whole clusters and the other three entirely whole clusters. The wine was raised in eighteen percent new wood in 2015 and offers up a very precise and nascently complex nose of black raspberries, black cherries, espresso, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, cedar and a touch of clove-like spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full, nascently complex and nicely structured, with ripe tannins, excellent mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip, tangy acids and a long, soil-driven and extremely promising finish. This could well be the longest-lived of the 2015 pinots that I tasted from PGC, but it will need some time in the cellar to really blossom. Fine, fine juice. 2025-2075. **94+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Freedom Hill Vyd.” Coury Clone- Patricia Green (Willamette Valley)

The Coury clone bottling (the name comes from Charles Coury, one of the pioneering planters in the Willamette Valley, who brought these pinot noir clones back from Alsace) from Freedom Hill is one of the smallest cuvées in the cellars in 2015, as there were only six casks made of this wine. It was made this year with fifty percent whole clusters and delivers a very fine aromatic constellation of dark berries, grilled venison, chicory, espresso, cloves, a touch of nutmeg, dark soil tones and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very soil-driven in personality, with refined tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, elegant and tangy finish. This will probably be ready to drink a bit earlier than the above, but it will easily last as long. Great wine. 2022-2075. **95+.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Freedom Hill Vyd.” Perspicacious Cuvée- Patricia Green (Willamette)

The 2014 Perspicacious Cuvée from the Freedom Hill Vineyard is the last of the 2014 pinots to be released by Jim and Patty at PGC, with the wine almost entirely available in larger-sized formats. There are only three barrels of this superb young wine, which was made entirely with whole clusters and from the Dijon 115 clone. The bouquet is deep, pure and very classy, offering up a vibrant blend of cassis, black raspberries, espresso, chicory, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, chicory and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and impressively structured, with a sappy core of black fruit, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and a very long, beautifully balanced and nascently complex finish. This will be gorgeous, but give it time to properly blossom in the cellar! 2024-2075. **95+.**

2005 Pinot Noir “Estate Vineyard”- Patricia Green Cellars (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2005 Estate Vineyard bottling from Patricia Green Cellars is starting to drink very nicely at age twelve, but still retains more than a vestige of youth in its lovely bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, spices meats, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a topnote of wild bay. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still suavely tannic, with a superb core of fruit, bright

acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This wine is starting to stir nicely from its hibernation, but is still climbing and will be even better with further bottle age. 2017-2040+. 92+.



1997 Pinot Noir “White Rose Vineyard”- Torii Mor Vineyards (Dundee Hills)

This wine was made while Patty and Jim were still at the helm at Torii Mor Vineyards, prior to founding Patricia Green Cellars in 2000. The White Rose Vineyard lies just above Balcombe Vineyard in the Dundee Hills. The 1997 bottling is now fully mature, offering up a complex and tertiary blend of dried black cherries, woodsmoke, laurel, brown spices, coffee, forest floor and a fine topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely autumnal in personality, with a good core, bright acids, melted tannins and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. I do not sense quite the same precision here as is characterized by Patty and Jim’s wines at PGC, but this wine has aged very nicely and is a pleasure to drink at age twenty. 2017-2030+. 89.

Minimus (Carlton)

Chad Stock is one of the most dynamic, thoughtful young producers in the Oregon wine scene, and his Minimus and Omero Cellars labels grace some of the most beautiful bottles of wine to be found in the state. As we worked exclusively through a lineup of wines from Minimus during my visit, I asked Chad what was going on at Omero Cellars, where he has also been the

winemaker since 2014, as we had not opened any bottles with the Omero label. Chad related that the Omero dynamics had changed dramatically since last summer, when he sent me a few beautiful wines from the 2014 vintage from that winery, as a divorce with the owners of the winery and vineyard had prompted divestiture on their parts and things were currently up in the air regarding Omero. The Omero “brand” and the cellars stocks of bottled wines and casks from the 2015 and 2016 vintages had been purchased by Chad to augment his Minimus label, but as the Omero Vineyard was a far more costly endeavor, he had not been able to buy the vineyard at the same time and it remains available for purchase, as the present owners sort out their legal issues in the wake of their divorce. As Chad observed, “we would have loved to have purchased that vineyard, as I did a lot of the recent planting there and it is a fine *terroir* and is going to be a treasure trove of different grape varieties and clones in the coming years, but the timing was just not right for us to buy the vineyard right now and we are hoping that when someone does buy it, we can still contract for some of the fruit from here.” In the 2015 and 2016 vintages, Chad was still able to get all the fruit from the Omero Vineyard, so that the Omero label will include several of the same bottlings from the same parcels for the next two years that were so impressive from the 2014 vintage that I sampled last summer, but whether he is able to continue working with fruit from the Omero Vineyard further on down the road will depend upon who eventually ends up buying this vineyard.

During my visit to Minimus on this trip, I got a much better perspective on the various labels that Chad uses for his wines from the winery, whose logic is now quite clear to me, but which eluded me when tasting through the very generous number of samples he sent along last summer. There is a range of wines which Chad calls the “Dictionary Series” (and whose labels include definitions of the grape variety that has been utilized for the cuvée, and which Chad envisions as a “test case” for the respective varietal in the firmament of Oregon wine country. Consequently, his experimental nature in regards to winemaking is put on the backburner for these wines, as his goal is to “vinify and raise these wines as straightforwardly as possible, so as to really get a sense of how well this particular grape is suited to its *terroir*.” These bottlings are a response to his philosophical question which I mentioned in the introduction of this article, as to whether pinot noir, pinot gris and chardonnay are necessarily the best grapes to be widely planted in the various *terroirs* of Oregon, or if they are simply the grapes that went into the ground first back in the day and have developed a certain historical inertia from their being the first planted, but are perhaps not truly the best-suited to Oregon’s various *terroirs*. It is a very interesting question to pose, and the Dictionary Series bottlings at Minimus are designed to test this out by making stellar and straightforward examples of wines from grapes such as Vermentino, Grüner Veltliner, Trousseau (the 2016 version of this is breathtakingly beautiful here!), Gamay, Grenache and Syrah.

Beyond the Dictionary Series at Minimus, there are still several other bottlings that are a bit more experimental in nature, or at least happily off the beaten path. These include a pair of “Dijon Free” cuvées of chardonnay and pinot noir, with each (as the name implies) eschewing the use of the most widely-planted clones of the two grape varieties, to express a different synthesis of top *terroir* and chardonnay and pinot noir respectively. There is also the beautiful bottling of Pinot Gouges Blanc that I wrote up last year, which was made from a small parcel of vines that were taken as cuttings from the pinot noir-mutated white grapes (pinot blanc I suppose they are now) that originally were found in the Domaine Henri Gouges vineyards in Nuits St.

Georges and cultivated by the Gouges family. Additionally, there are the more experimental bottlings which carry designations such as “SM-1” or “SM-2” on their labels, with variations of varietal blending, different approaches to skin contact, fermentation style or *elevage* and a host of other possibilities designed to test the traditional parameters of winegrowing in the region. There are even a couple of wildly experimental wines that Chad developed specifically for a lecture he was giving in London earlier this year, discussing accepted perceptions of winemaking flaws such as volatile acidity and brettanomyces, which he whimsically labeled as “I Have VA” and “I Have Brett”, but which possess these elements in completely different ways than what one might expect. In short, this is a winery where one can sample across a very, very wide spectrum of grape varietals, blends, and interpretations of classic favorites, all impeccably well-made and suited to the relative degree of vinous adventure one is in the mood for at the time! As the Omero Cellars wines had just been bottled from the 2015 vintage, Chad is going to send them along in the fall for inclusion in the next article on American wines and we tasted exclusively wines from Minimus on my visit here in July.



Chad Stock, in his tasting room at Minimus Winery, in the town of Carleton.

2016 Vermentino “Layne Vineyard”- Minimus “Dictionary Series” (Applegate Valley)

The 2016 Vermentino bottling from the Dictionary Series from Chad Stock comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane, with the grapes having been foot-trodden for this wine and the juice given a forty-eight hour skin contact and fermentation in cement vats. The wine is beautiful and very precise on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a blend of lemon, a touch of green olive, salty soil tones, white flowers and a nice touch of fresh rosemary in the upper

register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full, pure and vibrant, with a good core, sound acids and a long, complex and zesty finish. Just a lovely example of vermentino. 2017-2020. **90.**

2016 Grüner Veltliner “Vitae Springs Vineyard”- Minimus “Dictionary Series”

The Vitae Springs Vineyard is located in Salem, Oregon and falls under the Willamette Valley AVA. This is the riper of the two Grüners that Chad Stock is producing, with the 2016 from this vineyard coming in at 13.8 percent alcohol. This bottling was fermented and raised entirely in older, Austrian oak puncheons. The wine offers up a bright and simply superb nose of apple, rosemary, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil, citrus oil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite classy in profile, with a fine core, really lovely balance, solid framing acids and a long, focused and impressively cool finish. This really handles its octane seamlessly! 2017-2020. **91.**

2015 Grüner Veltliner “Johan Vineyard”- Minimus “Dictionary Series”

As noted in the introduction, the gorgeous Johan Vineyard will soon be included in the pending Van Duzer Corridor AVA, but for the present time, it is still listed as Willamette Valley. The 2015 Grüner from this vineyard has really turned to gold in Chad Stock’s very capable hands, and this wine is outstanding. The octane here is quite a bit lower, coming in at 13.2 percent and the wine jumps from the glass in a fine blend of tangerine, sweet grapefruit, a touch of rosemary, salty soil tones dried flowers and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and supremely elegant in profile, with a fine core, bright acids and superb length and grip on the crisp and impeccably well-balanced finish. A simply outstanding bottle of Grüner Veltliner! 2017-2025. **93+.**

2015 Chardonnay “Dijon Free” Johan Vineyard- Minimus (Willamette Valley)

The 2015 version of the “Dijon Free” chardonnay from Chad Stock is every bit as brilliant as the 2014 bottling I reported on last year. This is produced from different chardonnay clones planted at Johan Vineyards beyond the widely-planted Dijon clones that were first brought into the state in the mid to late 1980s by David Adelsheim and Ron Cameron of Oregon State University. These “Dijon Clones” which were considered more suitable to Oregon’s cooler growing conditions than the clones that had been developed from French cuttings planted originally at Wente Brothers and Mount Eden in the late 1800s in California, and the Dijon Clones are now the dominate chardonnay clones planted in the state. Chad Stock was curious to see what some of these other clones might yield in terms of personality, so this bottling is made from a ninety percent blend of Wente Clones and l’Espiguette Clones (the only French clone brought into the state in the mid-1980s that did not hail from Dijon wood), with ten percent a Chardonnay Musqué clone. I suppose, to be completely scientific in the comparison of Chad’s Dijon Free bottling, he would also have to produce a Dijon Clone-based bottling from Johan fruit as well, but he has not yet done so. Next project? In any case, the 2015 “Dijon Free” chardonnay is absolutely stellar, having been barrel-fermented and raised in about ten percent new oak, prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The wine offers up a beautifully pure and complex bouquet of pear, lemon, acacia blossoms, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of butter and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined in profile, with superb purity and focus, crisp acids and outstanding grip on the long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Great juice. 2017-2030. **94+.**

2016 SM-1 “Stellar Maris Vineyard”- Minimus (Applegate Valley)

The SM-1 bottling from Chad Stock is composed entirely of sauvignon blanc, though the name of the varietal is conspicuously absent on both the front and back labels, as Chad wants customers “to drink the wine without any preconceived notions.” Chad is not a fan of the grassy

side of this grape, so he tends to pick it quite late and let the sugars climb where they will, to squeeze out that last bit of pyrazine. Consequently, the 2016 version is fourteen percent alcohol, and as this is an experimental wine, the wine is raised for six months in amphora, with full skin contact the entire time, and it is a far cry from a “traditional” example of sauvignon blanc. The bouquet offers up a tropical blend of pineapple, tangerine, a touch of clay-derived aromatics from the sojourn in amphora, smoke and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has plenty of stuffing at the core, with good focus and balance and a long, moderately crisp finish. This wine carries its alcohol very nicely and shows no signs of backend heat, but its having been raised in amphora has effectively taken any soil signature out of the finished wine. This is interesting, but as I am a fan of the grassiness in sauvignon blanc, I am probably not the target audience for this bottling. 2017-2020. **88.**

2016 SM-2- Minimus

The SM-2 bottling from Minimus is a co-fermented blend of viognier and sauvignon blanc. The *cépages* is sixty percent viognier and forty percent sauvignon blanc, which again must have been picked fairly late, as the wine comes in at 13.8 percent octane. This is raised in older casks, rather than amphora, and offers up a very expressive bouquet of pear, apple, acacia blossoms, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of coriander seed. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite suave on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. This is not the most complex wine, but it hits all the right notes within its more limited range. 2017-2023.

2016 Pinot Gouges Blanc- Minimus (Eola-Amity Hills)

Chad gets his Pinot Gouges from the Zivo Vineyard, which is planted on cuttings taken from vines that Charles Coury brought back to Oregon from Nuits St. Georges all the way back in 1966. The 2016 version spent six months on its skins, with twenty percent of the blend fermented as whole berries, which is down from the fifty percent that were used for the 2015 version. The wine is outstanding and even better than the very good 2015 version, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, a touch of quince, dried flowers, salty soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with excellent focus and balance, find depth at the core and impressive grip on the complex and very long finish. This is the kind of wine that would make the Gouges family proud! 2017-2027+. **92+.**

2015 “I Have VA” Blanc- Minimus

Chad produced this wine as an example of how we can rethink some of our general impressions of wine flaws, as he wanted to have something to show a group he was addressing in London on this theme. As he noted, the volatile acidity here is above what is generally considered acceptable, and yet he liked the wine the way it was and decided to just bottle it up for his scheduled lecture and use it as “Exhibit A”. The wine is a blend of forty percent each chenin blanc and aligoté, with twenty percent chardonnay. All of the grapes came from the Omero Vineyard. I did not write down the level of VA here, but it is evident on both the nose and palate of the wine. The bouquet is bright and beautifully expressive, offering up scents of lemon, pear and a fine mix of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full, long and even more complex than the nose promises, with a good core, gentle notes of volatile acidity, but conversely, also delivering a sense of really lovely balance on the long and focused finish. I have no sense of how this wine will evolve with bottle age, but my gut feeling is that eventually the VA might start to undermine the beautiful balance it shows today, but if this turns out to be the

case, it will not be for at least several years down the road. A fascinating experiment and a very tasty wine. 2017-2025. **91.**

2016 Origin Rosé “Ribbon Ridge”- Minimus

The 2016 Origin Rosé is a superb wine that is just brimming with personality, but it is not “everyman’s” rosé, as this unique wine is composed of a blend of Blaufrankisch, St. Laurent, Zweigelt and Grüner Veltliner. The wine offers up superb aromatic complexity, wafting from the glass in a blend of rhubarb, orange peel, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and focused, with an impressive core, fine grip and a long, beautifully balanced and zesty finish. Great juice from outside the box! 2017-2022. **92.**

2015 “I Have Brett” Rouge- Minimus

By the time we got to the “I Have Brett” Rouge bottling from Chad, he was in full philosophical flight and I could not write my notes fast enough to get it all down on paper for recall later! But, as well as I remember the theme, he observed that since several of his favorite “micro-brew” beers are fermented using brettanomyces, he decided to try the same thing with a wine in anticipation of his then upcoming lecture in London on wine flaws. This wine is composed entirely of pinot gris that Chad fermented as a red wine, with the fermentation started by an inoculation of brettanomyces. Ironically, the wine shows none of the horsey, barnyardy elements that we normally associate with brett, but Chad observed that “those elements will probably develop in the wine further on down the road, once the wine has had some extended bottle age. However, today, they are nowhere to be found in the wine, which offers up a really lovely bouquet of rhubarb, dried strawberries, gentle smokiness, a superb base of soil tones and a nice, gently savory topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully transparent, with tangy acids, melted tannins and lovely intensity of flavor on the long and vibrant finish. I am not sure when this wine will get barnyardy in profile from its brett, but until it does, it is going to be a shockingly fine wine for drinking! 2017-2025? **92.**

2016 Trousseau Noir “Omero Vineyard”- Minimus “Dictionary Series” (Ribbon Ridge)

I have never tasted a finer example of Trousseau than Chad Stock’s 2016 version from the Omero Vineyard. The wine has the lovely pale color so typical of this varietal, but is far less autumnal out of the blocks than so many wines made from this grape, as it offers up a stunningly pure and complex bouquet of strawberries, blood orange, woodsmoke, rose petals and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and very transparent, with impressive intensity of flavor, bright acids and fine length and grip on the complex and energetic finish. The balance here is impeccable and the wine is gorgeously light on its feet and yet loaded with personality. Great juice that is drinking with style and distinction right out of the blocks, but clearly will age very nicely as well. 2017-2030+. **94.**

2016 Grenache “Soloro Vineyard”- Minimus “Dictionary Series” (Applegate Valley)

As readers may recall, the grenache cuttings planted in the granitic soils at Soloro Vineyard originally hailed from Beaucastel. The 2016 version from Minimus is a blend of ninety-two percent grenache, co-fermented with three percent each of marsanne and roussanne and two percent viognier, so sort of a Côte-Rôtie twist on grenache. The wine just a touch lower in octane in 2016 than was the case in the hot summer of 2015, coming in at 13.7 percent and offering up a very refined bouquet of cherries, red currants, pepper, stony soil tones, venison and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a fien core, suave tannins and impressive focus and grip on the shockingly elegant (for grenache!), long and nascently complex finish. This is an excellent bottle of grenache in the making. 2020-2050. **92+.**



A couple of the “Dictionary Series” bottlings from Chad Stock at Minimus.

2016 Pinot Noir “Johan Vineyard”- Minimus (Willamette Valley)

Chad had no 2015 pinots in the house to show at the time of my visit, so he opened this beautiful 2016 version from Johan Vineyards, which he had just bottled two day prior to our tasting! Happily, the wine had not yet begun to shut down post-bottling and was showing very well indeed. This was seventy percent whole clusters in 2016 and came in at a cool 12.8 percent octane. The bouquet is superb, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of meatiness, woodsmoke, red plum, mustard seed and a marvelous base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and tangy, with a fine sappy core, lovely focus and grip and a very long, suavely tannic and elegant finish. There is plenty of intensity of flavor here, despite the wine’s lightness of step and it is going to be an absolutely superb bottle of pinot noir when it has had a chance to blossom properly. 2021-2060. **93+**.

2016 Noir #23- Minimus

The Minimus #23 “Noir is a blend of one-third each of trousseau, gamay and pinot, but as Chad Stock laughs, “there is a bit of a twist with the pinot portion of the blend!” It turns out that the “pinot” third of the *cépages* is almost all composed of white grapes- pinot blanc, pinot gris, pinot Gouges, with a bit of pinot meunier tossed in for good measure! All the pinots were fermented as white wine and then blended into the trousseau and gamay. The result is a very compelling and unique red wine, offering p a complex nose of dark berries, a touch of pepper,

superb soil tones and a nice bass note of espresso. On the palate the wine is fullish, soil-driven and complex, with excellent balance, moderate tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long, tangy and quite refined finish. A totally off the wall combination of grapes that in the end have produced a very suave and sophisticated red wine. 2017-2030. **92.**

2016 Gamay Noir “Jubilee Vineyard”- Minimus “Dictionary Series” (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2016 Gamay had also just been bottled two day before my visit, but was showing very fine potential. This was made with no carbonic maceration and offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, cassis, pepper, dark soil tones, cranberries, a touch of violet and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crunchy and soil-driven, with a good core, just a touch of tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. A very classic example of Gamay! 2017-2030+. **92.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Dijon Free” Johan Vineyard- Minimus (Willamette Valley)

Chad Stock’s 2016 Dijon Free version of pinot noir is every bit as compelling as his “Dijon Free” chardonnay bottlings. The pinot noir grapes here hail from the beautiful Johan Vineyard and are the Mariafeld Clone of pinot, which originated in Switzerland and was propagated at UC-Davis. The 2016 version is an excellent young wine, offering up a deep and primary bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, coffee, soil and a nice touch of meatiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core, tangy acids and a very long, moderately tannic and well-balanced finish. This is still a puppy and needs some bottle age to start to blossom, but it will be a truly exceptional wine in the fullness of time. 2021-2060+. **94.**

2016 “Parental Warning” Rouge “Omero Vineyard”- Minimus (Ribbon Ridge)

The Parental Warning red from Chad Stock is another eclectic blend of grapes, as this really lovely red wine is composed of a blend of cabernet franc, mondeuse and gamay. The wine was fermented with one-third whole clusters and comes in at a very svelte 12.2 percent octane. The bouquet is bright and expressive, delivering a fine constellation of dark berries, woodsmoke, very pretty spice tones and a complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, poised and tangy, with an impressive core of fruit, bright acids, little tannin and excellent length and grip on the complex and intensely flavored finish. This is a really lovely middleweight red that is accessible in its youth, but has such beautiful balance and acidity that it will cruise along in bottle for many, many years to come. 2017-2035. **92+.**

Kelley Fox Wines (McMinnville)

Kelley Fox produces primarily pinot noir, from two beautiful vineyards, the biodynamically-farmed Momtazi Vineyard in McMinnville and the organically-farmed Maresh Vineyard in the Dundee Hills. She works out of a cozy, rented winery space in McMinnville, located on the property of Maysara Winery, who are the owners of the Momtazi Vineyard. A visit to Kelley’s small winery is unlike any other cellar visit I have ever made, for as I pulled up for my appointment, strains of Rachmaninoff were wafting out of the winery’s stereo system at a robust volume, from a pair of speakers that had to be nearly as tall as Kelley herself. A little tasting music for the afternoon was augmented by a deep and wide-ranging discussion on a myriad of subjects, as Kelley is an inspiring intellectual who came to winemaking midstream in her career, while pursuing a doctorate at Oregon State University in Biochemistry (she has undergraduate degrees in Psychology, Biochemistry and Biophysics). When the wine bug bit, she switched directions and became a full-time winemaker in 2000, working first for the founding father of the Oregon wine world, David Lett at Eyrie Vineyards and then going on to

work at Torii Mor and Hamacher Vineyards, before settling in as the head winemaker at Scott Paul Wines in 2005. Kelley made the wines at Scott Paul in Carleton for a decade, prior to settling in at her own winery exclusively in 2014. She had first started her own label in 2007, beginning with a small bit of fruit from the Maresh Vineyard in that vintage, which allowed her to craft two hundred cases of pinot noir in her inaugural vintage of 2007 and has slowly grown the production levels up to her present two thousand cases per year. Kelley runs her winery with her brother Gerson Stearns, who is a refugee from the world of corporate law offices, but whose formal university training is in fine arts, and a myriad of his excellent original pieces grace the walls of the winery.

Kelley Fox has no formal winemaking training, having left academia while working on her doctorate and learning her current trade from David Lett and the other talented winemakers with whom she apprenticed, prior to taking over the reins at Scott Paul in 2005. However, her strong science background in her days prior to starting to make wine in Oregon certainly gave her a solid foundation in the cellars, and with a keen eye for detail and a harmonic convergence with the natural world around her, it is quite clear that Kelley settled into her new *métier* briskly and with *élan*. Speaking with Kelley, it is quite clear that she does not really make the wines here, but rather stays out of the way as much as possible and follows the natural flow of vineyard and vintage, with few preconceived notions in the cellar other than to allow the wines to shape themselves as much as possible and to reflect their underlying *terroirs* and the personalities of each passing growing season. Cellar practices here are as non-interventionist as is humanly possible, with indigenous yeasts used for the ferments, a large percentage of whole clusters (starting in the 2015 vintage, everything will be whole cluster for the pinot noirs, provided the season lends itself to this approach), no enzymes or other cellar tricks utilized, no cold soaks, no pump-overs, gentle *pigeage*, and generally only a single racking to assemble the wines prior to bottling. As Kelley observes, “the only additives used in the cellar are sulfur, food-grade tartaric acid, sourced from grapes, in very warm vintages and a bit of cane sugar in very cool years” for a touch of chapitalization. She started out using about thirty percent new oak in her earliest vintages, but has consistently dialed this back with each passing year and has used no new oak for any of her wines since the 2012 vintage. *Elevage* typically runs about eleven months prior to *assemblage* and bottling, without fining or filtration, but as Kelley likes to say, “this of course depends on the vintage and the wine, as always.”

Kelley likes to do almost everything herself at the winery and also assists with the farming in some of the parcels of vines that she obtains fruit from each year from the Maresh Vineyard, one of the two vineyards that she makes wine from these days. The other, the Momtazi Vineyard, has been Demeter-certified for several years now, as this vineyard has been farmed biodynamically and beautifully since it first went into the ground. In the Maresh Vineyard, Kelley will assist the Maresh team, though as she notes, “Maresh Vineyard is also loved and beautifully-farmed, and certainly doesn't need any help from the likes of me, but I do rent (long-term) about 3.3 acres,” and “in these blocks, I prune with the crew, stir and apply the biodynamic preps, remove suckers, head-thin/shoot-thin, pull leaves, and selectively green-thin (if necessary).” She is clearly in tune with these vines, as Kelley managed to produce some of the most svelte and low octane wines that I tasted from the torrid vintage of 2015, simply “by paying attention to what these old vines wanted to do that spring and summer” and working in tune with the vines, rather than pruning and suckering the vines in some sort of customary fashion. As

Kelley related, “in 2015, these old vines seemed to know what lay in store, as they produced two shoots per eye and plenty of suckers, so I just decided that they probably knew better than me how to adapt to the conditions of 2015 and I left both shoots and let the old vines have the clusters that they wanted” while trying to keep up stripping the suckers, which took three rounds in the vines. The results were low octane, supremely elegant 2015s that ranged from 12.5 to an even thirteen percent in alcohol- almost unheard of low levels in this very hot growing season of 2015 except from vineyards in cool regions like the Van Duzer Corridor.



Kelley Fox, in front of the Momtazi Vineyard, next door to her winery in McMinnville.

From the start of Kelley’s own label in 2007, up through the 2015 vintage, she has used screwcaps to seal her wines, but has decided to switch to natural corks beginning with the 2016 vintage. When I expressed my customary disappointment that her wines were bottled under screwcap, Kelley gently, but firmly upbraided me for my lack of faith in her, as she commented “I love my wines and would not do anything to them that was harmful- these are the very finest screw-threaded bottles that one can buy (and far more costly than regular bottles for cork-finished wines) and the top quality liner for the closure allows a very discreet oxygen ingress to prevent the reduction issues so prevalent with the closure under lesser quality liners and bottles.” She continued that the use of screwcaps was not an economic decision (it is hard to imagine her actually making an economically-based decision, as her foundations seem far removed from our mercenary economic times), but rather an attempt to avoid losing any bottles to TCA

contamination, and indeed, given how beautifully all of her 2014s and 2015s showed under screwcap, I came away with more food for thought about this closure at its most highly-realized (and seldom used) ideal. In any case, as I mentioned, she has now abandoned screwcaps for natural corks for her 2016 wines, which was the result of a conversation she had with her new Japanese importers and their concerns of how the screwcaps would upset the magnetic well-being of her wines, and their argument was so persuasive that Kelley made the decision to switch to natural corks with the 2016s.

Though Kelley Fox works with the fruit from only two vineyards, the aforementioned Momtazi Vineyard in McMinnville and the Maresh Vineyard in the Dundee Hills, she has expanded the number of bottlings that she produces from the two vineyards in the last few vintages, so that she is presently producing seven distinct cuvées of pinot noir under her label. There is also a bit of experimental pinot gris as well from the Maresh Vineyard, which Kelley is seeking to vinify more along the lines of a red wine to see what can be brought out from this grape, but the 2016 that we tried was in a particularly grumpy, adolescent state at the time of my visit from its fairly recent bottling and I did not take a formal note on the wine, catching it at an inappropriate moment in its evolution. It will be interesting to see how this particular wine evolves when it has had some requisite bottle age, and this may become a standard member of the Kelley Fox Wines' lineup in the future. The biodynamically farmed Momtazi Vineyard was planted in 1998 and 1999 from an abandoned wheat farm that the Momtazi family had purchased in 1997. The base of the vineyard is a mixture of sedimentary and volcanic soils and the vineyards were planted with Dijon clones, which have been farmed biodynamically since day one. The Maresh Vineyard on Worden Hill Road in the Dundee Hills is one of the earliest-planted vineyards in the region, with Jim Maresh having put his first pinot noir in the ground in 1970 (Jim and his wife Loie bought their farm in 1959) to augment his other crops, and during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, additional vineyards were carved out of their rolling hills on the property. The Mareshs' pinot noir and chardonnay vines, planted on red volcanic soils, have been dry-farmed organically since day one.

At the present time, Kelley Fox produces three distinct bottlings of pinot noir from the Momtazi Vineyard and four bottlings from the Maresh Vineyard, with several of these cuvées having just been introduced with the 2015 vintage. From Momtazi, there is the eponymous single vineyard bottling, another Momtazi cuvée which she calls "Tir" from a tiny section of the vineyard that was planted on *selection massale* in 2003, and "Ahurani" which takes its name from the Persian goddess of "water and well-being" and is a barrel selection that Kelley makes from casks that remind her of the *terroir* found in the areas around the several small springs that run through the vineyard in the winter and early growing season. From the Maresh Vineyard, there is again the bottling simply named for the vineyard and three distinct cuvées that hail from specific blocks here or are selected for a specific style. These include the Mirabai, Red Barn Blocks and Star of Bethlehem Flower Block bottlings from the Maresh Vineyard. The Mirabai bottling is a barrel selection that Kelley describes as a "lithe, high-energy, aerial Pinot" that also has the benefit of being very, very tasty right out of the gate, though it clearly also has the balance to age long and gracefully. The regular Maresh Vineyard bottling is more structured in its youth than the Mirabai and really built for the long haul. The very limited Star of Bethlehem Flower Block and the Red Barn Blocks are very small barrel selections of the fruit that Kelley gets from these two old parcels of vines that are still farmed by ninety-one year-old Jim Maresh

Sr., who planted both these sections back in 1970. The former is probably the most perfumed and elegant of Kelley's pinot noirs (all of which would actually fit that description!) and the Red Barn Blocks bottling, of which there are only two casks, is more a mix of black and red fruit and is a bit more structured in personality, but with all the inherent refinement and complexity of a Kelley Fox wine waiting in the wings. These are simply some of the most beautiful and complex pinot noirs being made anywhere in the US these days and are very much worth a search to find and cellar!

2015 Pinot Noir "Momtazi Vineyard" Ahurani- Kelley Fox (McMinnville)

The 2015 Ahurani bottling from the Momtazi Vineyard is also outstanding, with a more accessible personality in its youth than the more structured Tir. The wine is made from a barrel selection from all parts of the vineyard that Kelley receives fruit, but which remind her of the sections that have springs running through the vines. The 2015 Ahurani is pure and complex on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a fine constellation of black cherries, a superb base of soil, a touch of balsamic overtones, chicory, woodsmoke and a nice topnote of stem-related savory elements. On the palate the wine is pure, full and utterly suave on the attack, with a fine core of black fruit, lovely soil signature, modest, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the refined and nascently complex finish. Lovely juice. 2017-2055. **92.**

2014 Pinot Noir "Momtazi Vineyard"- Kelley Fox (McMinnville)

The 2014 Momtazi Vineyard bottling from Kelley Fox included eighty percent whole clusters and was racked once during its ten months of *elevage*, prior to bottling. The wine is very refined, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of cherries, plums, a touch of *sous bois*, chicory, hints of beetroot, woodsmoke and a lovely range of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the poised and already velvety finish. This is drinking with style right out of the blocks, but is beautifully balanced and will age long and gracefully as well- if one can keep one's hands off of it in the cellar! 2017-2045+. **92+.**

2015 Pinot Noir "Momtazi Vineyard" Tir- Kelley Fox (McMinnville)

The Tir bottling from Kelley Fox hails from a small section of the Momtazi Vineyard that was planted on *selection massale* back in 2003, and which produced enough for three casks of wine in 2015. Like all of the other cuvées here in 2015, this was one hundred percent whole clusters and zero percent new oak. The wine is nicely black fruity on the nose, offering up scents of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, incipient meatiness, lovely soil tones and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nascently complex, with lovely focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and a very long, focused and still youthfully shut down finish. This will need at least a few years in the cellar to start to stir, but will be excellent once it blossoms. 2021-2055. **93+.**

2015 Pinot Noir "Maresh Vineyard" Mirabai- Kelley Fox Wines (Dundee Hills)

The Mirabai bottling from the Maresh Vineyard is a barrel selection from the various parcels Kelley works with in the vineyard, with the exception of the Red Barn Block. This is very pretty in profile and was probably selected for its extra degree of elegance, as the wine is more red fruity than the above, wafting from the glass in a refined constellation of strawberries, gentle notes of beetroot, cinnamon, cloves, a marvelous base of soil, coffee and the first vestiges of the forest floor elements to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and potential quite silky, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, suave, moderate tannins and a very long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This too is going to be a beautiful

bottle of wine and seems likely to drink well a few years ahead of the Maresh Vineyard bottlings. 2020-2055. **93.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Maresh Vineyard”- Kelley Fox (Dundee Hills)

The 2015 Maresh Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Kelley Fox comes in at an even thirteen percent (rather unheard of in this very hot vintage for Dundee Hills vineyards!) and offers up beautiful purity and perfume. This wine is made from the two of the blocks that Kelley assists in farming in the Maresh- one called Old Block and the other Long Rows, both of which were original *Franco de Pieds* parcels put in by Jim Maresh in 1970. The bouquet of the 2015 has a nice sheen of muskiness in its constellation of cherries, beetroot, mustard seed, a fine base of soil, a touch of cedar and a lovely topnote of exotic spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full, complex and beautifully structured, with ripe, suave tannins, excellent depth at the core, impeccable balance and a long, focused and vibrant finish. This has the chassis to age long and gracefully, but I would be inclined to tuck this one away in the cellar for a handful of years prior to starting to drink it, to allow its secondary layers to start to emerge on both the nose and palate. 2022-2060. **93+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Maresh Vineyard” Bethlehem Flower Block- Kelley Fox (Dundee Hills)

The Bethlehem Flower Block bottling from Maresh Vineyard is Kelley’s lowest octane 2015, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol. These vines were planted in 1991 on *Franco de Pieds* roots and are now just entering their prime. This is a parcel of the vineyard that is still personally farmed by Jim Maresh Sr. The complex bouquet of the 2015 version is beautifully red fruity in personality, offering up scents of cherries, beetroot, cinnamon, a nice touch of stems, incipient notes of forest floor, fresh nutmeg and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and intensely flavored, with marvelous focus and grip, the seamless balance of a dancer, suave tannins and a very long, bright and supremely elegant finish. There is an effortless beauty here that is quite magical! 2019-2055+. **94+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Maresh Vineyard” Red Barn Blocks- Kelley Fox Wines (Dundee Hills)

The Red Barn Blocks bottling hails from the original vines that were planted by Jim Maresh Sr. in 1970 (Wadensvil clones), which again are on *Franco de Pieds*, rather than American rootstocks, and this parcel is also still farmed by Jim at the age of ninety-one! This wine again came in at an even thirteen percent in 2015 and delivers a beautifully complex and classy nose of red and black cherries, a touch of cola, dark soil tones, a nice dollop of savory elements from the whole clusters and a delicate topnote of cardamom. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, moderate, ripe tannins and beautiful length and grip on the suave and very promising finish. This has a completely different personality than the Star of Bethlehem Flower Block (as it should), but it will be every bit as stunning when it is ready for primetime drinking. 2022-2060. **94+.**

Other Recently-Tasted Oregon Wines

Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Grüner Veltliner and Muscat

2016 Gewürztraminer “Since I Fell For You”- Ovum Wines (Rogue Valley)

This 2016 Gewürztraminer from John and Ksenija House hails from the Gerber Vineyard, which is located close to the Off the Grid Vineyard in deep southern Oregon and was planted at an elevation of sixteen hundred feet above sea level all the way back in 1976. These forty-one year-old vines ripened their fruit with enthusiasm in this idyllic vintage, with the finished wine topping out at 14.1 percent alcohol and this can be sensed a bit on the backend of

the palate. But, the aromatics here are first class, wafting from the glass in a youthfully complex mix of pear, rosewater, spices meats, a bit of orange peel, lovely minerality and a gently savory topnote that recalls rosemary. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured out of the blocks, with a fine core, nascent complexity, bright acids and very good length and grip on the gently warm finish. This does a very good job of managing its octane, so this should be very tasty for the first decade of its life in bottle. After that point, I suspect the alcohol will start to get the upper hand, but we shall see! 2017-2027+? **90.**

2016 Muscat “Suspension”- Ovum Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2016 “Suspension” bottling of Muscat hails from the Eola Springs Vineyard in Rickreall, in the Van Duzer Corridor. The vineyard has fifty-four acres planted to pinot noir and a generous, ten acres planted to Muscat. The 2016 version from Ovum Wines is finished quite dry, though coming in at only 11.9 percent octane and reflecting the cooler vineyard site. The nose is quite expressive, offering up scents of peach, pear, acacia blossoms, bergamot and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and fairly lean, with nice intensity of flavor, moderate complexity and sneaky length on the vibrant and bone dry finish. This is already beautifully expressive on the nose, but it is a young wine on the palate and could do with at least a year or two in the cellar to really start to stir. My gut feeling is that it will be excellent when it has had a chance to properly blossom on the palate, and will delight in a similar manner to many of the best 2011 chardonnays today. That said, it may be a touch too lean right out of the blocks for some tasters. 2019-2030. **89.**

2016 Riesling “Base Line”- Ovum Wines (Elkton)

The 2016 Riesling “Base Line” bottling from John and Ksenija House’s Ovum Wines was fermented completely dry and comes in at 13.5 percent octane in 2016. The wine is nicely ripe on the nose and shows nascent complexity in its aromatic combination of apple, incipient notes of petrol, a touch of guava, a bit of honeycomb, lemongrass, orange peel and a fine base of minerally soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and focused, with a rock solid core, fine transparency, good acids and just a bit of backend heat on the long and complex finish. I really like the raw materials here, but the octane level is a bit heady and I wonder how this will affect its ability to age over the long haul. But, for drinking over the next handful of years, this should not be an issue and the wine should be very tasty over that interval. Beyond a half dozen years, the octane may come into play like it does in some top Austrian Rieslings, which get a bit top heavy with extended aging from their ripeness levels. 2017-2023+? **89.**

2016 Riesling “Off the Grid”- Ovum Wines (Rogue Valley)

As I mentioned last year, the “Off the Grid” Vineyard is found in the remote southern reaches of Oregon, just twenty-five miles inland from the Pacific and just north of the California border. The vineyard is planted on a dried up riverbed, at an elevation of fifteen hundred feet above sea level, with excellent diurnal swings that guard acidity in the grapes. The 2016 Off the Grid Riesling from Ovum is a bit riper than its 2015 counterpart, coming in at 13.2 percent octane and delivering a very fine bouquet of apple, white cherry, lovely floral overtones redolent of iris and lilac, stony soil tones and whisper of early smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively racy, with a rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, brisk acids and outstanding length on the nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is superb juice in the making! 2017-2035. **93.**

2016 Riesling “Memorista”- Ovum Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

This is the ripest wine I have tasted yet from Ovum Wines, as this Riesling tips the scales at a very Austrian 13.9 percent alcohol. Despite its pretty octane, the wine is impressively fresh

and complex on the nose, offering up scents of apple, gentle leesy tones, hints of the yellow plum to come with bottle age, a touch of menthol, smoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fully dry, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, bright acids and a bit of backend heat and bitterness (along the lines of grapefruit pith) poking out on the long finish. This is just a bit riper than I would like to see it, with filigree having been swapped for power in this vintage, and though it carries its alcohol really quite well for nearly a fourteen percent Riesling, I would have liked this far better a point lower in alcohol. 2017-2025. **87.**

2016 Riesling “Toro Y Scorpio”- Ovum Wines (Ribbon Ridge)

This Ribbon Ridge vineyard of Riesling has to be one of the few in this AVA dedicated to this variety, with the sedimentary soils here giving the wine a lovely sense of filigree. This wine comes in at a cooler 12.5 percent octane and offers up a very expressive nose of apple, white peach, a whisper of smoky leanness, lovely floral tones, a hint of lavender and a complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and racy, with a fine core, excellent transparency, brisk acids and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is still a puppy and deserves some time in the cellar to fully blossom. It will be outstanding when it is ready to go and should be particularly long-lived! 2019-2035+. **91+.**

2015 Grüner Veltliner ‘Havlin Vineyard’ Franchere (Willamette Valley)

The 2015 Grüner from Mike Hinds comes in at a cool and classy 12.7 percent alcohol and is beautifully aromatic, offering up scents of apple, menthol, lavender, salty soil tones, gentle savory notes and a touch of wild flower. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and focused, with a good core, fairly gentle acids and a touch of natural wine “wildness” on the long and well-balanced finish. This is a lovely bottle for the table, but with the lower acids of 2015, it will probably want drinking up in the next few years. Good juice. 2017-2020. **88.**

Pinot Gris

2015 Pinot Gris- Eyrie Vineyards (Dundee Hills)

The 2015 Pinot Gris from Eyrie Vineyards in a nicely cool customer, impressively only tipping the scales at 12.5 percent octane in the hot summer of 2015. The wine offers up an expressive bouquet of apple, wheat chaff, a touch of hazelnut, a good base of soil and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full, crisp and clean, with good focus and grip, respectable complexity and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2017-2025. **89.**

2015 Pinot Gris Reserve “Clover”- Goodfellow Family Cellars (Willamette Valley)

The 2015 Pinot Gris Reserve “Clover” from Marcus Goodfellow is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts in a mix of puncheons, *foudres* and barrels, prior to being racked into older oak barrels (with one or two acacia casks tossed into the mix) for an *elevage* of fourteen months prior to bottling. The 2015 comes in at 13.4 percent octane and offers up a fine nose of apple, fresh almond, dried flowers, a nice base of soil tones and incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and shows even more personality than the nose suggests, with a good core, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. I really like the backend energy here! 2017-2020. **90.**

Chardonnay

2014 Chardonnay “Seven Springs Vineyard”- Evening Land Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2014 Seven Springs Vineyard Chardonnay from Evening Land comes in at 13.1 percent octane and was barrel-fermented and raised in thirty percent new oak for a year, prior to racking into stainless steel tank for an additional six months of *elevage* prior to bottling. This is a younger vine bottling, but it was showing beautifully, offering up a lovely bouquet of apple, nectarine, esthery floral tones, a touch of almond, fine soil tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with solid depth at the core, good acids and fine length and grip on the fairly oaky finish. I am guessing that the remainder of the casks that were not new for this bottling were one and two wine barrels, as this shows more new oaky character than I would expect for its thirty percent. Not bad, but it needs some time to integrate its new oak, which dominates the backend just a touch right now. 2018-2025+. **89.**

2014 Chardonnay “la Source”- Evening Land Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2014 la Source bottling of chardonnay from Evening Land hails from the lower section of the Seven Springs Vineyard and its volcanic soils. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised in twenty percent new oak for ten months prior to *assemblage* and further aging for six months in tank, with the wine fined, but not filtered at bottling. The bouquet on the 2014 offers up a fine, gently reductive bouquet of pear, apple, a touch of iodine, almonds, soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good, ripe fruit, fine soil signature, bright acids and a long, fairly oaky finish. This wine still needs some time to absorb its new oak, but has plenty of stuffing to do so and once the oak descends a bit, it will be a tasty bottle. Still, I would love to see this wine raised entirely in one and two wine barrels, just to let the soil signature take center stage. 2019-2030+. **90+.**

2014 Chardonnay “Summum”- Evening Land Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2014 Chardonnay “Summum” from Evening Land is their “grand cru” bottling from the Seven Springs Vineyard. The wine is raised in all new, Stockinger *puncheons* for ten months prior to racking into tank for settling prior to bottling. The 2014 Summum comes in at a cool 12.9 percent octane and delivers a fine, new oaky nose of pear, apple, almond, a nice base of soil and a stylish serving of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and plenty oaky, with a good core, moderate soil signature, sound acids and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This has very good potential, but again, less new wood would produce a far more exciting wine to my palate! 2019-2030. **90+.**

2014 Chardonnay “Richard’s Cuvée”- Goodfellow Family Cellars (Ribbon Ridge)

The Richard’s Cuvée bottling of chardonnay from Marcus Goodfellow hails entirely from the windy Whistling Ridge Vineyard in Ribbon Ridge. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in primarily older French oak puncheons for twenty-one months prior bottling. The 2014 version offers up an outstanding, complex bouquet of apple, white peach, buttered almonds, a fine base of chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate is deep, full-bodied and has a fine core of ripe fruit, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is a riper styled wine, but it has personality to burn! 2017-2025. **92.**

Gamay

2015 Gamay Noir “Seven Springs Vineyard”- Evening Land Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2015 Gamay from Evening Land is a lovely, tart middleweight, offering up a pale ruby color and topping the scales at 12.3 percent octane. The wine’s bouquet is red fruity and

vivacious, offering up scents of cherries, cranberries, sandalwood, a bit of bonfire and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and complex, with modest tannins, vibrant acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. This is a livewire on the palate and a great companion at the table! 2017-2025. **89+**.

Syrah

2014 Syrah “Havlin Vineyard”- Franchere (Willamette Valley)

The 2014 Havlin Vineyard syrah from Mike Hinds has not lost a step since I last tasted it eighteen months ago. This is a nicely low octane (12.9 percent) and classically styled bottling, offering up a superb and smoky nose of cassis, black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, plenty of spice tones and a fine base of dark soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very transparent, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and balance on the complex and classy finish. This is still a properly young wine and needs some time in the cellar to fully blossom, but it is going to be excellent syrah once it has softened up a bit more. 2021-2045. **92**.

2009 XVII “Deux Vert Vineyard”- Biggio Hamina (Eola-Amity Hills)

The XVII bottling from the Deux Vert Vineyard was the only 2009 I tasted from Biggio Hamina that was sealed under natural cork and it is outstanding. This is primarily syrah (eighty-three percent), though this does not appear on the front label of the wine. It was co-fermented with seventeen percent viognier and aged for nearly five years in Oregon oak barrels prior to bottling in the spring of 2014. The wine is lovely, offering up a complex nose of cassis, pepper, violets, a fine base of soil, smoked meats, a touch of chocolate and a unique touch of spicy oak from the Oregon casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still a bit chewy, with a good core, blossoming complexity and a long, moderately tannic finish. I have no experience with syrah aged in cask for this period of time, but I really like how the wine has evolved on both the nose and palate with this extended *elevage*, though there is a bit of oak tannin to be worked through on the backend after that long in barrel. But, this is a good wine that will continue to drink nicely for many years to come, but may always have a bit of backend tannin. 2017-2025. **90**.

Pinot Noir

2015 Pinot Noir- Fossil and Fawn (Willamette Valley)

The 2015 Fossil and Fawn pinot noir hails from the fine Silvershot Vineyard. Like the 2015 bottling from Brianne Day, the Fossil and Fawn version shows the hydric stress issues that plagued vines in this dry-farmed vineyard in the torrid 2015 summer, as it only comes in at 12.1 percent octane, having not achieved a particularly noteworthy level of Brix. The wine is pale ruby in color, but offers up a pretty and quite complex nose of cherries, cranberries, woodsmoke, a hint of cola, fresh herbs and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and nicely soil-driven, with moderate depth at the core, nice intensity of flavor, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the youthful finish. This is modestly ripe, but shows signs of delivering a pretty flavorful glass of pinot with a few years' worth of bottle age. 2020-2040. **87+**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Havlin Vineyard”- Franchere (Willamette Valley)

The 2015 Havlin Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Mike Hinds is made entirely with whole clusters and was raised in older casks. It is a very limited release, as there were only two barrels produced in 2015, which comes in at a cool 12.7 percent octane. The bouquet is still

fairly primary, but shows fine potential in its blend of plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of duck and a topnote of Vosne spices. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip, nascent complexity and impressive length on the tangy and ripely tannic finish. This is still a puppy and needs some bottle age to really blossom, but it is going to be a very tasty bottle. An excellent Havlin Vineyard pinot from Mike Hinds! 2021-2050. **91+**.



The Maresh Vineyard in the Dundee Hills- planted in 1970 on “Franc de Pieds” original roots.

2015 Pinot Noir- Domaine Nicolas Jay (Willamette Valley)

The second pinot noir release from Domaine Nicolas Jay, the joint venture of Burgundian Jean-Nicolas Méo and American Jay Boberg, has been sourced from a wider range of vineyards than the 2014 version, and the team here has done an excellent job of managing the ripeness inherent in this vintage and the 2015 comes in at a very nicely measured thirteen percent octane. Like the 2014 version, this wine was raised in one-third new oak and offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, cola, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh nutmeg and a nice framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a sappy core, lovely soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This is really, really good and shows that Jean-Nicolas is fast learning the lay of the land in the Willamette Valley! 2022-2050. **92+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Holmes Gap Vineyard”- Biggio Hamina (Willamette Valley)

Biggio Hamina’s 2014 Holmes Gap Vineyard bottling of pinot noir comes in at a nicely cool thirteen percent in this warm vintage. The bouquet is very pretty and red fruity in

personality, offering up scents of strawberries, cherries, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, a good signature of soil and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, bright acids and good length and grip on the youthful and promising finish. This has fine structure and will need some time in the cellar, but I like the balance here very much and this is going to be very tasty when it is ready to drink! 2020-2050. **91+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Youngberg Hill Vineyard”- Biggio Hamina (McMinnville)

Happily, the 2014 Youngberg Hill Vineyard pinot noir from Biggio Hamina is bottled under natural cork, so the wine does not have the same screwcap issues as the 2009s from the winery. This cuvée comes in at an event thirteen percent alcohol and offers up a fine, youthful nose of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of fresh nutmeg, woodsmoke, a touch of mustard seed, a good base of soil tones and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, youthful and very promising finish. This has the nice ripe fruit of 2014, without getting too high in octane and should age long and gracefully. It is still a bit on the young side today for primetime drinking, but its potential is self-evident and this will be very tasty in three or four more years. Good juice. 2020-2045+. **90+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Vespidae”- J. K. Carriere (Willamette Valley)

The 2014 “Vespidae” bottling from Jim Prosser’s J. K. Carriere winery is a superb bottle in the making, but this pure and classy pinot is built for the cellar and deserves another six to eight years tucked away before it will truly start to stir. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, raised in just over twenty percent new oak, and bottled unfined and unfiltered. The bouquet is very pure and focused, offering up a fine blend of red plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, a fine base of soil, incipient meatiness, a touch of fresh sage and a discreet base of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and focused, and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This will be outstanding when it has blossomed and should age long and gracefully. Impressive juice. 2021-2055. **92**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Antoinette”- J. K. Carriere (Eola-Amity Hills)

The Antoinette cuvée from Jim Prosser hails from the oldest block of pinot noir vines in the Temperance Hill Vineyard, which were planted in 1979. This is one of the highest elevation and coolest sections of this vineyard. The wine is barrel-fermented with natural yeasts and raised in just under forty percent new oak (three new casks out of eight) and bottled unfined and unfiltered. The 2014 Antoinette is beautifully light in color and offers up a very classy, red fruity bouquet of red plums, pomegranate, fresh nutmeg, mustard seed, a complex base of soil, cedary wood and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully tangy, with a nice touch of sappiness in the core, with fine-grained tannins, excellent acids and a very long, focused and nascently complex finish. This will be a superb bottle in the fullness of time. 2022-2060+. **93+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Anderson Family Vineyard”- J. K. Carriere (Dundee Hills)

The Anderson Family Vineyard bottling from Jim Prosser is one of his smallest production pinots, with only two casks made of this wine in the 2014 vintage. These are twenty-four year-old Dijon 115 clones, which produces small clusters and smaller berries, delivering an ideal skin to juice ratio. Like all of Jim’s pinots, this is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised without new wood (one cask is a one wine barrel and the other is a two wine barrel). The bouquet is lovely and a bit more black fruity than these other two bottlings from J. K. Carriere,

offering up scents of plums, red and black cherries, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, fresh thyme, mustard seed and a hint of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, nicely structured and vivid, with a superb core of fruit, excellent transparency, fine-grained tannins and a long, perfectly balanced and nascently complex finish. This will be the sappiest of these three excellent 2014 pinot noirs from Jim Prosser when it is fully mature, but it will need a solid decade in the cellar to start to really blossom. Fine, fine juice. 2024-2065. **93+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Seven Springs Vineyard”- Evening Land Vineyards (Eola-Amity Hills)

This bottling of pinot noir from Evening Land hails from thirty year-old vines that have been planted on their *Franc de Pied* roots, rather than grafted onto American rootstocks. The wine is raised in thirty percent new oak and included about twenty-five percent whole clusters in 2014. The wine is a suave 13.1 percent octane and nicely light in color, delivering a nascently complex bouquet of cherries, red plums, volcanic soils, a touch of cocoa powder and a fair bit of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and a bit new oaky in personality, with a good core, respectable soil signature (though some of this is lost under the wood), moderate tannins and a long, tangy, slightly four-square finish. This is a good, solid wine, but stylistically it reminds me quite a bit of the more chunky wines produced in the 1980s in the Willamette Valley and is not quite as refined as so many of the new releases out there from the top win growers in the region. 2020-2040+. **88**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Seven Springs Vineyard” La Source- Evening Land (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2014 La Source bottling of pinot from Seven Springs Vineyard is Evening Land’s top pinot noir cuvée. The wine up an excellent bouquet of red plums, cherries, incipient notes of cola, a bit of meatiness, a fine base of soil, a touch of fresh bay and a very well-done framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, transparent and beautifully balanced, with lovely mid-palate depth, suave tannins, good acids and a long, complex and classy finish. This is a serious bottle of pinot noir that could do with a couple of years to really start to blossom, but whose true apogee is a decade down the road. Fine juice. 2019-2045+. **93**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Eyrie Vineyards

The 2014 Willamette Valley bottling of pinot from Eyrie Vineyards is primarily from estate grown fruit (from organically-certified vineyards), with about thirty-five percent of the blend hailing from a few other organically-farmed vineyards that the winery has purchased fruit from for many years. A little under five percent of the cuvée were whole clusters, with the rest destemmed, and the wine was fermented with indigenous yeasts. The 2014 comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a still fairly tight nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a nice base of soil and a bit of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still quite tightly-knit, with solid mid-palate depth, firm, well-integrated tannins and good length and grip on the slightly chunky finish. This is not overly elegant out of the blocks, but it may well blossom in that direction with some extended bottle age. 2022-2045. **87+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Sisters Vineyard”- Eyrie Vineyards (Dundee Hills)

The Sisters Vineyard is one of the younger plantations in the Eyrie portfolio, having first been cleared and planted in 1989 and with further vines going in over the years, with a wide range of varieties planted in the vineyard. The vineyard sits between 220 and 330 feet above sea level, on red Jory Volcanic soils. The pinot noir here is all planted on *Francs de Pieds*. The 2014 Sisters pinot tips the scales at an even thirteen percent octane and was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in twelve percent new wood. The wine offers up a pure and youthfully complex nose of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, a touch of raw cocoa, wild bay and a delicate framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and nicely structured, with a

very good core of fruit, fine soil signature and impressive length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This wine needs plenty of time in the cellar, but it is going to be excellent when it is ready to drink. 2024-2060. **92.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Outcrop Vineyard”- Eyrie Vineyards (Dundee Hills)

The Outcrop Vineyard at Eyrie was planted between 1982 and 2000, with the parcel lying just above the original Eyrie vineyard that David Lett started planting in 1965. The winery was able to buy this small vineyard in 2011 and produced their first bottling of Outcrop in the 2012 vintage. The site faces north, giving it a cooler microclimate than many in the Dundee Hills, and this is reflected in the thirteen percent octane of the 2014 bottling. The wine again was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in twelve percent new wood. The bouquet is pure, red fruity and refined, offering up scents of cherries, a hint of blood orange, gamebird, lovely soil tones, rose petal, fresh herb tones and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, soil-driven and nascently complex, with a good core, firm, well-integrated tannins and good length and grip on the primary finish. This too is pretty bound up in its structural elements right now, but with sufficient bottle age, it should blossom nicely and be a very tasty bottle of pinot noir. 2024-2055. **91.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Zena Springs Vineyard”- Franchere (Eola-Amity Hills)

I was very happy to have a second chance to look at both the 2014 Zena Springs and Zenith Vineyard bottlings of pinot from Mike Hinds, as I tasted these back when they were first released back in the spring of 2016. The 2014 Zena Springs comes in at 12.6 percent octane and is blossoming nicely on the nose, offering up scents of black cherries, red plums, a touch of cocoa, woodsmoke, beautiful spice tones and a fine signature of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured still, with a good core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, youthful finish. As I noted eighteen months ago, this is not overly transparent in style right now, but this may yet come with further bottle age, as the nose is already starting to open up very nicely and the palate may well follow in due course. 2020-2040. **89+.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Zenith Vineyard”- Franchere (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2014 Zenith Vineyard cuvée of pinot noir from Franchere is riper than the Zena Springs, coming in at a robust 13.9 percent alcohol, and is a wine built for the cellar and still in need of some hibernation time. The wine is ripe and black fruity on the nose, offering up scents of black cherries, chocolate, a bit of bonfire, good spice tones, dark soil and a touch of balsam bough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and a bit more extracted in style than the other pinot noir bottlings from Franchere, with plenty of stuffing at the core, ripe tannins and very good balance on the long and focused finish. This needs time, but will be a tasty bottle when it is ready to go. 2022-2040+. **89.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Goodfellow Family Cellars

The Willamette Valley bottling of pinot nor from Marcus Goodfellow hails from three different vineyards that he also produces single vineyard wines from: Durant, Whistling Ridge and Bishop Creek Vineyards. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and includes a percentage of whole clusters, but sees no new oak during its *elevage* of fifteen months. The 2014 version is pretty ripe at 13.8 percent, but also a lovely, light ruby color and offers up an excellent bouquet of cherries, strawberries, mustard seed, woodsmoke, a touch of cinnamon from the whole clusters and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and surprisingly powerful in personality (given its fairly light color), with a good core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and primary finish. This is still very early days for this wine, which needs at least four or five years in the cellar to blossom, but all of the

constituent components are in place and this should be very tasty when it is really ready to drink. 2021-2050. **91+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Durant Vineyard”- Goodfellow Family Cellars (Dundee Hills)

The Durant Vineyard, located in the Dundee Hills, was first planted in 1973. This is a warmer microclimate, with its due south exposition and the soils are volcanic. The 2014 bottling from Marcus Goodfellow is pretty ripe at 14.2 percent, but 2014 was a hot growing season and the wine offers up a refined bouquet of cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, a lovely base of soil, a touch of gamebird, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty ripe, with a good core, fine soil signature, firm tannins and very good length and grip on the focused, nascently complex and gently warm finish. This has the balance to age very nicely, but I would have loved to have seen it come in a half point lower in octane, as some nuance has been sacrificed to the hot growing season. 2022-2050. **89+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Whistling Ridge Vineyard”- Goodfellow Family Cellars (Ribbon Ridge)

The pinot noir in the Whistling Ridge Vineyard was planted in 1990 (with ten different clones), so they were getting into their sweet spot as they closed in their quarter century mark in 2014. This is one of the lighter colored 2014 pinots from Marcus Goodfellow, having been raised in twenty-five percent new oak (puncheons, rather than smaller barrels) and was bottled unfined and unfiltered. The wine is excellent, offering up a complex and very refined bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, a bit of blood orange, gorgeous soil tones, roses, a hint of spice and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very transparent, with a fine structure, good depth at the core, fine-grained tannins and good length and bounce on the nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is still a young wine, but it is going to be outstanding when it starts to truly blossom. I love how light on its feet and transparent it is in the warm year of 2014, with this wine’s 13.8 percent octane not evident in the least. This will be outstanding with a few years in the cellar and a long distance runner. 2020-2055+. **93**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Classico”- Ponzi Vineyards (Screwcap)

Some of the most beautiful Oregon pinot noirs I have ever tasted came from Dick Ponzi between 1985 and 1990, but I had lost track of how the winery had evolved in recent times and had not tasted a Ponzi wine in probably twenty years. Sadly, this 2014 bottling was pretty pedestrian, with high alcohol, the spit-polished palate and cookie-cutter bouquet of cultured yeasts and other cellar modifications. The simple nose is an anonymous blend of black cherries, balsamic tones, woodsmoke and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep and velvety on the attack, with soft tannins, moderate mid-palate depth (this is more about glossy up front fruit than mid-palate intensity) and a reasonably long, hot and gently spoofed finish. I ordered this by the glass at the family’s bistro in Dundee and could not even finish a third of a glass! Soulless juice and very disappointing, given the historical importance of this estate. 2017-2025. **83**.

2014 Pinot Noir- Salem Wine Company (Eola-Amity Hills)

The Salem Wine Company is a project of Raja Parr and Sashi Moorman (proprietors of Sandhi and Domaine de la Côte in the Santa Barbara area of California, and now Evening Land in Oregon). Their 2014 pinot noir comes in at 13.5 percent octane and is beautifully light ruby in color. The wine offers up a fine, red fruity bouquet of cherries, beetroot, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil, fresh herbs and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and tangy, with a good core, moderate tannins and very good focus and grip on the long, vibrant and youthful finish. This is approachable today, but could really do with a few

years in the cellar to resolve a bit of the tannin and allow the wine to fully blossom. Good juice. 2020-2045. **90.**

2013 Pinot Noir “Bishop Creek Vineyard”- Goodfellow Family Cellars (Yamhill-Carlton)

There were only three barrels of the Bishop Creek pinot from Marcus Goodfellow in the 2013 vintage, so I felt very honored when he sent me a bottle to taste. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent octane, included about fifty percent whole clusters, was raised in about a third new oak and offers up a simply beautiful young nose of red plums, cherries, raw cocoa, a complex base of soil, a touch of thyme, gentle vanillin oak and a topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and far more closed than the nose suggests, with a fine core of fruit, tangy acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, moderately tannic and complex finish. This is a promising wine, but it has not yet absorbed fully its new oak on the palate and needs a bit more bottle age to do so properly. Once this has occurred, the wine will be very tasty. 2020-2050. **92.**



Evening falling on one of the Domaine Drouhin vineyards in the Dundee Hills.

2012 Pinot Noir “Zenith Vineyard”- Biggio Hamina (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2012 Pinot Noir “Zenith Vineyard” from Biggio Hamina included eighty percent whole clusters and was raised for twenty-four months of *elevage* prior to bottling. The wine comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a fine nose of cherries, beetroot, a touch of

cocoa powder, a nice dollop of soil and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely structured, with a good core, firm, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is not showing a ton of complexity right now, but my gut feeling is that it is simply still too young and there will be more nuance to emerge here once the wine has truly blossomed. Give it another three to four years in the cellar. 2020-2045+. **88+**.

2012 Pinot Noir “Caroline”- Biggio Hamina (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2012 Cuvée Caroline is the most limited bottling in the Biggio Hamina lineup, as it has only been produced in the 2010 and 2012 vintages, from a selection from the Zenith Vineyard and its volcanic soils. The wine is one hundred percent whole cluster, fermented with indigenous yeasts, bottled unfined and unfiltered and comes in at thirteen percent octane. There were only one hundred and four cases produced in 2012. The wine offers up a nascently complex bouquet of black cherries, a touch of plum, a nice youthful dollop of stems, dark soil tones, a bit of savory elements, vanillin oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a good core of fruit, fine-grained tannins, good focus and a long, tightly-knit and promising finish. I am guessing there is a fair bit of new wood used for this bottling, as the backend shows just a touch of wood tannin that still needs to be integrated, but the stuffing is there and it will only be a matter of time until these tannins are absorbed. Like the 2012 Zenith Vineyard bottling, this wine is still young and adolescent, so more cellaring is definitely needed. It should prove to be very good juice when ready, and perhaps outstanding, but it is so hunkered down at the present time that I do not have a real sense of what its eventual shape will look like. 2022-2050. **89-92+?**

2011 Pinot Noir- Thomas Vineyards (Dundee Hills) Magnum

The 2011 pinot noir from John Thomas is a very fine bottle in the making, but out of magnum it is still on the young side and deserves more time in the cellar. This is a cooler vintage in Oregon (as it was in California as well) and the wines are still on the young side, but in regular-sized formats they are starting to blossom nicely. However, in magnums, time is still needed. The classy bouquet here wafts from the glass in a blend of strawberries, beetroot, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, lovely spice tones and a very discreet framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and soil-driven in personality, with a fine core, impressive nascent complexity, moderate tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. This is lovely juice, but it is still a puppy and patently deserves at least another five or six years in the cellar to more fully blossom. 2022-2055+. **93.**

2009 Pinot Noir “Deux Vert Vineyard” Cuvée Katri- Biggio Hamina (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2009 Pinot Noir “Deux Vert Vineyard- Cuvée Katri” from Biggio Hamina is a very limited release, as there was only one barrel made of this bottling. This cuvée included forty percent whole clusters. I am not sure if the entire twenty-five cases were sealed under screwcap, but my sample bottle was under screwcap and a bit reductive when first opened, but eventually blossomed to deliver a fine bouquet of black cherries, cola, a bit of bonfire, lovely spice tones, soil and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the fairly long, moderately tannic finish. This wine opened up very nicely on the nose with extended aeration, but is a bit tensile on the palate and clamped down on the finish and I wonder if this is from the closure. Structurally, this wine could use a few more years in the cellar to blossom, but I worry what will happen three

years down the road under the screw, given its overtly reductive personality when first opened and poured. That said, the raw materials here are first class. 2020-2040? **88-92?**

2009 Pinot Noir “Zenith Vineyard” Cuvée Lucca- Biggio Hamina (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2009 Cuvée Lucca from the Zenith Vineyard is also sealed under screwcap, so I gave it a good hour in decanter prior to tasting the wine and there was less signs of reduction on the nose as a result. Again, there was only a single cask produced of this bottling, which was made including thirty percent whole clusters and comes in at an even thirteen percent octane. The wine is showing a bit more red fruity and pleasingly autumnal personality than the Cuvée Katri, offering up a complex nose of cherries, beetroot, forest floor, cola, a good base of soil tones, gentle savory tones and a fair bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is more reductive than on the nose, with its full-bodied, complex and velvety format a bit pinched on the backend, with some overt bitterness and slightly vegetal tones that are a result of the closure. As is the case with the '09 Cuvée Katri, the 2009 Cuvée Lucca is a very serious bottle of pinot noir that has been undone by a less than serious closure. Given how much air I gave this wine, I have to suspect that at age eight, the reduction is locked in and permanent. 2017-2035. **87** (with at least 92 point raw materials).

THE UNDERRATED AND ELEGANT 1971 BORDEAUX VINTAGE



The 1971 vintage in Bordeaux is one of those overlooked, younger sibling vintages that was lost in the market excitement that surrounded the 1970 vintage when it was released. However, the 1971s were another very strong set of wines, and like many of the more middleweight vintages of this era in Bordeaux, the wines have aged far longer and more gracefully than would have ever been imagined when they were young, and today, with the vintage at age forty-six, the top wines continue to cruise along with great style and breed and show no signs of slowing down anytime soon. It was a short crop on the Gironde in '71, as the flowering in June occurred under unsettled weather, so that the yields this year were fully forty percent less than the very generous (at that time) crop of 1970. By the end of the decade, 1971 would share the distinction with the very minor vintage of 1977 as the smallest crop size of the entire decade. From the outset, the 1971s were a perfumed and seductive lot of claret, with the best wines of the vintage offering up early accessibility, silky textures from relatively low acidity, and plenty of elegance, complexity and drinking pleasure. It is hard to imagine it today, when many of those adjectives would be equally applicable to the 1970 Bordeaux vintage, but back in their early days, the 1970s were far more bound up in their sturdier structural elements and did not possess anywhere near the same degree of early and rather complete drinkability that the 1971s exhibited almost from release. Consequently, some wine merchants specializing in

Bordeaux back in the day actually touted the 1971s as superior to the previous vintage's wines, though with the passage of time, this has proven to be a rather inaccurate assessment of the relative quality of the two vintages.

The spring of 1971 did not help get this vintage out of the blocks in style, as it was cool, damp and good spring weather was very, very late in coming on the Gironde. June was not much better than the previous couple of months here, hence the poor flowering later in that month, but from the end of June forwards, the growing season was exemplary in the region. Temperatures were warm and the days were sunny, but nothing torrid, so that by the time the *Bordelais* were back from their August vacations, the weather was ideal and the grapes ripened completely in the beautiful month of September. Picking began in early October and everything was brought in under ideal conditions, so the only real caveat about the vintage out of the blocks was that there was not going to be a whole lot of wine, particularly when viewed in the wake of the very generous yields of the 1970 vintage. In fact, the very limited crop size of 1971 would eventually lead to the Bordeaux market melting down in the mid-1970s, as *négociants* in Bordeaux took advantage of the increased demand in the market brought about by the fine 1970 vintage (after three modest to downright poor years between 1967 and 1969) to hike prices for futures significantly for the 1971 vintage. No doubt this decision to raise prices dramatically for the '71s was at least partially due to the short crop in this year, but also, the very flattering style of the vintage out of the blocks allowed for a bit of extra enthusiasm on the part of the trade when it came time to decide on pricing.

As Michael Broadbent would write about the 1971 vintage in the late 1980s, the vintage was "overpriced at the start and undervalued (ever) since." The price hikes that château owners and well-connected *négociants* orchestrated for the 1971s would come back to bite them in the very near future, as this pricing would cause the first substantial cracks in the foundation of the Bordeaux market, and when this was followed up with even higher prices for the decidedly inferior 1972 Bordeaux vintage, the market flat out collapsed, with prices falling for virtually any vintage of Bordeaux still in the pipeline starting in 1973, and it would really not be until the latter half of the decade of the 1970s that a semblance of stability returned to the Bordeaux market. The "Bordeaux Crash" of 1973 and 1974 resulted in a lot of good, slightly older claret being pumped into the market, as cash-strapped merchants and *négociants* sought to find buyers for anything older in their inventory as they struggled to pay for overpriced 1972 claret that no one wanted to buy and which they were committed to pay for. What eventually happened to all those cases of 1972 Bordeaux is a bit of a mystery, but I imagine that the wines slowly trickled out of *négociant* cellars to fill wine lists across France at rock bottom prices over the coming half dozen years, but in the meantime, merchants had to unload far more inventory of 1970s, 1971s and older vintages at very low prices to try and generate a bit of cash flow to pay for the overpriced '72s. The amount of economic disruption of the Bordeaux market at this time cannot be overstated, with many long-time *négociants* in the city going under or changing hands, and many a château also finding its way onto the selling block at this time. For wine collectors who happened to have some spare cash, it was a great time to be buying claret in quantity, as prices had really collapsed, but most of the inventory snapped up during the crash hailed from the 1970, 1966 or older vintages, and many of the 1971s were unfairly lumped together with the truly dismal 1972s in the minds of collectors at this time and were paid scant attention by buyers.

Given the ancillary role played in the start of the economic collapse of the Bordeaux market by the 1971 vintage, it is understandable that the wines are not really remembered all that fondly by folks who were in the wine trade at the time. In those days, there were not the same plethora of publications reporting on and journalists hovering around each new vintage on the Gironde to try and give (relatively) independent reports on the potential quality of the new vintage in Bordeaux, so with a bit of behind the scenes “group think” on the part of Bordeaux merchants, it was possible to spin the new vintage of 1971 in a very positive light. And the short crop was certainly a reasonable explanation to hang on the price hikes that were universally taken by *négociants* and estate owners for their 1971s. Given that the 1971 clarets were indeed very good, as well as quite forward in personality, it was not all that hard to generate at least some initial positive feedback for the vintage when the wines began to ship to stores and restaurants a bit further down the pipeline. But, as time went by and members of the trade began to realize that the 1970 vintage was both cheaper and even better in quality- at least for their long-term prospects- most savvy merchants turned their buying attention back to the 1970 vintage and the market structures started to buckle. When the market eventually crashed with the cold shoulder turned to the 1972s, it pulled down the reputation of the 1971 Bordeaux vintage along with it, which was rather unfair, given that the wines were actually very good. From that point forward, the vintage descended into relative obscurity and has enjoyed sleeper status ever since.

Today, the top 1971 wines continue to cruise along at their apogees of peak drinkability and are one of the most enjoyable mature claret vintages for current consumption. There are more forward middleweights, such as Haut-Bailly, that have probably been fully mature for several decades now and will require drinking up in the relatively near future, but most of the top successes in 1971 are still right smack dab in the middle of their plateaus and can look forward to at least a couple more decades of fine drinking ahead of them. At age forty-six, the top wines are very elegant, pure and complex, though not necessarily blockbusters of stuffing in the mid-palate, with tannins that have pretty much melted away by now, leaving wines of beautiful harmony and silken mouthfeel. The vintage was characterized as quite low in acidity when the wines were first released (and unlikely to make old bones for this reason, as well as their fairly modest tannin levels out of the blocks), but at this most recent tasting of the vintage, low acidity did not seem to be particularly evident in many of the wines, which showed lovely vibrancy and a good spine of tangy acidity. The vintage was touted as strongest on the Right Bank and in the Graves, and this still seems to be the case, though a few of the very best wines of the vintage (such as Château Latour) did hail from the Left Bank. But, given the difficulty of still finding bottles from 1971, given the combination of the very short crop levels and the very early accessibility that the vintage demonstrated, it is hard these days to put together a very comprehensive look at the vintage if one does not already have many of the bottles tucked away in the cellar, as so many have simply been drunk up over the years and are no longer available in the market.

For this report, I have augmented the notes I have from recent bottles of 1971 Bordeaux with recollections of other important wines from the vintage, that I have not tasted in more than a decade, but which are also important wines in this vintage. As I have only tasted nineteen different wines in recent times, the report is not as broad as I typically like it to be on a given vintage, but with the aforementioned difficulties of finding bottles in the market these days, I am

very happy to at least have notes on these most recent 1971s. That said, I have drunk a much wider array of 1971s in the past, as this is a vintage that I have often bought and consumed with great pleasure over the years, having been attracted back in the day to the vintage's stylish, forward personality, and its relative value *vis à vis* other mature vintages from the same era. So despite not having recent notes on several important Left Bank '71s, such as Latour or Pichon-Lalande, these are wines I know very well from all of the past bottles I have drunk of the two wines and include my older impressions on the wines for those who may own or have the good fortune to come across bottles in the market. In a nutshell, the 1971 Bordeaux vintage is one of impeccable balance, and this characteristic is as evident today as was the case back in the late 1970s, when the wines first started to drink with generosity. It is an old-fashioned vintage in that most of the wines are fairly low in alcohol, and one can expect most bottles to be around the twelve percent range, give or take a few tenths of a percentage, depending on how generous the cellar team might have been with chapitalization at the time. They harken back to an older era in Bordeaux- one that I am sorry is now nearly extinct- when the region focused on wines of complexity, elegance and balance, rather than aiming for some sort of Frankenstein level of power. And lest we forget, despite the vintage having been overpriced out of the blocks, it still offers relative value compared to the prices on the Gironde today, if the wines can be found.

In the notes that follow, I have included observations on some of these 1971s that I drank with a bit of frequency back in the day, but have not been lucky enough to cross paths with in the last few years, just to give readers a bit more background on the vintage. Those notes are in *italics* to set them apart from the recently-tasted wines, and do not have any score. It is interesting as I look back through my files, that several of my favorite producers' wines I have never crossed paths with from the 1971 vintage, so I have no notes at all on First Growths such as Mouton and Lafite from this year, as well as old standbys like Vieux Château Certan, Lynch-Bages, Beychevelle, Gruaud-Larose, Cantemerle, La Lagune, Domaine de Chevalier, Pape-Clément or the various Leoville estates. Given how much 1971 claret I have drunk through the years, I find it surprising that I have not drunk those wines in recent times, but I suppose this just further underscores how their availability was affected by the short yields and the disruptions of the Bordeaux market collapse in the mid-1970s. On the other hand, it is almost embarrassing how often I have drunk wines like Ducru, Magdelaine, Palmer, Haut-Brion and Trotanoy from 1971 in the last couple of years, which I guess shows where my heart truly lies in this vintage!

Pomerol

1971 Château la Conseillante

The 1971 la Conseillante is an absolutely beautiful example of this elegant vintage and this even more elegant wine. The mature and perfumed nose wafts from the glass in a classic blend of raspberries, blood orange, woodsmoke, a touch of olive, cigar ash, espresso, gravelly soil tones and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety, with a very suave attack, superb complexity and focus, a fine core and a very long, refined and fully resolved finish. This wine has probably been ready to drink for twenty-five years, but it is so beautifully balanced that it will continue to cruise along in its plateau for at least another couple of decades. A superb wine. 2017-2035+. **93.**

1971 Château Latour à Pomerol

The 1971 is one of my favorite vintages of Latour à Pomerol for current drinking. It does not possess the same depth and grandeur as the stunning 1970, but this is no weak-kneed vintage

at this fine property and the wine is now fully mature and at its apogee of peak drinkability. The beautifully complex nose offers up scents of plums, cherries, chocolate, black truffles, dark soil tones, a touch of nutskin and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, focused and beautifully refined, with a fine core, lovely transparency, melting tannins and superb balance on the long, seamless and very complex finish. Truly a lovely vintage of Latour à Pomerol. 2016-2035+. **92.**

1971 Château Pétrus

I have not drunk a bottle of the 1971 Pétrus in many a year, but this has always been one of the very best wines of the entire vintage and I have immensely enjoyed the wine on the occasions when I have been fortunate enough to drink it. It is a beautifully perfumed and velvety example of Pétrus, and quite similar stylistically to the more powerful, but equally classic 1970, and more refined than wines such as the 1966. I have no doubt that this remains one of the very top two or three wines from 1971 and pristine bottles should be in a very similar stage of development to the '71 Cheval Blanc and still have at least a quarter century of life ahead of them.

1971 Château Rouget

The 1971 Château Rouget is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a meaty and plummy profile, still a bit of tannin and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. The quite complex bouquet offers up a mature and nicely tertiary blend of roasted plums, black cherries, sweet cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, plenty of meatiness, chocolate, cigar ash and a touch of paraffin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a chocolaty core of fruit, melted tannins, good focus and grip and a long, complex and nicely soil-driven finish. This is nicely broad-shouldered and very tasty. 2017-2030+. **90.**

1971 Château Trotanoy

The '71 Trotanoy is a beautiful example of the vintage that has been fully mature for a couple of decades already, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. This is a perfect example of how wines of impeccable balance cruise on and on at their apogees, even when there is not a preponderance of tannin remaining in the wine. The nose of the '71 Trotanoy delivers a perfumed and *à point* blend of black plums, black cherries, tobacco, black truffles, fresh herbs, a lovely of gravelly soil component, a dollop of red curry, nutskins and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and velvety on the attack, with a lovely core of pure fruit, great focus and detail and a long, suave and beautifully poised finish. Just a lovely vintage of Trotanoy and one of my favorite wines from this underrated vintage. 2013-2030+. **92+.**

St. Émilion

1971 Château Canon

The 1971 Canon was served alongside the 1970 at a double blind tasting recently and it showed very well indeed. The nose is fully mature and quite elegant at age thirty-seven, as it offers up scents of red cherries, menthol, nutskins, coffee, complex soil tones and gentle notes of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and silky, with good, but not great mid-palate depth, fine length and focus on the rather gentle and now seamless finish. There is not a lot of grip or tannin remaining, and this was never a high acid vintage of Canon to begin with, so I would opt for drinking up the 1971 in regular-sized bottles over the next decade or so. 2008-2020. **88.**



The winding, walled-in and narrow roads up on top of the plateau of St. Émilion.

1971 Château Cheval Blanc

The 1971 Cheval Blanc is simply a beautiful example of the vintage that remains at its absolute apogee of drinkability and offers up glorious complexity on both the nose and palate. The deep, pure and very vibrant bouquet delivers a superb aromatic constellation of cherries, pomegranate, spiced meats, menthol, tobacco, a touch of nutskin, a complex base of soil tones, cedar and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and velvety on the attack, with a superb core, outstanding transparency, tangy acids, melted tannins and superb focus and grip on the very, very long and perfectly balanced finish. This is unequivocally one of the wines of the vintage in 1971! 20017-2040+. **95+**.

1971 Château Figeac (served from magnum)

The 1971 Figeac is just a tad riper than the more classic vintages of this era at the estate, and while it is a very, very good bottle of wine (particularly in magnum), I had hoped for just a touch more precision on the palate. The nose is deep, very complex and almost exotic in its ripeness, as it offers up scents of raspberries, cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, summer truffles, iron soil tones, a touch of nutskin and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with beautiful complexity, a very velvety palate impression and a very long, pure and seamless finish. The ripeness here adds just a touch of jamminess on the attack that keeps the score down a bit, but this is a lovely bottle of Figeac for current drinking, and which is

at a particularly good point in magnum. In magnum, it still has decades of life ahead of it. 2013-2050. **92+**.

1971 Château Magdelaine

I have consistently enjoyed the 1971 vintage of Magdelaine over the last half dozen years, and this most recent bottle was again, simply outstanding. The wine is now at its absolute apogee of peak maturity and offers up an utterly refined and perfumed bouquet of cherries, limestone soil tones, blood orange, woodsmoke, a touch of sweet bell pepper, cigar wrapper and a bit of St. Émilien nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full, plush and velvety, with great purity and focus, a sappy core, outstanding soil signature, lovely acids and great focus and grip on the long, pure and complex finish. This wine is just a beautiful drink today, but still has plenty of life ahead of it! 2017-2040. **94**.

1971 Château Troplong-Mondot

I had never tasted a bottle of Troplong-Mondot from this era and was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the 1971. It is not a great wine (this is not a top *terroir* in St. Émilien after all), but the wine has stood the test of time and is still pretty tasty at age forty-six. The nose offers up a tertiary blend of roasted black plums, cigar ash, *sous bois*, coffee, smoke and a bit of chipotle pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, plush and completely resolved, with modest remaining structure, but still a good core, melted tannins and pretty decent length and grip on the slightly four-square finish. Really not bad and with another decade of life still in it. 2017-2027. **87**.

Graves

1971 Château Haut-Bailly

The 1971 Haut-Bailly has been fully mature for decades, but the wine is starting to get closer to the far side of its plateau and will probably start its gentle decline in the not too distant future. Today, the wine remains a beautiful and complete middleweight, offering up a pure and perfumed nose of plums, mocha, Cuban cigar, a hint of red curry, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones and a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and silky, with solid depth at the core, melted tannins and very good length on the wide open and fully mature finish. I would be inclined to drink this very pretty wine up over the next dozen years or so in regular sized formats, as I think it is getting towards the end of its beautiful run of peak maturity. Good juice. 2017-2030. **89**.

1971 Château Haut-Brion

The 1971 Haut-Brion continues to drink beautifully and remains right in the center of its plateau of peak maturity. I have drunk this wine on four or five occasions in the last couple of years and it has always performed with distinction, but this most recent bottle in late August was one of the best I have tasted in recent times, with a bit more backend grip and structural chassis that has been evident in some of the other, perfumed and very velvety examples that I have enjoyed. This most recent bottle was stellar, wafting from the glass in a complex and classic Haut-Brion blend of cassis, charred tobacco, a nice touch of meatiness, singed soil tones and a very smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly suave on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, impeccable balance and a very, very long and focused finish that closes with still a faint touch of backend tannin. Most recent bottles have been around 93 points, but this was even better! 2017-2040+. **94+**.

1971 Château La Mission Haut-Brion

The 1971 vintage of La Mission Haut-Brion has been drinking beautifully since the very first bottle I tasted, all the way back in the mid-1980s, and the wine continues to just cruise along as if time will never touch it! The bouquet is deep, pure and more refined than the very strong La Tour Haut-Brion that preceded it at our recent tasting, offering up a complex constellation of cassis, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a discreet touch of La Mission's medicinal side, spiced meats and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still shows a lovely sense of sappiness at the core, with great focus and grip, melted tannins, good acids and outstanding backend soil drive on the long, complex and classy finish. A fine, fine La Mission at its apogee. 2017-2040. **94.**

1971 Château La Tour Haut-Brion

The 1971 La Tour Haut-Brion is also outstanding, with a bit less refinement than its older sibling, but all of the character one expected from this wine in its heyday. The bouquet is complex and vibrant, offering up scents of cassis, a bit of leather, charred earth, cigar ash, medicinal tones, a nice touch of meatiness and an excellent base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively focused, with a good core, still a bit of backend tannin, good acids and fine balance on the long and complex finish. A fine bottle with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2017-2040. **92+.**

Margaux and the Southern Médoc

1971 Château Giscours

Giscours was so good in the sixties and seventies, so it is no surprise that their 1971 continues to drink very nicely. The wine offers up that classic, black fruity and smoky Giscours nose from its golden era, wafting from the glass in a fine and *à point* blend of cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a bit of remaining tobacco leaf, smokiness and a dollop of coffee grounds in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and nicely resolved, with a good core, melted tannins and very good length and grip on the complex finish. Like the '71 Palmer, this is a wine where the charge of low acidity leveled at the vintage in general can be sensed a bit on the easy-going backend. But, this still has plenty of vigor and is very enjoyable to drink. 2017-2030+. **90.**

1971 Château Margaux

The 1971 vintage of Château Margaux does not have a great reputation, but I was quite impressed with the quality of this wine. I had never had a chance to taste it before, but preferred it to vintages such as '66 and '70 at this First Growth. The bouquet is deep and quite refined, offering up scents of baked red fruit, a touch of orange peel, a fine base of chalky soil tones, cigar ash, hints of summer truffle and a lovely topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a plush core, fine focus and grip, melted tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is really a lovely example of Margaux (and one of the best from the latter Ginestet era here) and the 1971 vintage, which has been unjustly maligned for a long, long time. 2017-2035+. **92.**

1971 Château Palmer

The 1971 vintage of Palmer has always been a very silky, seductive example of the property and the wine has drunk beautifully since the early 1990s. In our August lineup, this was probably the only wine (along with the Haut-Bailly) where one could sense a bit lower level of acidity than the others in the tasting, but it was far from "acid deficient" as the vintage had been labeled in the distant past. The wine is all suave silkiness on the palate and beautifully perfumed

on the nose, offering up a bouquet of black cherries, mulberries, cigar ash, a nice touch of spices meats, dark soil tones, a hint of sweet bell pepper and a nice touch of blood orange poking out in the upper register with a bit of extended aeration. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and velvety, with a good core, melted tannins and lovely focus and grip on the pure and complex finish. This is a lovely bottle. 2017-2030+. **91.**



Château Margaux, home to one of the unsung successes of the 1971 vintage.

St. Julien

1971 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1971 Ducru-Beaucaillou is a beautiful wine, with the bottle at our August tasting a tad more delicate in personality than the last couple that I have drunk, but with great harmony and complexity. This bottle was the quintessential middleweight, offering up a beautifully vibrant and complex bouquet of cherries, red currants, cigar wrapper, a nice dollop of spiced meats, a superbly complex base of soil and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and utterly refined, with a suave attack, good, but not great depth at the core, fine intensity of flavor, melted tannins and really impressive, tangy acidity giving the wine shape and lift on the very long and complex finish. I could drink this wine anytime! 2017-2030+. **93.**

Pauillac

1971 Les Forts de Latour (served from magnum)

In my experience, Château Latour made the finest wine on the Left Bank in the 1971 vintage, and even their second wine, Les Forts de Latour, is excellent in this overlooked year. Out of magnum, the wine is absolutely singing today, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of sweet cassis, cigar smoke, a touch of red berry, menthol, tobacco leaf, a fine base of dark soil tones and a hint of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very suave on the attack, with superb focus and balance, melted tannins and excellent length and grip on the poised and *à point* finish. 2015-2040. **93.**

1971 Château Latour

I was really surprised as I went through my recent notes that I had not tasted the 1971 Latour in several years. This has been one of my favorite vintages of Latour from this era at the property and I have drunk more than a dozen bottles of it over the years, and until more recent times, this was a vintage of Latour (along with the very underrated 1964) that one could still buy at auction for a fairly reasonable price. The wine has long been considered the wine of the vintage on the Left Bank, and this is a very accurate description of the wine, as the note above on the recent magnum of the property's second wine will demonstrate. It is a deep, complex and very pure Latour that still retained plenty of old school Latour structure when I last drank it, and I have little doubt that it remains a terrific wine for drinking over the next quarter century or more.

1971 Château Pichon-Lalande

This was another 1971 that I was sure I had drunk more recently, but I could not find any recent notes on the wine. It too is a very strong example of the vintage, with the silky personality of so many of the top wines of the year very much in evidence in its personality. The contemporary reports on the vintage indicated that the merlot in particular on the Right Bank had problems with flowering, so perhaps this is a vintage of Pichon-Lalande that relied more on cabernet sauvignon than was typical in a perfect growing season, but I have not seen any evidence that this was indeed the case with the '71 here. Based on my previous notes, this wine should be in the same stage of its evolution as the Palmer today, with no rough edges, lovely complexity and a very elegant palate impression. I have no doubt it continues to drink beautifully.

Ste. Estèphe

1971 Château Montrose

I find the 1971 vintage to be so underrated these days and many of the top wines from this vintage, such as the Montrose, are still great sleepers in the market. This most recent bottle of '71 Montrose was wide open, complex and at its absolute apogee, wafting from the glass in a classic aromatic constellation of sweet cassis, cigar ash, a bit of saddle leather, dark soil tones, a touch of currant leaf and a nice topnote of black truffles. With air, the wine starts to show a nice touch of mineral salts as well. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with really beautiful balance and resolution, a good core, excellent soil signature and a very long, meltingly tannic and utterly poised finish. Just a lovely bottle of fully mature claret from the previous golden era at Montrose. 2017-2040. **92+.**

THE SUMMER OF 2017 NORTH AMERICAN WINES



I have come to really look forward to my bi-annual reports on North American wines in the last few years, as more and more producers here are crafting wines of balance and purity and I find that the percentage of my own personal cellar being taken up by American wines has grown exponentially in the last several years as a result of this exciting trend. While there remain plenty of Leviathan wines produced out west (plenty of these hailing from the once fertile soils of Napa Valley) in the cynical style of the late 1990s and early 2000s, it seems to me that this is a school that is definitely losing traction in the marketplace and perhaps one day in the not too distant future, we can all finally say a fond *adieu* to these monster wines. But, not yet! In any case, my rather open dislike for this concocted style of over the top wine has at least happily kept me from seeing too many of these wines in my travels, so when I settle in to taste a roster of new releases from North American wine producers, they are generally already been self-selected away from the high octane, overly concocted style and very few of these wines still find their way to my pile of samples for each article on American wines. Which suits me just fine, as I would rather spend my time tasting something new, low octane and interesting, rather than trying to come up with new ways to describe the sensory effrontery of another new release from the over the top camp. The fact that many of the most famous winemakers who craft the Leviathan style do not even deign to drink their own wines should be sufficient commentary.

In any case, in the last few years, producers of low octane, soil-inflected and classically-inspired wines on the west coast of the US and Ontario have sought me out with greater frequency, so I now get a beautiful selection of North American wines to sample through for each of my bi-annual reports for these regions. Because of the greater volume of bottles, I now will often stop soliciting samples from some of my favorite producers once the pile of sample bottles has grown sufficiently large for me to question whether or not I can clear the deck in time to make the deadline for the new issue. Hence, some of my favorite producers will not be found in this report, but will be featured in part two of this series a couple of issues down the road. As I have written in the past, given the plethora of relatively new producers embracing the old school style of balanced wine (producers such as Rhys, Calluna, Sandhi, Domaine de la Côte, Poe Wines, Kutch, Arnot-Roberts and Kendric- to name just a few), coupled with the old school wineries that have never lost their way (Heitz, Stony Hill, Kalin Cellars et. al.), it is very easy to be persuaded that the tide has truly turned on the over the top style, but, in fact, both styles continue to peacefully co-exist at the present time, which can make things rather difficult for wine consumers who might be in search of a classically-inspired style of Syrah and have to face a shelf full of options in their local wine shop without any knowledgeable assistance from staff on the floor. But, in general, wine lovers who prize balance, complexity and soil signature in their wines can find more options with each passing vintage from North American producers, if they know where to look.

Many of the wines that I tasted for this report hail from the 2015 vintage, which in California at least does not look to be anywhere near the exceptional quality of the two previous vintages. It was the fourth drought vintage in a row in California wine regions, and a very short crop, as cool and unsettled weather during flowering led to poor fruit-set and yields were down across the board. A further issue with poor flowering conditions were bunches with uneven berries and plenty of shatter, which would lead to uneven ripening at the backend of the growing season. The very dry summer led to hydric stress in dry-farmed vineyards, and an early season heatwave got the sugars way out ahead of the phenolic development in the grapes, which would further cause balance issues come the end of the growing season. To further add to the disequilibrium of harvest time, several heat spikes pushed sugars soaring at the end of August, leading to a scramble to get the bunches off of the vine and some raisining of berries and further adding complications to the harvest. The results to my palate are a very heterogeneous vintage in terms of wine quality and style, with some wines high in alcohol (at the neo-classicists' estates, the sugar hunters in Napa and Sonoma are always high octane and not part of this analysis), others low in octane, but also rather modest in terms of aromatic and flavor development, and some miraculously finding a sweet spot in a very challenging vintage. But, there is nowhere near the same exhilaration tasting through a lineup of young 2015s as one experienced routinely with the beautiful wines of 2013 and 2014. And, even at the most consistently excellent estates, there is not really a consistency of style or traditional hierarchy, and often the lower level, blended bottlings are every bit as good as the single vineyard cuvées. It is a topsy-turvy vintage and it pays to pick and choose.

The first of the 2016 vintage were also to be found amongst the mountain of samples in my office this summer. This is a more measured year than 2015, with higher yields, a generally cooler growing season and a more leisurely harvest window, which has allowed for winegrowers to bring in grapes at what they deemed optimal ripeness. Of course, this is a personal definition,

so some will have made over the top wines, but there is the possibility of a very strong set of wines down the road from the neo-classicists and old guard in 2016. Yields were up significantly from the sparse crop of 2015, which was good news for winery principals, and the early examples I have tasted from the vintage augur very well for future releases. I should also mention that the 2016 vintage is reported to be really outstanding in Ontario, where I received some lovely samples from one up and coming producer, North 42 Degrees Winery, and I am looking forward to tasting more wines from north of the border from this vintage in the next installment of this report on North American wines. As always, this report includes plenty of older wines as well, with later-released 2013s and 2014s still showing all the promise of these two excellent vintages, and the oldies that were also tasted since the last iteration of this report showing just how well the classicists in California and other American wine regions can perform with extended bottle aging.

Sparkling Wines

2012 Wenzlau Vineyard “Cuvée Inconnu” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Disgorged Feb. 2017)

The Wenzlau Cuvée Inconnu is made from a parcel of old Wente Clones in their vineyard in the Santa Rita Hills. The *vins clairs* are aged a full year in tank prior to assembling for the secondary fermentation. It then spends an additional four and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, and has a very low *dosage*. The 2012 Cuvée Inconnu offers up a fine nose of pear, apple, salty soil tones, fresh-baked bread and just a hint of *crème patissière*. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still quite brisk, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and good length and grip on the fairly snappy finish. This is quite well-made, but to my palate, a bit more *dosage* would have buffered the wine’s very good acids and made it even more attractive right now. This will age well and will be tastier when the acids mellow a bit more. 2017-2030+. **87+**.

Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon

2016 Calluna Vineyards “Estate Blanc” Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon (Chalk Hill)

The 2016 vintage witnesses the first white wine to be produced by the talented David Jeffrey at Calluna Vineyards. It is a blend of sixty percent sauvignon blanc and forty percent sémillon, which are both barrel-fermented. Not surprisingly, given David’s formative training in Bordeaux, the wine pays a stylistic nod to a great white Graves in its youthfully complex nose of fresh fig, green apple, chalky soil tones, delicate grassiness, incipient notes of petrol and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely soil inflection, bright acids and impeccable focus and grip on the long, complex and very classy finish. If you can imagine an example of Pape-Clément Blanc with completely different soil signature, then you can get a vicarious feel for this beautiful bottle. 2017-2025. **93**.

2016 North 42 Degrees Winery Sauvignon Blanc (Ontario)

The 2016 sauvignon blanc from North 42 Degrees comes in at a cool 12.8 percent octane, but offers up pristine ripeness of fruit and lovely focus and balance. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of tangerine, lime, incipient notes of petrol, a good base of soil, just a whisper of cut grass and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and focused, with a good core, fine balance and a long, zesty finish. This is closed under screwcap, so I would opt for drinking it over the next couple of years, but it will deliver plenty of enjoyment over that time. Very nicely done. 2017-2019. **89**.

2012 Screaming Eagle Sauvignon Blanc (Napa)

I have to confess, that prior to being served this wine blind, I had no idea Screaming Eagle even produced a bottling of sauvignon blanc. The 2012 version is good, but a bit ripe in style and now getting a bit aggressive in the cat pee department with five years' worth of bottle age, but it is still bright and complex. The wine offers up a bouquet of damp grass, lime, grapefruit, cut pee, petrol, white pepper and a topnote of orange peel. There are quite a few aged Pouilly-Fumé characteristics here. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite zesty in personality, with a good core and length on the backend, quite sound acids and a long, complex finish. This is not the most refined example of sauvignon blanc, but it is not short on personality and has aged pretty well for its first five years in bottle and still has a good bit of life ahead of it. Not bad, if price is no object, but one must mention that this wine is ludicrously expensive for what it is. 2017-2025. **88.**

1992 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

This was the first time I had tasted the 1992 Kalin Cellars Sémillon and the wine showed beautifully, as it has now entered its apogee of peak maturity and is drinking with impressive complexity and grace. Like all mature examples of Kalin Sémillon, the 1992 open up beautifully as it has had some extended aeration, eventually offering up a complex and vibrant bouquet of hazelnuts, baked apples, orange peel, sweet browned butter, salty soil tones and a lovely topnote of toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with outstanding focus and balance, bright, zesty acids and a very long, refined and vibrant finish. While the 1992 vintage of Sémillon from Terry and Frances Leighton is fully mature at age twenty-five, it still is at its peak and has plenty of life still ahead of it. Gorgeous wine. 2017-2030. **93.**

Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Chenin Blanc

2016 North 42 Degrees Winery "Estate" Gewurztraminer (Ontario)

The North 42 Degrees version of Gewurztraminer from the 2016 vintage is quite classic in style, coming in at an even thirteen degrees octane and nicely supporting four grams of residual sugar. The wine is marvelously expressive on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, a touch of lychee nut, rosewater, just a hint of spiced meats and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, very good acids and outstanding grip on the long and complex finish. Despite its four grams of residual sugar, there is no perception of sweetness on the palate here, as the sugars just buffer the acids nicely and the wine is essentially dry in style. Very Alsace-like in personality, with different and intriguing soil signature. 2017-2025. **91+.**

2016 North 42 Degrees Winery "Estate" Riesling (Ontario)

The 2016 Estate Riesling from Jan Schulte-Bisping at North 42 Degrees was finished essentially dry and comes in at 11.5 percent alcohol, with the wine balanced out with three grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is superb on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a classic blend of apple, tangerine, petrol, salty soil tones, a hint of citrus oils and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with good, sound framing acids, lovely ripeness and fine length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This is under screwcap as well, so drinking on the early side is probably a better strategy, but it will be delightful over the next handful of years. Lovely wine. 2017-2023+? **91.**

2016 North 42 Degrees Winery “Reserve” Riesling (Ontario)

The 2016 Riesling “Reserve” from North 42 Degrees is a bit riper than the estate bottling, with an alcohol level of thirteen percent and only two grams per liter of residual sugar, so this is the winery’s version of a Grosses Gewächs bottling. Happily, this bottling is sealed under natural cork, which augurs very well for long-term cellaring. The fine and nascently complex bouquet offers up scents of pear, white cherries, salty soil tones, a touch of beeswax and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is young, fullish and very elegant in profile, with a good core, ripe acids, lovely focus and grip and an impressively long, primary and light on its feet finish. This will have lovely filigree when it is ready to drink, but it is quite a bit behind the estate Riesling in terms of development and really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to properly blossom. 2019-2035. **92+**.

2016 North 42 Degrees Winery Sweet Riesling (Ontario)

The vineyards used for this wine from North 42 Degrees lie on the north shore of Lake Erie, with the wine ending up with 9.5 percent alcohol and with a finishing sweetness of Spätlese level. The bouquet is very pretty, offering up scents of apple, nectarine, spring flowers and a lovely topnote of apple pie spices. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and juicy, with fairly low acidity, but nice focus and complexity on the long and elegant finish. I would have loved to have seen a bit more acidity here to add grip and cut on the backend, but the flavors are very tasty. 2017-2020. **87**.

2016 North 42 Degrees Winery Late Harvest Gewurztraminer (Ontario)

The 2016 Late Harvest Gewurztraminer from North 42 Degrees is very pretty aromatically and flavor-wise, but like the Sweet Riesling, it is a bit low in acidity and will want drinking in its youth. The bouquet is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of rosewater, lychees, pear, delicate spice tones and gently musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nicely balanced, with a good core, moderate complexity and lovely length on the creamy and easy-going finish. This is like a rich Auslese in sweetness level, but very pure and light on its feet. With more acidity to lend lift and cut on the backend, it would be stunning, rather than very good. 2017-2020. **87**.

2015 Leo Steen “Saini Vineyard” Chenin Blanc (Dry Creek Valley)

Leo Steen’s 2015 chenin blanc is another lovely example of the varietal that drinks like a young Vouvray Sec. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, with half of the cuvée having its malo blocked to retain a good spine of acidity. Eighty percent of the cuvée is raised in older casks and the other twenty percent in cement eggs. The 2015 is starting to blossom nicely, offering up a fine nose of lemon, quince, dusty soil tones a touch of lanolin and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent cut and focus, blossoming complexity and very impressive backend drive on the long, zesty and energetic finish. This is a beautiful wine in the making that should age very, very well. 2017-2040. **92+**.

2015 Stony Hill White Riesling (Napa)

The 2015 Stony Hill White Riesling comes in at twelve percent octane and is quite dry in style, with just a hint of residual sweetness giving the wine a Kabinett-like sensibility, with a bit more body and depth. The bouquet is young and promising, offering up scents of apple, a touch of white cherry, salty soil tones, honeysuckle and a delicate touch of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nascently complex, with a good core, fine soil signature, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This

bottling, like all wines at Stony Hill, invariably takes some time to really blossom and three or four years in the cellar will really allow its secondary layers to emerge. It is one of the finest young vintages of Stony Hill riesling that I have tasted in many years. 2020-2040+. **92.**

Red and White Italian Varietals

2016 Idlewild “The Bee” Flora and Fauna White (North Coast)

Idlewild is owned by Sam Bilbro, who has decided to focus on Italian varietals, with a particular passion for the wines of Piemonte. His white blend called “The Bee” is composed of a blend of fifty-three percent Muscat Canelli, forty-two percent Arneis and five percent Cortese. The grapes are co-fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in old oak barrels for four months, prior to being racked to stainless steel for the final six months of their *elevage*. The 2016 is a very pretty wine, offering up a nicely Muscat-influenced bouquet of musky floral tones, tart pineapple, a touch of green olive, lovely soil tones and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and fairly complex, with fine focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. The nose has a bit more personality than the palate here, but overall, the wine is very nicely balanced and quite tasty. 2017-2020. **89.**

2016 Idlewild “The Bird” Flora and Fauna Red (Mendocino County)

The 2016 Idlewild “The Bird” bottling from Sam Bilbro is composed of a blend of thirty-nine percent barbera, twenty-eight percent nebbiolo, twenty-six percent dolcetto, four percent grignolino and three percent freisa, so this is a proper Piemonte red table wine blend! Sam decided to retain almost all whole clusters for the wine, which he then allowed to start with carbonic maceration, before getting into the vats and crushing the grapes properly to allow for a transition to a more classical fermentation. The wine is 13.2 percent octane and was raised entirely in older casks. The bouquet is pure and vibrant, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, a hint of tariness, a nice base of dark soil tones and just a whisper of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with a good core, a bit of youthful horsiness and fine focus and grip on the complex and moderately chewy finish. This could do with a year or two of bottle age to allow the tannins (probably mostly from the nebbiolo?) to soften up a bit. It is a very unique and tasty bottle in the making. 2019-2030. **89.**

2016 Vermentino “Hers- Las Brisas Vineyard”- Ryne Cellars (Carneros)

Ryne Cellars is a relatively new project of the husband and wife team of Ryan and Megan Glaab, who run their small winery on the side, while working as assistant winemakers for others in the area. They make quite a few different bottlings of Italian varietals, and actually produce two different cuvées of Vermentino, with one made by Ryan and the other by Megan, as they both favor a different style for this grape. This is Megan’s version, which is a touch reductive when first opened, but blossoms nicely with a bit of swirling to offer up scents of green apple, salty soil tones, a touch of green olive, dried flowers and other savory elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with sound acids and fine length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice. 2017-2020. **89.**

2016 Sangiovese “Sailor Vineyard”- Viola Wine Cellars (Columbia Gorge)

Viola Wine Cellars is based in Portland, Oregon, but makes wines from both Washington and Oregon. I have listed their Washington state wines here in this report, rather than in the Oregon article. Their 2016 Sangiovese “Sailor Vineyard” bottling is pretty ripe, coming in at fourteen percent octane, but offers up good precision on both the nose and palate and a fairly well-balanced backend. There is a bit of CO2 here when the wine is first opened, so please decant it! The bouquet is a nice, black fruity blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh oregano,

dark soil, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tangy and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, moderate, slightly coarse tannins, tangy acids and a long, gently warm and complex finish. A pretty good example. 2017-2025+. **88.**

2015 Dolcetto “Allegre Vineyard”- Viola Wine Cellars (Columbia Gorge)

The 2015 Dolcetto from the Allegre Vineyard from Viola is quite a classic example of this varietal, albeit with just a touch of CO2 spritz perking up the backend of the palate. The bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, a bit of tariness, espresso, good soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full, complex and nicely balanced, with a bit of backend tannin, good acids and fine soil signature on the long and focused finish. This is nicely chewy and could do with a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom (like a proper Piemontese Dolcetto!) and should age quite nicely over at least the mid-term. It is thirteen percent alcohol, for those keeping score at home. 2019-2030. **89+.**

2015 Barbera “Alder Springs Vineyard”- Viola Wine Cellars (Columbia Valley)

I know that 2015 was a hot and ripe vintage in Washington, as the 2015 Barbera from Viola comes in at a hefty 14.5 percent alcohol, which may well make it the ripest example of this varietal I have ever tasted. The wine is very good, if the octane does not dissuade you from the outset, as it offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, a bit of nutskin, coffee grounds, soil and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit hot, with a good core, fine focus, moderate tannins and a bit of CO2 perking up the long and complex finish. This is a bit too heady for me to really warm up to, but it is obviously very well made and I would love to taste an example of this in a less torrid vintage. If the octane level does not dissuade you, add five points to my score, as the wine is very obviously well-made. 2017-2025. **85.**

2014 Sangiovese “Reward Ranch”- Kendric Vineyards (Shenandoah Valley)

To my knowledge, this is the first bottling of Sangiovese that Stewart Johnson has produced. These vines were recently grafted over from syrah that was planted in the vineyard here, and the 2014 from Kendric comes in at a ripe 13.9 percent octane. The wine offers up a stylish bouquet of cherries, orange peel, coffee, lovely spice tones, a touch of mustard seed and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is young, fullish and nicely transparent, with a good core, tangy acids and a long, chewy finish of ripe tannins that will need some time in the cellar to resolve. This will blossom nicely with some bottle age, but is a little too chewy out of the blocks to not tuck it away and let the tannins start to soften. In time, this will be very tasty. 2020-2040. **89+.**

Casa Viola “White Wine”- Viola Wine Cellars (Columbia Gorge)

The current release of Casa Viola “White Wine” is an eclectic blend of forty-eight percent Gewurztraminer, thirty-three percent Sauvignon Blanc, thirteen percent Moscato Giallo and six percent Chardonnay, with all of the grapes hailing from the 2015 vintage, though I cannot find this stated anywhere on the label. The bouquet has plenty of personality, delivering scents of tangerine, grapefruit, fresh-cut grass, a bit of petrol and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and fairly complex, with sound framing acids, good focus and length and a bit of backend heat from its 14.1 percent octane level. Good solid juice. 2017-2019. **87.**

Casa Viola “Oregon Red Wine”- Viola Wine Cellars

The Casa Viola bottling from Daryl Joannides is listed as an “Oregon Red Wine”, but the grapes for this Italian-inspired blend hail from both Oregon and Washington. This is a non-vintage blend, with the 2015 vintage responsible for the twenty-six percent each of sangiovese and dolcetto, seventeen percent barbera and fifteen percent primitivo. The sixteen percent balance in the blend is nebbiolo from the 2014 vintage! This is a plenty ripe customer, with most of the *cépages* hailing from the torrid summer of 2015, so the finished wine is a hefty 14.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is nicely complex and precise for its octane, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, charred earth, a bit of espresso, woodsmoke, cedar and a nice touch of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, tangy acids, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and just a bit of backend heat poking out on the long finish. This is good juice that would be even better at lower alcohol. 2017-2027. **88.**



Chardonnay

2016 Kutch Wines “Sonoma Coast” Chardonnay

The 2016 is only the second vintage of chardonnay from Jamie Kutch, and it is a fine follow-up to the debut release. The wine comes in at a cool and collected 12.5 percent octane and offers up a nascently complex bouquet of apple, nectarine, a touch of pink grapefruit, spring flowers, a fine base of soil and a subtle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still tightly-knit, with a fine core of fruit, lovely transparency, bright, zesty acids

and excellent focus and grip on the long, well-balanced and promising finish. This is already tasty, but the real complexity here is still a bit bound up in the wine's fine structural elements and I would be inclined to give this a year or two in the cellar and really allow it time to blossom properly. It is a fine, elegant and classy wine in the making. 2018-2030. **92+**.

2015 Arnot-Roberts “Watson Ranch” Chardonnay (Napa)

Watson Ranch is in the extreme southern end of Napa Valley, just above the San Pablo Bay and is one of the coolest vineyard sites in northern California. The soils here are a blend of clay and limestone, which is also extremely rare in Napa. The 2015 chardonnay from Arnot-Roberts from Watson Ranch is excellent, offering up a superb bouquet of pear, lemon, butter, chalky minerality, a touch of *fleur de sel* and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with impressive focus and grip, zesty acids and a very long, balanced and classy finish. This is only 12.5 percent octane, but seems just a bit more complete than the 2013 version. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2030+. **93+**.

2015 Poe Wines Chardonnay “Ferrington Vineyard” (Anderson Valley)

The 2015 Ferrington Vineyard Chardonnay cuvée from Poe Wines is just a touch less ripe than the Manchester Ridge bottling (13.4 versus 13.5 percent), but the wine is far more aromatically giving out of the blocks than the more structured Manchester Ridge. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a really lovely blend of pear, white peach, salty soil tones, hints of the butter to come, a touch of acacia blossom and gentle vanillin oak tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and more primary than the nose suggests, with excellent depth at the core, bright acids, fine focus and balance and a long, vibrant and promising finish. Like the Manchester Ridge 2015 chardonnay, there is no problem drinking this wine now, but a couple of years' worth of bottle age will allow the wine to really start to sing. 2017-2030. **92+**.

2015 Poe Wines Chardonnay “Manchester Ridge Vineyard” (Mendocino Ridge)

The 2015 Manchester Ridge Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Samantha Sheehan is a lovely example of the vintage, with a nice ripe veneer of pure fruit defining the nose, offering up scents of pear, apple, gentle spice tones, dried flowers, a nice base of soil and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely plump at the core, with a primary personality, fine focus and good length and grip on the youthful and nicely balanced finish. This is still a very young wine in terms of development, with more complexity in store for those who tuck it away for a couple of years, but it is also quite easy to drink already. 2017-2027. **90+**.

2015 Rhys Vineyards Chardonnay “Anderson Valley”

The 2015 Anderson Valley chardonnay from Rhys Vineyards is nicely cool in this vintage, coming in at a svelte 12.5 percent octane and offering up a really vibrant bouquet of apple, pear, fine soil tones, gently musky floral tones, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very transparent, with lovely focus and grip, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the poised and complex finish. This is very tasty out of the blocks, but has the requisite balance to age long and gracefully as well. 2017-2030+. **92**.

2015 Rhys Vineyards Chardonnay “Bearwallow Vineyard” (Anderson Valley)

As readers may recall, this is only the second bottling of Bearwallow Chardonnay ever produced at Rhys Vineyards, as the vineyard team here only planted chardonnay in 2009 and 2014 was the first vintage where the vines were deemed old enough to stand on their own. The 2015 version is an outstanding follow-up to the inaugural vintage, coming in at a svelte 12.6

percent alcohol and delivering a superb bouquet of pear, delicious apple, a touch of acacia blossom, a fine base of soil, a whisper of leesiness and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and intensely flavored, with lovely cut and grip, nascent complexity, fine focus and a long, zesty and nicely structured finish. This is still a puppy and will age very well indeed, but it is also very easy to drink right out of the blocks. Fine juice, with outstanding backend energy. 2017-2035. **92+**.

2015 Rhys Vineyards Chardonnay “Alpine Vineyard” (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2015 Alpine Vineyard chardonnay from Kevin Harvey and his very talented team at Rhys is a beautiful young wine, beautifully managing its thirteen percent octane to retain boatloads of precision and vibrancy on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a nascently complex mélange of pear, just a touch of nectarine, complex soil tones, apple blossoms and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with bright acids, laser-like focus, a lovely core and outstanding length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is all too easy to drink out of the blocks, but it is still a puppy and I would not touch a bottle (if I could help it!) until the wine has had at least three or four years in the cellar, as there are simply too many good things still to come here to be leading bottles to slaughter before the wine has really had a chance to blossom! 2020-2040. **94**.

2015 Leo Steen “Santa Cruz Mountains” Chardonnay

This is the first chardonnay from Leo Steen, who has made quite a name for himself for his dry, Vouvray-like chenin blanc bottlings. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and is raised in a combination of cement eggs and puncheons, with twenty-five percent of the oak new. The wine offers up a vibrant nose of lemon, pear, salty soil tones, a hint of butter and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, primary and well-balanced finish. Good juice that will be even better with a year or two in the cellar to blossom fully. 2017-2030. **91+**.

2015 Chardonnay “Chapel Vineyard”- Trail Marker Wine Company (Santa Cruz Mts.)

A couple of years ago I had tasted the 2013s from Trail Marker Wine Company and liked them very much, but somehow I had missed the 2014 releases from the winery, so I was very happy to have a chance to taste the 2015s here. The 2015 Chapel Vineyard chardonnay is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised entirely in older casks. The wine is excellent, coming in at a cool 12.7 percent octane and offering up a fine bouquet of pear, apple, dried flowers, a touch of fresh nutmeg, a lovely base of soil tones and just a whisper of vanillin oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and racy, with lovely burgeoning complexity, a fine core, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the poised and well-balanced finish. This is really good, low fat chardonnay. 2017-2025. **91+**.

2015 Chardonnay “Manchester Ridge Vineyard”- Trail Marker (Mendocino Ridge)

The Manchester Ridge Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Trail Marker is a new cuvée to me, as I did not taste this bottling in the range of 2013s that I sampled from the winery. This is a touch riper than the Chapel Vineyard chard, coming in at 13.3 percent alcohol, but retaining all of the purity and precision of the Trail Marker house style. The wine was again raised entirely in older casks and delivers a superb aromatic constellation of pear, apple, a complex base of soil tones, just a touch of vanillin oak again (despite it seeing no new wood), a gently savory element that is redolent of sage and a topnote of wild flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with excellent focus and cut, impeccable balance and a very long, very classy finish. This is a beautiful bottle. 2017-2025. **92+**.

2014 Poe Wines Chardonnay “Ferrington Vineyard” (Anderson Valley)

The 2014 Poe Ferrington Vineyard bottling of chardonnay is a very pretty wine that is starting to drink with plenty of style, but still has more development ahead of it with further bottle age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of pear, buttered apples, a touch of Mendocino savory tones, spring flowers, lovely soil tones, a bit of almond and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core, lovely grip and backend energy, bright acids and a very long, poised and beautifully balanced finish. This is a terrific chardonnay and one of the best examples of this varietal I have tasted yet from Samantha Sheehan! 2017-2030. **93.**

2014 Poe Wines Chardonnay “Manchester Ridge Vineyard” (Mendocino Ridge)

Sam Sheehan’s 2014 Manchester Ridge chardonnay is starting to blossom very nicely aromatically, delivering a fine constellation of pear, a touch of casaba melon, butter, a bit of almond, really fine soil tones and a stylish framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, fine acids and impressive focus and grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. Good juice. 2017-2025. **91.**

2014 Sandhi “Santa Barbara County” Chardonnay

The 2014 Santa Barbara County bottling of chardonnay from Sandhi is a cool 12.5 percent octane and delivers excellent complexity on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a scents of apple, gentle leesiness, salty soil tones, a bit of pineapple and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex, medium-full and vibrant, with a good core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. My only criticism of this wine is that the *battonage* has left a bit of leesiness on the palate that I find detracts a touch from the overall elegance of the wine. But, it is a small complaint. 2017-2025. **89.**

2014 Sandhi “Santa Rita Hills” Chardonnay

The Sandhi 2014 “Santa Rita Hills” chardonnay is a beautiful bottle in the making, wafting from the glass in a pure and complex blend of pear, apple, salty soil tones, a hint of butter, gentle floral tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, impressive complexity, zesty acidity and a very long, poised and energetic finish. This is a superb bottle in the making. 2017-2030. **92.**

2014 Sandhi “Mount Carmel” Chardonnay (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2014 Mount Carmel bottling of chardonnay from Sandhi is a superb bottle that is lean, pure and intensely flavored, with its twelve percent alcohol level keeping everything cool and precise on the palate. The lovely bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of pear, delicious apple, lemon oil, almost salty soil tones and a gently musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and intensely flavored, with a fine girdle of acidity, a lovely core, nascent complexity and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. Having just drunk a rather blunt-edged Meursault with dinner last evening, I admire this wine’s elegance and lightness of step and it would have been the far better companion at table last night! 2017-2025. **92.**

2014 Sandhi “Bent Rock” Chardonnay (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2014 Bent Rock chardonnay from Sandhi is a tad higher in octane than the stylish Mount Carmel bottling, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up a slightly reductive bouquet when first poured. With a bit of time in decanter, the wine opens up nicely to show off an aromatic constellation of apple, white peach, a nice touch of butter, good soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and still quite primary in personality, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, impressive focus and grip and a long, vibrant and

promising finish. I would opt for giving this very stylish wine a year or two worth of bottle age to let it really blossom. It should age very nicely and is most impressive, given that these are still only seven year-old vines. 2018-2025+. **92+**.

2014 Sandhi “Rita’s Crown” Chardonnay (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2014 Rita’s Crown bottling of chardonnay from Sandhi hails from the highest elevation in the Santa Rita Hills, with its due south exposition allowing for a bit riper interpretation of chardonnay than the other bottlings from the winery. The 2014 comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a youthfully complex and classy nose of apple, lemon, salty soil tones, spring flowers, a hint of sage and a very discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, bright acids and impeccable focus and grip on the long and very promising finish. This is already very easy to drink, but I would be tempted to try and give it at least a few years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2030. **92.**

2014 Sandhi “Sanford and Benedict” Chardonnay (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2014 Sandhi “Sanford and Benedict” chardonnay from Raj Parr at Sandhi is a touch reductive out of the blocks, but shows outstanding potential. The bouquet is a touch reductive out of the blocks, but also pure and classic in its blend of apple, peach, iodine, a dollop of butter, fine soil tones, dried flowers and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still quite primary, with a fine core, excellent transparency, bright acids and impeccable focus and balance on the long and zesty finish. This is a touch riper than the cool 2013 version (thirteen percent versus twelve), but still a cool and classy customer. It is very easy to drink this wine already, but more complexity will emerge if it is given a bit of bottle age. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2035. **93.**

2014 Stony Hill Vineyards Chardonnay (Napa)

The 2014 vintage is the new release of chardonnay from this Napa Valley chardonnay institution, and like all Stony Hill wines, this is meant for the long haul. Today, one is only sampling a percentage of the complexity that will emerge with extended cellaring here, but all of the constituent components are in place for an outstanding vintage of Stony Hill Chard. The bouquet is pure and precise, offering up scents of pear, lemon, white soil tones, apple blossoms, hints of beeswax and a very, very discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core, bright, racy acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, energetic finish that closes with outstanding grip and bounce. This is going to be a superb bottle in the fullness of time, but right now, it is only on the stunning backend that one can really get a sense of what lies in wait for those with the requisite patience. Superb juice. 2022-2055. **93+.**

2013 Arnot-Roberts “Watson Ranch” Chardonnay (Napa)

The 2013 Watson Ranch chardonnay from Arnot-Roberts is a lovely bottle that is now drinking at its peak, offering up a wide open and precise bouquet of lemon, green apple, spring flowers, white soil tones and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and zesty, with a good core, and fine focus and balance. The finish is long and energetic, with good grip and cut. This is not the most complex bottling I have tasted from Arnot-Roberts, but the wine hits all the right notes in its slightly more limited range and will continue to cruise along nicely for several more years. 2017-2025+. **91+.**

2013 Wenzlau Vineyard Chardonnay “Estate” (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2013 Wenzlau Vineyard “Estate” chardonnay was raised in twenty-five percent new wood and tips the scales at a civilized 13.5 percent octane. The wine is starting to develop a touch of secondary complexity on the nose, as it delivers a fine mélange of apple, a touch of pineapple, salty soil tones, a bit of musky orange blossoms and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, lovely acidity and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not overly complex on either the nose or palate, but is bright and long and still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2017-2025. **89.**

2012 Stony Hill Vineyards Chardonnay (Napa)

The 2012 vintage of Stony Hill chardonnay is a beautiful young wine, but this is still defined by its impeccable structure and will need time in the cellar to really start to stir and deliver on its marvelous promise. The youthful bouquet offers up a very pure and still quite tight blend of apple, a touch of beeswax, chalky soil tones, fruit blossoms, a touch of fresh almond and a very, very faint touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, fresh and rock solid at the core, with its full-bodied format delivering outstanding focus and grip, zesty acids and laser-like precision on the very long and very primary finish. All Stony Hill chardonnays need extended cellaring to really blossom, but the 2012 looks likely to be a real long distance runner in the context of great recent vintages here! 2022-2065+. **93+.**

2009 Stony Hill Vineyards Chardonnay (Napa)

The 2009 chardonnay from Mike Chelini and the team at Stony Hill is starting to blossom very nicely at eight years of age and is starting to show some of its secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate, while still retaining the bounce of youth. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very classy blend of apple, pear, a touch of butter, salty soil tones, a bit of lemongrass, lavender and a topnote of gently pungent floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit behind the bouquet in terms of development, with a nice touch of beeswax on the backend, bright acids, fine depth at the core and a long, youthful and very promising finish. When I first smelled this wine, I thought, here is a Stony Hill vintage that is starting to stir, but on the palate, the wine has very different ideas! 2020-2055+. **92+.**

2008 Stony Hill Vineyards Chardonnay (Napa)

With Stony Hill chardonnay, the color in the glass will always give a clue when this beautifully structured bottling is starting to stir, as is the case with the 2008, where the color is just starting to develop a hint of gold in its lemon yellow hue. This wine comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a fine constellation of apple, pear, candied lemon, salty soil tones, dried flowers and incipient notes of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and really starting to open up at age nine, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is still in its climbing mode, but age nine is really a good time to be starting to check in on it with regularity! Great juice. 2017-2040+. **94.**

1995 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée CH” Chardonnay (Sonoma)

The 1995 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée CH” Chardonnay is a beautiful bottle of wine that has reached its apogee of maturity, wafting from the glass in a pure and classy bouquet of pear, a touch of passion fruit, delicate notes of browned butter, hazelnuts, beautiful, salty soil tones, gentle smokiness and a very deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and perfectly balanced, with a fine core of fruit, bright framing acids, lovely complexity

and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. A beautiful example sourced from the Charles Heinz vineyard, the 1995 Kalin Cuvée CH is at its apogee today, but will have no trouble cruising along for many years to come. 2017-2030+. **94.**

1995 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée L” Chardonnay (Sonoma)

The 1995 Cuvée L bottling of chardonnay from Terry and Frances Leighton is outstanding, offering up the complexity of peak maturity on both the nose and palate. The wine delivers a ripe and complex nose of fresh apricot, a touch of mango, salty soil tones, buttered almonds and an exotic whiff of dried eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of ripe fruit, excellent soil signature, bright acids and a long, refined and very classy finish. This is a riper vintage for this bottling, coming in at 13.8 percent octane, but it is very well-balanced and shows no signs of *sur maturité* on either the nose or the palate. High class juice at the peak of its powers at age twenty-two! 2017-2030+. **93.**



Looks like summer...

Salinia Wine Company “Solera Spring” Chardonnay (Russian River Valley)

Salinia Wine Company is run by Kevin Kelley, who returned to the west coast after a few years working with Jean-Nicolas Méo and living in Nuits St. Georges. He makes a classic range of wines, sourcing fruit primarily from the Charles Heintz Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast (see the note on the 1995 Kalin bottling from this vineyard above), but this is an experimental chardonnay made in a solera style. I could find no information on the cork, label or website

about the age of this bottling. The wine is already a fairly deep golden color and offers up a complex bouquet of orange peel, a bit of browned butter, just a touch of salty soil tones and a dollop of new leather. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely plump at the core, with impressive complexity, good balance and a long, zesty and focused finish. This is listed at thirteen percent alcohol on the label, but seems a good dealer higher than that, but the wine is impressively well-made and quite unique in personality. The aromatics and flavors are like a cross of a mature chardonnay and a high quality Madeira. Idiosyncratic in style, but good juice! 2017-2030. **90.**

Rosé

2016 Rosé “The Flower” - Idlewild (Mendocino County)

The 2016 Rosé “The Flower” from Idlewild is composed on an unusual blend of fifty-one percent Dolcetto, twenty-five percent Nebbiolo and twenty-four percent Barbera. The wine is a fairly deep rosé color and offers up a fairly complex nose of cherry skin, woodsmoke, a touch of blood orange, lovely soil tones and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, balanced and nicely vinous in style, with a good core, good framing acids and fine length and grip on the focused finish. There is almost a whisper of backend tannin here, which really works nicely with food. 2017-2019. **88.**

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Rosé- North 42 Degrees Winery

The 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Rosé from North 42 Degrees is a lovely bottle that is light on its feet, coming in at 11.5 degrees alcohol and offering up a bright and food-friendly nose of cherry skins, red berries, smoke and a touch of rhubarb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely balanced, with solid depth, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the finish. This is not overly complex, but quite satisfying. 2017-2019. **87.**

2016 Rosé- Poe Wines (Sonoma County)

The 2016 Rosé from Poe Wines is a blend of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third pinot meunier, with the wine made from a short skin contact and fermented without going through malolactic fermentation. This lovely bottle offers up a pure and very expressive nose of strawberries, cherry skin, very pretty soil tones, dried flowers and just a whisper of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and beautifully balanced, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is one of the best examples of Rosé I have tasted from the United States! 2017-2019. **90.**

2016 Rosé- Shinn Estate Vineyards (North Fork of Long Island)

The 2016 Rosé from Shinn Estate Vineyards is made entirely from merlot and offers up a very stylish nose of cherry skin, watermelon, a nice touch of soil and a gentle topnote of dried violets. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nicely vinous in personality, with a good core, bright acids and really quite impressive backend grip on the long finish. This is really a fine Rosé for the table. 2017-2019. **88.**

Gamay and Trousseau

2016 Gamay- Arnot-Roberts (El Dorado)

The 2016 Gamay from Arnot Roberts hails from two vineyards in El Dorado, the Barsotti Vineyard (that fans of Edmunds St. John wines will certainly be familiar with, and in fact Steve Edmunds suggested this as a good source for gamay to the team at Arnot-Roberts) which is planted on granitic soils perfect for gamay, and the Witters Vineyard. The wine sees a small percentage of carbonic maceration and the 2016 offers up a classic bouquet of cherry, cranberry,

pepper, stony soil ones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and complex, with good acids, a bit of tannin and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2017-2025+. **89.**

2016 Trousseau- Arnot-Roberts (North Coast)

Arnot-Roberts was the pioneer when it comes to bottling Trousseau on its own from northern California and this cuvée has justifiably developed quite a following. The 2016 version comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and is a classic, pale ruby color, with a touch of amber at the rim. The bouquet is already developing the autumnal tones that Trousseau is so famous for, as it wafts from the glass in a fine blend of desiccated cherries, forest floor, bonfires, lovely soil tones, a touch of coffee grounds and a topnote of pepper. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very transparent, with tangy acids, modest tannins and a long, autumnally complex finish. This is a lovely example that really makes one think of the Jura! 2017-2025+. **92.**

Rhône Blends, Syrah and Grenache

2015 Syrah “Sonoma Coast”- Arnot-Roberts (Sonoma Coast)

The 2015 Sonoma Coast cuvée from Arnot-Roberts is a beautiful, low octane and very classically styled bottle of syrah. The wine tips the scales at a cool 12.5 percent, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and is one hundred percent whole clusters, with the *elevage* taking place in older casks. The bouquet is deep, pure and youthful, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, pepper, a touch of black raspberry, spiced meats, lovely soil tones and a youthful touch of stems. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still plenty chewy, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and impressive focus and grip on the long and very promising finish. This wine needs to be tucked away for another eight to ten years to really blossom, after which it should drink beautifully for another four decades or more. High class juice! 2023-2065. **92.**

2015 Syrah “Sonoma Coast”- Model Farms

Model Farms is a small project run by Sean Castorani and his wife Joanna Wells. Sean’s day job is working as the assistant winemaker with Kevin Harvey at Rhys Vineyards, with Sean and Joanna farming their small syrah vineyard in the Petaluma Gap in Sonoma in their free time. As one might expect, the wine is made with one hundred percent whole clusters, indigenous yeasts and raised in neutral oak. There are only two casks made of this excellent 2015 syrah, which comes in at 13.2 percent octane and offers up a refined and classic bouquet of cassis, black pepper, a nice touch of stems, a touch of grilled venison, black olive, dark chocolate and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully structured, with firm, ripe tannins, an excellent core of fruit, tangy acids and great backend mineral drive on the long, nascently complex and energetic finish. This is great juice in the making! 2022-2055+. **92+.**

2014 Syrah “Que Vineyard”- Arnot-Roberts (Sonoma Coast)

The beautiful Que Vineyard has been a source for syrah for the Arnot-Roberts team for several years and they have finally been able to buy this fine Sonoma Coast vineyard. The 2014 single vineyard bottling of syrah from Que is outstanding, coming in at an even thirteen percent octane and delivering a superb, youthful bouquet of cassis, pepper, hung game, woodsmoke, a superb base of dark soil tones and a topnote of youthful stemminess. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very soil-driven in personality, with a rock solid core, ripe

tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and properly chewy finish. A great bottle of syrah in the making. 2026-2075. **94.**

2014 Syrah “The Ornbaun” Drew Family Wines (Mendocino)

This syrah bottling from Jason Drew is a blend of eighty-four percent syrah, eight percent grenache, five percent mourvèdre and three percent viognier. The wine includes fifty percent whole clusters and was raised entirely in older casks. The 2014 comes in at 13.9 percent octane and delivers a complex bouquet of cassis, grilled meats, pepper, lovely spice tones and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and focused, with a good core, moderate tannins, bright acids and very good length and grip on the slightly warm finish. This is very well-balanced for its octane level, but I would love to see it just a half point lower, as it would give the wine even more precision and detail. But, this is still a very tasty bottle. 2020-2040+. **88.**

2014 Syrah “Sonoma Coast”- Model Farms

The 2014 Syrah from Sean Castorani is a tad lower in alcohol than the 2015 version, tipping the scales at an even more civilized 12.6 percent alcohol and offering up a truly exceptional and complex bouquet of dark berries, pepper, grilled meats, a touch of espresso, woodsmoke, black olive, a touch of balsam bough, a dollop of stems and lovely soil signature. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tannic and laser-like in its focus, with a fine core of fruit, great backend energy and grip, ripe tannins and a very long, tangy and very complex finish. This is still a very young wine, but it is so beautifully balanced that it is already easy to drink this wine in its youth. That said, I would try desperately to not touch a bottle for at least another five years, as this is going to be absolutely brilliant when it is really ready to drink! 2022-2060. **93+.**

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

Starting in the 2014 vintage, there is only going to be a Horseshoe Vineyard bottling of syrah from Rhys Vineyards, as Kevin Harvey and his team has decided that their parcel of this variety in their Skyline Vineyard would be better off budded over to pinot noir. It is too bad, as I often had a hard time deciding which of these two beautiful bottlings of syrah I preferred in each vintage. In any case, the 2014 Horseshoe Syrah is another in the long line of stunning Rhys bottlings of this varietal, offering up a pure and nascently complex bouquet of black raspberries, blackberries, a touch of dark chocolate, roasted meats, incipient notes of pepper, beautiful soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and more peppery than the nose suggests, with excellent depth at the core, superb soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long, complex and promising finish. Like an old-fashioned vintage of Chave Hermitage, the 2014 Horseshoe Vineyard Syrah is going to need a solid decade of bottle age before it starts to stir, but it will be an absolutely superb example once it has blossomed! 2025-2065. **94+.**

2014 Bel Canto- The Withers (El Dorado)

The cuvée of Bel Canto from The Withers is composed of a mix of seventy-three percent grenache, twenty-two percent mourvèdre and five percent syrah. The 2014 bottling hits the tarmac at 13.7 percent alcohol and offers up a bright and red fruity nose of cherries, raspberries, pepper, *garrigue*, a bit of celery seed and a touch of spiced meats in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly transparent in personality, with a good core, a bit of ripe tannin, pretty heady backend octane and a long, fairly complex finish. I detect a bit of backend bitterness from alcohol on the finish here, which makes me think it is a bit north of its stated 13.7 percent. To my palate, it is a bit too high in octane, but others may find it right in

their wheelhouse. Add four points to my score if you do not mind headier wines, but this is my least favorite 2014 from the winery this year. 2017-2030. **87.**

2014 Ruben- The Withers (El Dorado)

The Ruben bottling from The Withers is a blend of eighty-two percent mourvèdre, twelve percent syrah and six percent grenache. The 2014 version comes in at 13.9 percent octane and delivers a fine, nascently complex bouquet of raspberries, hung game, pepper, *garrigue*, lovely spice tones and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plenty ripe, with a plush core, fine focus and grip, ripe tannins and a bit of backend heat poking out on the long and potentially velvety finish. I would have loved to have seen this wine a half point lower in alcohol, as the heat on the finish diminishes my enjoyment of the wine just a bit, but in terms of depth, complexity and personality, this wine has impressive credentials. The 2014 Ruben is approachable today, but will be even better when the tannins have a chance to soften up a bit more. For those that like riper wines, add three points to my score. 2017-2035. **89.**

2014 Mr. Burgess- The Withers (El Dorado)

The 2014 bottling of Mr. Burgess is almost the exact inverse of the Ruben bottling, as the *cépages* here is eighty-five percent syrah, twelve percent mourvèdre and three percent grenache. This is a bit lower in alcohol, coming in at 13.5 percent and offering up a superb bouquet of black raspberries, pepper, spiced meats, woodsmoke, a touch of mustard seed, lovely soil tones and a nice touch of spicy new oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully soil driven, with a fine core, suave, fine-grained tannins, excellent acidity and a very long, focused and complex finish of impeccable balance and grip. This is a dynamite example of syrah that will need some time to soften up and really start to drink with generosity, but is already extremely tasty out of the blocks. 2020-2045. **92+.**

2013 Syrah “North Canyon Road”- Edmunds St. John (El Dorado)

The 2013 North Canyon Road bottling of syrah from Steve Edmunds is a blend of two of the top syrah vineyard sources that Steve has worked with in the past, as this is a mix of sixty-nine percent fruit from Fenaughty Vineyard and thirty-one percent from Barsotti Ranch. The wine comes in at 12.9 percent octane and is brilliance personified, albeit, to be deferred until the wine is ready to drink! The bouquet is a deep, vibrant and classic blend of black raspberry, sweet cassis, grilled meats, a touch of bitter chocolate, pepper, black minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and utterly refined in profile, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a very long, focused and promising finish. This is nicely understated on the palate today, but give it six or seven years in the cellar and it will really start to sing! 2023-2060+. **93.**

2007 Syrah- Kendric Vineyards (Shenandoah County)

This bottling of syrah from Kendric Vineyards hails from the same vineyard as their more recent bottling of sangiovese, with this ten year-old syrah having been harvested to deliver an octane level of 13.9 percent. The wine is aging very nicely, offering up a complex nose of cassis, grilled meats, a touch of shoe polish, a fine base of soil, charred wood, sandalwood and a topnote of saddle leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with still a fair bit of tannin, good acids and fine soil signature on the long, well-balanced and gently rustic finish. This was very early days in Stewart Johnson’s winemaking career, and there is not the same polish here as one finds in his wines a decade down the road, but this is a tasty bottle that still has a long way to go and is really quite enjoyable to drink today. 2017-2035. **88.**



A very, very promising lineup of elegant, soil-driven and complex California pinot noir.

Pinot Noir

2016 Pinot Noir “Sonoma Coast”- Kutch Wines

The 2016 Sonoma Coast bottling from Jamie Kutch is a beautifully light and airy example, coming in at a cool 12.1 percent octane and sporting a lovely, light ruby color. The bouquet is bright and nascently complex, offering up scents of strawberries, blood orange, a touch of raw cocoa, fresh herb tones, a fine base of soil and a bit of rose petal in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tightly-knit and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature, zesty acids and a long, modestly tannic and youthful finish. This is still a puppy and deserves at least a handful of years in the cellar to properly blossom, but it is going to be an excellent middleweight. 2020-2050. **91+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Bohan Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The 2016 Bohan Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Kutch Wines is the lowest octane wine I can ever recall tasting from Jamie, coming in at only 11.3 percent alcohol! Despite its low octane, the wine is beautifully expressive on the nose, jumping from the glass in a blaze of red berries, sweet cranberry, a touch of orange peel, a nice dollop of soil, roses, fresh thyme and just a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and intensely flavored, with a good core, moderate tannins, fine focus and grip and a very long, tangy and nicely balanced finish. I cannot wait to follow this wine and see how it blossoms with bottle age, as it seems to me like the kind of pinot that will put on weight as it ages. 2022-2050. **92+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Falstaff Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The 2016 Falstaff pinot from Jamie Kutch is another cool customer, coming in at an even twelve percent alcohol. The wine is beautiful on both the nose and palate, offering up a very, very pure and red fruity bouquet of cherries, Morey St. Denis-like notes of beetroot, raw cocoa, a nice touch of the stems, superb soil signature and just a whisper of oak spice in the upper register. With air, a hint of blueberry also starts to show on the nose. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and still marked a bit by its youthful weediness, with a nice touch of sappiness at the core, tangy acids, laser-like focus and a very, very long, vibrant and moderately tannic finish. This is going to be a terrific wine when it is ready to drink, but it needs a bit of bottle age to soften up and blossom properly. With its moderate octane level, it will be a bit too weedy for some tasters out of the blocks, but with bottle age, I have a hard time imagining anyone who would not be not delighted to have this wine in their cellar! 2023-2060. **93.**

2016 Pinot Noir “MacDougall Ranch”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)

Though the 2016 MacDougall Ranch bottling of pinot noir from Kutch is the same even twelve percent in alcohol as the Falstaff Vineyard this year, the wine seems a tad riper on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is perfumed and very pretty, offering up a constellation of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of plum, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with a lovely core, superb transparency, zesty acids, moderate tannins and a very long, energetic and beautifully balanced finish. This is properly tight out of the blocks and will be a bit lean in the early going, but it is destined to be stellar when it has a chance to really open up and start drinking with generosity! 2022-2060. **93+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Signal Ridge Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Mendocino Ridge)

The 2016 Signal Ridge Vineyard cuvée from Jamie Kutch is simply outstanding, with the wine showing a really lovely sappiness on both the nose and palate, despite again only being twelve percent octane. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, a touch of plum, woodsmoke, a dollop of lovely, Mendocino herb tones, espresso, dark soil tones and a gentle framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and intensely flavored, with a fine core, ripe, suave tannins, tangy acids and great focus and grip on the very long and nascently complex finish. This will be a great middleweight- just add patience to the recipe! 2022-2060. **93+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Morning Dew Ranch”- Drew Family Cellars (Anderson Valley)

The 2015 Drew pinot noir from the Morning Dew Ranch (planted by Burt Williams of Williams-Selyem fame) was raised in thirty percent new wood and comes in at 13.1 percent alcohol. The complex bouquet is precise and youthfully weedy, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, Mendocino herb tones, cedar and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a pretty good core, fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and good length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This needs some time in the cellar to blossom, but will be quite good when it is ready to drink. 2021-2045+. **88+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Manchester Ridge Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Mendocino Ridge)

Samantha Sheehan’s Mendocino Ridge bottling of pinot noir hails from the Manchester Ridge Vineyard. The 2015 version comes in at 13.6 percent octane and offers up a deep and quite youthful nose of black cherries, Mendocino herb tones, dark soil tones, incipient cola tones, woodsmoke and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied

and youthful, with a fine core, good soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, primary and promising finish. This is still a very young wine, despite its very suave structure, and it deserves at least four or five years in the cellar to start to release some of its secondary layers of complexity. Before that time, it will be an okay drink, but only a shadow of what it will be with sufficient bottle age. 2021-2045. **90+**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Van der Kamp Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Sonoma Mountain)

The Poe bottling of pinot noir from the Van der Kamp Vineyard, which was planted in 1953, probably makes these some of the oldest pinot noir vines in California. The grapes are picked at night and the new vintage was raised in thirty percent new oak. The 2015 version comes in at 13.6 percent octane and delivers a deep, very pure and potentially perfumed bouquet of black cherries, a touch of plum, woodsmoke, cola, lovely soil tones, incipient notes of gamebird, wild bay and just a whisper of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, very good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and still quite youthful finish. This is going to be excellent wine with a bit of bottle age, but it is still very primary today and I would not touch a bottle for at least three or four years. It should age beautifully and will not peak until it is ten to twelve years of age. 2020-2050+. **92+**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Anderson Valley”- Rhys Vineyards

Rhys Vineyards’ 2015 Pinot Noir “Anderson Valley” bottling is really lovely and will drink with plenty of style right out of the blocks. The deep and classy nose wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, a touch of plum, dark chocolate, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke, a dollop of chicory, a touch of exotic botanicals and a really suave framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with a nice sappiness at the core, a fine soil signature, suave tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This has the balance to age very nicely, but it is so good to drink out of the blocks that it is going to be very hard keeping one’s hands off of bottles! 2017-2035+. **92**.

2015 Pinot Noir “San Mateo County”- Rhys Vineyards

The 2015 San Mateo Pinot Noir from Rhys Vineyards is nicely ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a bright and generous bouquet of red and black cherries, cola, fresh herb tones, a good base of dark soil nuances and a very discreet touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a plush core of fruit, modest tannins and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This will age very nicely, and grow in complexity with bottle age, but it seems crafted for earlier appeal and is already simply delicious to drink today. 2017-2037+. **92**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Family Farm Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (San Mateo County)

The 2015 Family Farm Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Rhys is pretty ripe for this cuvée, coming in at 13.8 percent octane in this very short crop vintage. The wine offers up a complex and black fruity bouquet of sweet dark berries, gentle balsamic tones, charred wood, dark soil tones, cola, a nice touch of spice and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with good acids and focus, a fine core, nice soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. This wine handles its octane very well indeed, but one can sense that it is a bit higher than customary in this vintage. 2022-2050. **91**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Home Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (San Mateo County)

The Home Vineyard 2015 pinot noir comes in at the same stated octane level of 13.8 percent as the Family Farm bottling, but for some reason I have the sense that this wine carries its ripeness a bit better and I do not get the same sense of backend warmth here as I did in the

preceding wine. The bouquet is again quite black fruity, but precise and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, dark berries, a fine base of dark soil, a touch of gamebird, woodsmoke, espresso and a bit of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with fine focus and grip, a potentially plush core of black fruit, fine soil signature and a fair bit of well-integrated tannin perking up the long and ripe finish. This will need longer in the cellar to blossom than the Family Farm bottling, but should be very good when it is fully ready to drink. 2025-2055. **92.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Bearwallow Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

The 2015 pinot noir from the Bearwallow Vineyard is a lovely wine in the making, with its octane just a touch lower than the two single vineyard bottlings from San Mateo, as this wine tips the scales at 13.6 percent. The bouquet delivers a fine, youthful constellation of dark berries, black plums, balsamic tones, a solid base of soil, lovely spices and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and nicely transparent, with a good core, ripe, gently chewy tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This will be a very good bottle once it has some time in the cellar to blossom. 2022-2055. **92+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Porcupine Hill”- Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

The portion of very densely-planted vines in Bearwallow that make up the Porcupine Hill bottling seem to have weathered the vintage very well, as there is an excellent sense of detail and future complexity presented here on both the nose and palate. Like the regular Bearwallow pinot, this is 13.6 percent octane and delivers a fine, youthful nose of sappy blackberries, black cherries, espresso, a refined signature of dark soil tones, cola, singed earth and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with a superb core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This is more polished structurally than any of the other single vineyard pinots up to this point in the lineup. 2022-2060. **94.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Horseshoe Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

What a difference location makes! The 2015 pinot noir from Horseshoe Vineyard is a cool and buttoned up 12.7 percent octane and is far removed stylistically from the single vineyard bottlings from San Mateo County in this vintage. The wine is still quite reticent on its youthful nose, offering up scents of black cherries, espresso, a bit of youthful stems, lovely minerality, pepper, chicory and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and beautifully balanced, with tangy acids, lovely mineral drive, moderate tannins and a long, primary and very promising finish. This is still a very primary wine and will take several years in the cellar to lose a bit of its youthful herbaceousness, but it will be an excellent middleweight in the fullness of time. 2025-2055. **92+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Alpine Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2015 Alpine Vineyard pinot noir from Kevin Harvey and his talented team at Rhys is an outstanding young wine, offering up perfect ripeness at thirteen percent, without any diminution in the expression of this vineyard’s outstanding *terroir*. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a youthful blend of sweet dark berries, espresso, complex minerality, a touch of stems, woodsmoke, pepper, incipient balsamic tones and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and exceptionally well-balanced, with a superb core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins, good acids and lovely transparency on the very, very long, nascently complex finish. This will be a superb bottle, once it has had a full decade in the cellar, and probably is the only 2015 Rhys pinot noir bottling that will be able to keep the pace set by the brilliant pinots made here in 2013 and 2014! 2025-2065. **94+.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Saveria Vineyard”- Trail Marker Wine Company (Santa Cruz Mts.)

I had quite liked the 2013 version of pinot from Trail Marker, but did not have a chance to try the 2014s. The 2015 vintage from the Saveria Vineyard is a good, solid pinot noir, but is a bit more weedy out of the blocks than the lovely 2013 had been at a similar point in its development. The wine offers up a complex nose of dark berries, black cherries, charred wood, dark soil tones and a slightly weedy topnote redolent of fresh dill. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and vibrant, with a good core, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This wine needs a few years to blossom, and may be a bit too weedy in personality for some tasters, but I really liked it. 2020-2040+. **88+**.



2014 Pinot Noir “Santa Rita Hills”- Domaine de la Côte

The 2014 Domaine de la Côte “Santa Rita Hills” bottling of pinot noir is a lovely follow-up to the classy 2013 I tasted about eighteen months ago. The wine is again cool and collected, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and is a beautiful light cherry red color. The bouquet is bright and lifted, offering up scents of blood orange, beetroot, lovely soil tones, a touch of mustard seed, coffee and a topnote of peonies. This is very Chambolle-like in its aromatic profile! On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and intensely flavored, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, moderate tannins, tangy acids and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. This is eminently approachable in its youth, but is really built for at least mid-term cellaring and

will be even tastier with three to five years' worth of bottle age. But, good luck keeping your hands off of bottles in the cellar! 2017-2040. **92.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Memorious”- Domaine de la Côte (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2014 Domaine de la Côte “Memorious” bottling of pinot is less ripe than the 2013 version, coming in at thirteen percent octane and offering more precision as a result than the previous year. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a high quality constellation of cherries, beetroot, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh thyme, mustard seed, a touch of bonfire and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with impressive mid-palate depth, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long, poised and nascently complex finish. This is a young and beautifully balanced wine that needs some time in the cellar to blossom, but it is going to be excellent once it has had a chance to open up properly with bottle age. 2021-2050. **92.**

2014 Pinot Noir “la Côte”- Domaine de la Côte (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2014 la Côte bottling of pinot noir is the most reserved aromatically of all of these 2014s from Domaine de la Côte, but it is also the finest of a very strong set of wines and will be simply stunning when it has blossomed. The tightly-knit nose eventually offers up a fine constellation of red plums, a touch of pomegranate, hints of beetroot, raw cocoa, a superb soil signature, a discreet base of cedary oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very sappy at the core, with outstanding transparency, suave, seamless tannins, tangy acids and great focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a superb bottle of pinot noir in the making. 2020-2055. **94+.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Bloom’s Field”- Domaine de la Côte (Santa Rita Hills)

The Bloom’s Field parcel is located contiguous and just to the north of the Memorious plot of pinot noir from Domaine de la Côte. The 2014 version of Bloom’s Field is nicely cool and classy, coming in at a very civilized 12.5 percent and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of cherries, beetroot, coffee, a fine base of soil, a touch of upper register bonfire, a hint of cedar and a topnote of lovely herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and intensely flavored, with a fine core, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a beautiful wine that will only get better as it has a chance to blossom with some extended bottle age! 2017-2045+. **92+.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Balo Vineyard”- Drew Family Cellars (Anderson Valley)

The 2014 Balo Vineyard bottling of pinot from Drew is plenty ripe, coming in at a purported 13.8 percent alcohol and seeming even a bit riper than this on both the nose and palate. The roasted bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, coffee grounds, a bit of balsam bough, chocolate, damp soil tones and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly hot on the backend, with a good core, slightly coarse tannins and solid length and grip on the ripe finish. This is not bad at its octane, but could have been superb a half point or more lower in alcohol. 2020-2040. **88.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Donnelly Creek Vineyard”- Elke Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

Elke Vineyards’ primary business is selling grapes to other wineries, but they make a bit of pinot noir, pinot gris and chardonnay on the side. Their pinot noir is completely destemmed and raised in thirty percent new oak prior to bottling, without fining or filtration. The 2014 version comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a black fruity bouquet of dusty dark berries, a touch of coffee grounds, juniper berries, woodsmoke and a good base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with moderate tannins, sound

acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a good, solid example of pinot noir. 2017-2035. **87.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Manchester Ridge Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Mendocino Ridge)

The 2014 Manchester Ridge Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Poe Wines is starting to blossom nicely on the nose, offering up a focused and complex constellation of black cherries, plum, a touch of cocoa powder, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs and a topnote of cola. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with a good core, ripe, seamless tannins, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long, youthful and very nicely balanced finish. The wine is not quite as open on the palate as the nose suggests, but once it catches up with the bouquet, this is going to be a beautiful glass of pinot noir! 2020-2045. **92.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Van der Kamp Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Sonoma Mountain)

The 2014 vintage of pinot from the Van der Kamp Vineyard is nicely light in color and already very expressive on the nose. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of red and black cherries, fresh nutmeg, a touch of meatiness, cola, a fine base of soil, herb tones, cardamom and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate, again, like the 2014 Manchester Ridge bottling, the wine is less evolved than the nose promises, with a full-bodied and very nicely balanced format, lovely depth at the core, firm, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. Just add time in the cellar! 2021-2050. **93.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Santa Barbara County”- Sandhi (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2014 Santa Barbara County pinot from Sandhi is a very pretty, red fruity example of this varietal that comes in at an even thirteen percent octane. The wine is light in color and offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of cherries, beetroot, fresh herb tones, a touch of bonfire, cola, lovely soil tones and a bit of spiced meats in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and succulent at the core, with good focus and balance, tangy acids, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This is the *villages* level bottling from Sandhi and is drinking with plenty of style out of the blocks, though it has the balance to also age very nicely over the middle term. Good juice. 2017-2035. **90.**

2014 Pinot Noir “la Côte”- Sandhi (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2014 Pinot Noir “la Côte” from Sandhi is a cool and vibrant example of the vintage, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a very expressive, youthful bouquet of cherries, beetroot, a touch of blood orange, cola, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, just a touch of dill, a discreet framing of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is young, fullish and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, modest tannins, bright acids and great focus and grip on the high-toned and nascently complex finish. This will be the quintessentially complex and refined middleweight in the fullness of time, but I would not want to touch a bottle for at least another five or six years, as this is still a very young wine, despite its very real accessibility due to its impeccable balance. 2022-2055+. **93.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Mount Carmel”- Sandhi (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2014 Mount Carmel bottling is the first pinot noir I have tasted under the Sandhi label produced by Rajat Parr. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a very pretty, gently musky bouquet of black cherries, beetroot, cola, woodsmoke, a dollop of fresh herb tones, dark soil, dried flowers and a whisper of oak spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with nascent complexity, a good core, ripe, suave tannins and a long, tangy and focused finish. This is very drinkable right out of the

blocks, but it is still pretty primary and will be far more complex with another handful of years in the cellar. Impressive juice! 2020-2045+. **91+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Mount Carmel” Old Vines- Sandhi (Santa Rita Hills)

Sandhi's 2014 old vine bottling of pinot noir from the Mount Carmel Vineyard hails from a parcel of *Frans de Pieds* vines planted back in 1990, and which today barely produce one ton of fruit per acre. There are only three casks of this wine (well, actually one 500 liter puncheon and one 225 liter barrel), which is flat out stunning on both the nose and palate. The complex bouquet jumps from the glass in a youthful blaze of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, woodsmoke, espresso, beautifully delicate spice tones (cardamom, nutmeg and gentle savory elements), a fine base of dark soil, incipient notes of cola and a very discreet touch of oak spice (though the wine sees no new wood). On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, tangy and intensely flavored, with a sappy core of black fruit, excellent transparency, fine-grained tannins and a very long, tangy and focused finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it is very tempting to drink young, but the wine is still a puppy and really should be buried in the cellar for at least another five or six years and really let it blossom! Great juice. 2022-2055+. **94**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Rinconada”- Sandhi (Santa Rita Hills)

Sandhi's 2014 Pinot Noir “Rinconada” bottling of pinot noir is flat out gorgeous on both the nose and palate. The complex bouquet is loaded with pure red fruit, jumping from the glass in a very vibrant blend of cherries, strawberries, beautiful spice tones, incipient notes of cola, a hint of dill, superb soil nuances, a touch of orange peel and just a dollop of cedary oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, tangy and full, with excellent focus and balance, moderate, suave tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and energetic finish. This wine is certainly approachable today, but it will really be better if given at least a few years in the cellar to blossom and start to show some of its secondary layers of complexity. 2019-2045+. **93**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Sanford and Benedict Vineyard”- Sandhi (Santa Rita Hills)

The 2014 Sanford and Benedict bottling of pinot from Sandhi is truly a stunning young wine. The very complex nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of dark berries, black cherries, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of espresso, gentle herb and spice tones (mostly nutmeg and bay) and incipient notes of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, great soil signature, ripe, suave tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and extremely classy finish. Great juice in the making. 2021-2055+. **94+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “English Hill”- The Withers (Sonoma Coast)

The 2014 English Hill bottling of pinot noir from the Withers is a very pretty wine on both the nose and palate. The very red fruity bouquet offers up scents of cherries, beetroot, fresh herb tones, incipient notes of cola, a fine base of soil, a nice touch of Sonoma weediness and a touch of cedary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, young and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe seamless tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and promising finish. This has enough structure so that it will definitely benefit from at least a handful of years in the cellar, but it is so well-balanced that it is also pretty easy to drink it today. Good juice. 2020-2045. **91**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Charles Vineyard”- The Withers (Anderson Valley)

The 2014 Charles Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from The Withers is a very pretty, fairly ripe example of the vintage, coming in at 13.7 percent octane and offering up a nascently complex bouquet of cherries, a touch of beetroot, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones and an incipient

notes of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a palate impression that seems slightly higher in alcohol than the stated 13.7 percent, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the slightly warm finish. This is okay, but nowhere near as precise and complex as the Peters Vineyard bottling this year. 2020-2040. **87.**

2014 Pinot Noir “Peters Vineyard”- The Withers (Sonoma Coast)

The Withers 2014 pinot from Peters Vineyard is a cool and classy bottle, coming in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and offering up a pure and vibrant bouquet of cherries, a touch of beetroot, raw cocoa, fine soil tones, a nice touch of fresh herbs, discreet vanillin oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, moderate tannins, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This will be an excellent bottle of pinot, and though it is already very approachable, I would let it definitely age for at least a few years and let these secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. 2020-2050. **92+.**

2013 Pinot Noir- Kendric Vineyards (Marin County)

I have loved Stewart Johnson’s elegant and very transparent examples of pinot noir since I first tasted them several years ago, and I would nominate Kendric Vineyards as one of the best-kept secrets in the world of classically-styled American pinot noir. His 2013 “regular” bottling of pinot is tad less ripe than the reserve, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offering up a characteristically light ruby color. The wine’s bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a red fruity and pure mélange of cherries, raspberries, fresh nutmeg, a touch of clove, lovely soil tones and a topnote of sandalwood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, bright and well-balanced finish. Fine juice in need of a few years to blossom. 2020-2045. **91.**

2013 Pinot Noir “Reserve”- Kendric Vineyards (Marin County)

The 2013 Pinot Noir “Reserve” from Stewart Johnson’s Kendric Vineyards is a small vineyard selection of two barrels that Stewart produces on its own from the section of the vineyard with the shallowest soils and where he finds the struggling vines produce a bit more depth and structure for the long haul. The wine comes in at 13.8 percent octane and offers up a really beautiful bouquet of raspberries, cherries, fresh nutmeg, lovely soil tones, a touch of Vosne-Romanée-like spices and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a fine core, ripe, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. The palate here is a bit less giving than the very expressive nose suggests and the wine will need a few years in the cellar to start to blossom, but it will be outstanding when it is ready to drink! Really, a superb pinot noir that is more ethereal and transparent than I would ever have imagined at its octane level! 2021-2050+. **94.**

2013 Pinot Noir “Santa Rita Hills”- Wenzlau Vineyard

The 2013 Santa Rita Hills bottling of pinot noir from Wenzlau Vineyards is a cool and classy customer, tipping the scales at a svelte 12.5 percent octane and offering up impressive aromatic and flavor purity. The color is a nicely pale ruby red, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, a touch of beetroot, raw cocoa, a touch of weediness, complex soil tones, hints of red curry and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, youthful and still quite tightly-knit, with fine transparency and a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and an impressively long, albeit, still youthful and slightly green finish. This needs some bottle age to blossom, and will probably be a bit too weedy for many tasters today.

However, the raw materials here are strong, so given some time in the cellar, I suspect this wine will blossom quite nicely and prove to be very tasty. 2021-2045+. **90.**

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

Stewart Johnson’s 2012 Pinot Reserve bottling is also pretty ripe by the standards of this winery, coming in at 13.9 percent alcohol, but retaining lovely freshness and bounce and showing no signs of heat on the palate. The wine is the customary light ruby of the Kendric pinot noirs and offers up a lovely, spicy bouquet of red plum, strawberries, beetroot, a touch of cola, lovely soil tones, Vosne spices, woodsmoke and a discreet framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and beautifully transparent, with tangy acids, a bit of firm backend tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, balanced and still quite youthful finish. This is a bit chewy when first decanted and takes some time to open; it was best on day three and showed no signs of decline despite being open for several days. This still deserves several years in the cellar to properly blossom, but with some extended decanting, is certainly approachable today. 2022-2050. **92+.**

1999 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD”- Pinot Noir (Sonoma)

The 1999 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée DD” is the newest release of pinot noir from Terry and Frances Leighton and the wine is excellent on both the nose and palate. This particular bottle showed a touch of volatile acidity when first opened, but a bit of time in decanter allowed this to blow off and the wine showed beautifully from that point forward. Once it has blossomed, the bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of cherries, strawberries, dried eucalyptus, cinnamon, a complex base of autumnal soil, woodsmoke, cedar and a nice touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with lovely focus and grip, tangy acids, just a wisp of tannin and outstanding length and grip on the complex finish. A classic and very transparent vintage of this iconic bottling from Kalin, which at age eighteen (and just released!) is on the cusp of its plateau of peak drinkability, but should continue to cruise along in bottle for another two and a half decades! 2017-2040. **93.**

Merlot and Cabernet Franc

2015 Cabernet Franc “Alegria Vineyard”- Ryme (Russian River Valley)

The 2015 vintage is the first for a cabernet franc bottling from Ryme, with the inaugural vintage coming in at a svelte 12.5 percent octane. The wine offers up a fine nose of dark berries, cigar smoke, cherries, a nice dollop of soil, gentle meatiness and a hint of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and focused, with a good core, fine complexity, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and promising finish. This is drinkable right out of the blocks, but I would love to see it given a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom and start hitting on all cylinders. A very refined and auspicious first cab franc from the husband and wife team of Ryan and Megan Glaab! 2019-2035+. **90+.**

2014 Merlot “aux Raynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

David Jeffrey has shown his fondness for Right Bank-styled merlots since he started Calluna, which is quite understandable, given his apprenticeship in St. Émilion back in the day. His 2014 bottling of merlot is another outstanding wine, offering up a pure and refined aromatic constellation of plums, sweet berries, sweet cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil, just a whisper of La Conseillante-like herb tones and a very discreet framing of spicy new wood. On the palate the

wine is full-bodied, suave and very elegant in profile, with the first signs of velvetiness already starting to push through the sophisticated tannic chassis. The core has plenty of depth, the wine is complex and beautifully balanced and the tannins are nicely integrated on the long and tangy finish. At fourteen percent octane, this seems just a tad riper than last year's version, but the wine is vibrant and will age long and very gracefully. High class juice. 2022-2055+. **92.**



Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux-Inspired Blends

2014 “CVC” (Calluna Vineyards Cuvée)- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2014 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is again made of a classic Bordeaux blend, with this vintage's *cépages* being forty-seven percent merlot, twenty-six percent cabernet sauvignon, ten percent cabernet franc, nine percent malbec and eight percent petit verdot. The wine is again a tad riper than I remember last year's version (which of course I did not write down), coming in at 14.2 percent octane and offering up a fine and very expressive nose of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, a bit of sandalwood-like spice tones, gentle floral tones and a very suave base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and elegant at the same time, with a lovely core of fruit, impeccable focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, youthful and discreetly ripe finish. To my palate, there is just a touch of backend heat showing today, but the wine's overall balance is just fine and it will age very nicely indeed. This cuvée seems to get just a bit more complexity with each passing vintage! At the price this sells

for (\$33 from the winery), this is one of the best red wine values to be found in all of California! 2022-2060. **92.**

2014 Calluna Vineyards “Calluna Estate” (Chalk Hill)

The Calluna Estate bottling from the 2014 vintage is again, just a touch higher in octane than its utterly superb 2013 counterpart (14.3 percent versus 14.1 percent), but offers up the same great depth and balance. The bouquet is a youthful and promising mix of cassis, a touch of black raspberry, cigar smoke, graphite, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of allspice and a stylish framing of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a nice touch of sappiness at the core, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the poised, balanced and still quite primary finish. This is a long distance runner and will certainly be a cellar treasure when it is fully mature. 2024-2075. **93+.**

2014 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”- Calluna Vineyard (Chalk Hill)

The Colonel’s Vineyard 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon from David Jeffrey is the lowest octane of his cabernet-based bottlings in this vintage, coming in at an even fourteen percent. As readers may recall, this is the only wine that David ferments in cask, with the barrels all new for the fermentation and then half of the cuvée racked off into older barrels for the *elevage* to bring the new oak percentage down to fifty percent. The 2014 Colonel is a superb wine in the making, but still very primary, as it offers up a pure and sappy bouquet of red and black cherries, superb soil tones, a touch of violet, fine spice tones, a complex base of soil, menthol and a refined framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and (as is customary with this bottling) the most powerful of the 2014s from Calluna. The wine is rock solid at the core, focused and nascently complex, with ripe tannins, very good focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and promising finish. This is going to need a good dozen years in the cellar to really blossom, but will be excellent when it is ready to go. 2026-2075. **93.**

2014 Helios Cabernet Franc “Sunbasket Vineyard”- Corison Winery (Napa)

As I mentioned in my feature on Cathy Corison in the last issue, the Sunbasket Vineyard in St. Helena had been one of Cathy’s first vineyard sources when she began her own label in the 1988 vintage, and in 2016 she finally was able to buy this vineyard. Starting with the 2014 vintage, she has begun to produce a pair of single vineyard wines from this fine property, with her 2014 Helios Cabernet Franc from Sunbasket being the first bottling of this varietal she has produced at Corison. The wine is excellent, coming in at 13.7 percent octane and being comprised entirely of this varietal. The bouquet is very pure and refined, offering up scents of red berries, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, menthol, incipient smokiness and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is full, elegant and nicely transparent, with beautiful focus and balance, moderate tannins, tangy acids and just a bit of backend warmth on the long and complex finish. Like all of Cathy Corison’s wines, this is built for at least medium-term cellaring and will be really lovely with five or six years of hibernation in the rearview mirror. 2023-2050. **92.**

2014 Cabernet Sauvignon “Sunbasket Vineyard”- Corison Winery (Napa)

The inaugural release of Corison cabernet sauvignon from the Sunbasket Vineyard is outstanding. The bouquet is pure, nascently complex and utterly classic, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of black cherries, a touch of mulberry, Cuban cigar wrapper, Rutherford Dust, lovely soil tones and a discreet framing of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly refined in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent nascent soil signature, fine-grained tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, perfectly balanced and nascently complex finish. This is a tad less powerful in personality than Cathy’s

old vine Kronos Vineyard bottling, but it may well be every bit as good in a different, more understated style. A stunning new addition to the Corison Winery lineup! 2025-2075. **95.**

2014 Cabernet Sauvignon- Ex Libris (Columbia Valley)

The 2014 Ex Libris cabernet is a nicely ripe and balanced example of the varietal, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and delivering an excellent and impressively pure bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a bit of menthol and a suave base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and a bit hotter than the stated alcohol level suggests, with a plush core of fruit, firm, slightly gritty tannins and a long, warm and youthful finish. This is a bit disappointing on the palate, but it is still a very young wine and may right the ship with some extended bottle age. Certainly, the first class bouquet suggests this could come around with some long-term cellaring, but it is higher in octane than ideal. 2024-2045+? **85-88+?**

2014 Cabernet Sauvignon “Three Twins Vineyard”- Stone the Crows (Napa)

The 2014 Three Twins Vineyard bottling of cabernet from Stone the Crows is a hefty customer, coming in at 14.8 percent octane and offering up that classic, neon purple rim when first poured in the glass. The wine is big and ripe on the nose, offering up scents of boysenberries, chocolate, a bit of cigar smoke and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and only moderately hot from its octane, with a pretty modest core, slightly chewy tannins, tangy acids and a long, youthful and modern finish. This is pretty well done for its idiom, but not anything that one would term “up my alley” stylistically. It carries its alcohol pretty well, but not a wine I would ever drink a glass of with a meal. 2020-2040. **87.**

2014 Cabernet Sauvignon “Fallen Feather”- Stone the Crows (Napa)

The 2014 Fallen Feather bottling from Stone the Crows is a bit more aromatically expressive out of the blocks than the *Grand Vin*, offering up scents of cassis, black raspberries, chocolate, a touch of cigar ash and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly hot (this too carries a 14.8 percent octane rating on the label), with a bit of chewy tannins, tangy acids and a long, ripe and heady finish. The Three Twins Vineyard, which this bottling also hails from, was only planted in 2005, so these are still pretty young vines and perhaps more complexity will show in the wines once the vines get a bit older. This is a well-made, modern cabernet of modest complexity, but nice packaging, but I would love to see a lower octane bottling from the estate someday. By the way, the winery also produces an outstanding olive oil. 2020-2040. **87.**

2014 Cabernet Sauvignon- Stony Hill Vineyards (Spring Mountain)

The 2014 Stony Hill Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon is the most complete example of this varietal that I have yet tasted from the winery, but as the vines only went in the ground in 2004, things are only going to get better as the vine continue to age. This is pretty ripe by Mike Chelini’s standards, coming in at an even fourteen percent octane and offering up a superb, old school bouquet of cherries, a touch of currant, sweet tobacco leaf, complex soil tones, incipient notes of cigar smoke and a lovely topnote of allspice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. Great juice in the making. 2025-2075. **94+.**

2013 Sequoia Grove “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 2013 Sequoia Grove “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon is a typically ripe Napa cab, coming in at 14.2 percent octane, but one has the sense that at least this is not overly manipulated in the cellars and harkens back a bit to the old school sensibilities that made the valley famous

for cabernet all those years ago. The bouquet is deep, ripe and nicely reticent, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, a bit of mint, cigar smoke and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripely tannic and youthful, with a good core, fine focus and grip and just a bit of backend heat poking out on the fairly balanced finish. This should age very nicely, but how complex it will ultimately be at full maturity is still an open question. It will at least be quite good, and maybe excellent when it is ready to drink. 2025-2055. **88+**.

2002 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

After just writing a feature on Cathy Corison’s beautiful wines, I was very pleased to taste a vintage of her Napa bottling that I had not tried previously. The 2002 vintage here came in at 13.6 percent octane and is a classic in the making, offering up a fine, still youthful bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, Rutherford Bench soil tones, violets, just a touch of dried eucalyptus and a gentle base of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, excellent focus and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a fine, fine bottle in the making, but it is still on the young side and needs more time in the cellar to fully blossom. 2024-2065+. **92+**.

1997 Dunn Vineyards “Howell Mountain” Cabernet Sauvignon

Randy Dunn’s 1997 Howell Mountain bottling is still very youthful and in need of many more years in the cellar, but it is a slightly bretty version and one’s appreciation of the wine will depend strongly on one’s tolerance of brett. Underneath the bit of horsey brett is a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, mountain soil tones and tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite stern structurally, with excellent depth at the core, chewy tannins, tangy acids and very fine length and grip on the well-balanced and youthful finish. This still needs at least a decade to start to soften, and though it is a touch too bretty for me, there is plenty of depth and potential longevity here. 2027-2100, **87-92** (depending on one’s tolerance for brettanomyces).

1987 Dominus (Napa)

I dearly wish that Christian Moueix had stayed the course with his original style of Dominus, instead of following the crowd and letting the octane and new oak components climb in this bottling as the years went by, as this 1987 is flat out beautiful wine. At age thirty, the wine is now fully mature and drinking with both breed and complexity, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, cigar wrapper, a touch black raspberries, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a deft framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined in profile, with a tightly-knit structural chassis, fine depth at the core, melting tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. These were the heady early days at Dominus! 2017-2050. **94**.

1987 Shafer “Hillside Select” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1987 Shafer “Hillside Select” is a dulled and slowly dying wine that has succumbed over the years to its cellar technique and was a rather cadaverous companion when paired up with the superb 1987 Dominus at a recent blind tasting. The bouquet is listless, regretfully sharing notes of smoky new oak, dried out black fruit, cigar ash and still damp coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is broad-shouldered, full-bodied and flat as a pancake, but with still pretty decent length on the four-square finish. This is not dead yet, but has entered that dull and pedestrian latter stage of wine life where death will be welcome when it finally arrives. 2017-2030. **82**.

1983 Mount Eden Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

This was the first time I had ever tasted the '83 Mount Eden cabernet sauvignon and the wine has aged pretty well, but shows some of the character of this difficult vintage on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is complex and black fruity, albeit still a touch weedy and clearly not from particularly ripe vintage, as it offers up scents of cassis, road tar, dried eucalyptus, cigar ash and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with a respectable core, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and a long, well-balanced and slightly lean finish. A good wine from a tough year, but not one of the great cabernet vintages from Mount Eden in this era. 2017-2035. **89.**

1982 Mayacamas Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Mount Veeder)

The 1982 Mayacamas cabernet sauvignon is an outstanding wine in the making, with its low octane 12.5 percent alcohol level giving the wine great bounce and vivacity on the palate. The bouquet is starting to blossom beautifully, wafting from the glass in a deep and complex mix of black cherries, cigar ash, mountain soil tones, rose petals, allspice and hints of the black truffle to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core of sappy fruit, excellent focus and grip, moderate tannins and outstanding length on the poised and perfectly balanced finish. This particular bottle had a bit of volatile acidity in evidence on both the nose and palate when first opened, but this blew off completely with thirty minutes in decanter. This wine still needs at least another five years in the cellar to completely peak, but it is getting close and is already very enjoyable to drink. 2022-275+. **92.**



1977 Heitz Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon “Bella Oaks Vineyard” (Napa)

I had not tasted a bottle of the 1977 Bella Oaks since early 2013 and the wine has blossomed nicely since that last bottle and is far better than I initially imagined. Four and a half years ago, I wondered if the wine would ever fully blossom from behind its remaining tannins, or if the wine was always going to be a bit bound up in its structure from the second straight drought vintage in Napa. Clearly, the wine just needed time and this most recent bottle was really wide open and showing beautifully, offering up a superb nose of cherries, blood orange, a touch of sealing wax, cigar smoke, red curry, a touch of new oak and a beautiful base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with impressive depth at the core and lovely complexity. There is still just a touch of backend tannin on the very long, well-balanced and classy finish. Fine juice that I clearly underrated previously. 2017-2040. **93.**

1977 Silver Oak Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon “Alexander Valley” (Sonoma)

I remember quite fondly the Silver Oak wines from the late ‘70s up through the mid’1980s, but tended to drink my bottles fairly early on back in this era and did not have any still kicking around in the cellar. Happily, I found a bottle of the ’77 Alexander Valley bottling at auction a year or two ago and it showed quite nicely when I got around to serving it after it had settled in from travel. The bouquet is quite complex, albeit, still a bit weedy in the style of this bottling back in the day, offering up scents of cherries, cigar wrapper, a touch of dill, menthol, petroleum jelly, cardamom and smoky American oak. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, with a slightly more four-square profile than the ’77 Bella Oaks paired up with it. There is good depth of fruit still at the core, modest tannins and a long, tangy and very nicely balanced finish. This is not a great wine, but it is a very good wine that has aged gracefully and still has plenty of life in it for further keeping. 2017-2040. **89.**

1975 Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon “Reserve” (Napa)

The 1975 Mondavi Reserve cabernet continued to drink beautifully at age forty-two, offering up bright, complex and fully mature bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, Rutherford dust, hints of bell pepper, pretty spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and quite refined in profile, with the rock solid core of the ’75 vintage still quite in evidence, melted tannins and impressive focus and grip on the long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is right up there with the more powerful, but less resolved 1974 Reserve from the winery and is one of the best vintages ever produced of this iconic 1970s bottling from Robert Mondavi. This wine had decades of life still in it! 2017-2040+. **94.**

1974 Raymond Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1974 Raymond Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon is a pretty ripe example of the vintage, coming in at 13.7 percent octane, but the wine has aged beautifully and is a perfectly balanced and completely resolved example of this outstanding year in California. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, cassis, a hint of petroleum jelly, menthol, dark soil tones and a hint of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch tarry in personality, with a fine core of fruit, melted tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, velvety and complex finish. The nose is a touch more refined than the palate, but this is a good, solid and fully mature example of a top flight cabernet vintage. 2017-2035. **88.**

1971 Beaulieu Vineyards “Georges de Latour” Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon

Virtually every single bottle of Georges de Latour cabernet that I have tasted in the last half dozen years from the decade of the 1970s has been in decline, so I was very happy to drink a bottle of the 1971 BV Reserve that was still holding on and drinking well. The wine has now entered a delicate endgame, but is not yet showing any signs of oxidation and is still a lovely drink. The complex and tertiary nose offers up scents of cherries, nutskin, Rutherford Dust, spice tones redolent of red curry and a gentle base of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full and beautifully transparent, with fine balance, melted tannins, bright acids and good complexity on the long and gentle finish. This will not hold on for many more years, but it is only on the cusp of the far side of the plateau and has not yet started its descent and remains a very pretty glass of old cabernet. 2017-2025. **88.**